

Clark's Corner – October 2009 – I Love the Church

I love the church. I really do. I love the fact that God's plan has always been, and continues to be, to work through regular, ordinary Christians, to make an extraordinary impact on our world. I love the fact that it is often the small, seemingly insignificant comments and actions that Jesus will use to change a person's life. I love the fact that in spite of apparently, insurmountable odds, churches continue to open their doors every single week. I love the fact that we Presbyterians are not quitters. We do not like to give up. We are tenacious and we are persistent. In a day and age when so much of our culture thinks the church is irrelevant, we continue to believe otherwise, knowing that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life, and that God is same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

I love the church. But, I also have a burden to see the church adapt. It frustrates me to see the church not living up to its potential. It bothers me that we don't take advantage of the best teachings and insights in ministry development. The majority of people who leave churches each year do not leave because they are angry. They leave because they are bored. They leave because they are not growing spiritually. They leave because they are not being challenged. They leave because their churches are lacking in life and vitality and enthusiasm. They leave because their churches are ingrown and are not involved in the needs of their own communities. This makes me sad. I know the church can do better.

Because I want us to "be all that we can be", some may think I am critical of the church. I am not critical of the church. I love the church. But, I do not want us to be content or complacent, resting on the successes of our past. It's a difficult dance to lead the church to adapt without people thinking we are being critical. I am not critical. I see so much good ministry in our congregations. But, we can't be afraid to set aside ministries that have lost their effectiveness. We don't want to settle for second best. We can't be afraid to set priorities and say that some ministries are more important than others. We need to carry forward the best of our past into our present and our future, while not shying away from eliminating ministries that have run their course.

These are the same sentiments written about in the *Workbook on Reading Your Neighborhood* by Alan Roxburgh . He writes this:

"This Workbook is written out of the conviction that we discover what the Spirit is up to in this crazy, changing, unthinkable time of ours, as we learn to cultivate a different kind of church from the ones that have shaped us to this point. But, this is not a workbook that intends to criticize the church. In fact, experience has shown that God's imagination for mission and ministry is already present among the people of many ordinary congregations. This workbook is for those people and those congregations. It relishes and celebrates the ordinary. Yes, church structures and programs do, indeed, need to be changed, but this isn't our focus. We are writing out of a far different set of convictions. First, that the days of simple, local churches aren't over, they are the place God is always 'making all things new'. Second, the key to that being made new and recovering of

mission involves us learning how to move back into the neighborhood. This last part sounds easy, but it's difficult and requires huge changes in the ways we think about being the church. Notice we said changes in the ways we think about church, not in structures and forms or traditions. These are not the issues."

I agree. There will always be local congregations. They are the called and sent community of Jesus' followers that the Holy Spirit invites to join the mission of God. When ordinary people are involved in their neighborhoods, ministry happens. But, we are in a time of transition. We need a new imagination for our churches. We need to learn new ways of connecting with a fast changing world. When I talk about these things, I am not being critical of the church. I love the church. But, the longer the church procrastinates on adapting its style of ministry, the harder it gets, and the greater the chance that it won't happen. I don't want that to be the case. I want to see the impact on our communities grow and expand. I love the people of the Presbytery of San Diego. I love the church.