The Church Doctor® Report

CHURCH DOCTOR MINISTRIES

Multiplying Hope Through Healthy Churches

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Purpose: To connect with those who have an active relationship with Church Doctor Ministries as peers in ministry, clients, and partners in prayer and support.

The Church Doctor® Report provides a quick read of strategic and influential information.
(To sign up: email tracee@churchdoctor.org)

But We've Always Done It That Way

There's an old joke about the platoon of soldiers who had been in the thick of battle for five weeks. Their commander visited them in the field.

"Men, I've got good news and bad news," the commander declared.

"Tell us the good news!" replied Jon.

The commander said, "Today, you get to change clothes!" The soldiers cheered.

David asked, "What's the bad news?"

The commander replied, "David, you're going to change with Jon. Fred, you're going to change with Glenn...."

In your church, have you ever encountered a discussion that reflected something like: "Who said anything about change?"

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It's a good response. Or it could be a bad one. Change is a reality of life. In many countries, people don't arrive at church in a horse and buggy anymore. Yet, in the Amish community—not more than 30 miles from my house—they do. That is just one signal that they live in a different ***context*** than we do at our house.

Change—and Context

In Matthew 16:1-4, the Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested Him by asking Him to show them a sign from heaven. They could have been interested to learn more. Some people are. Or, where there is opposition, there can be discomfort

with Jesus' challenges to their religious issues.

Jesus replied, "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' And in the morning, you say, 'Today, it will be stormy because the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah." Jesus left and went away.

This wasn't the first time Jesus had challenges with the Jewish leaders who were stuck in the challenges of "the way we've always done it." Earlier, in Matthew 12:39-40, the Pharisees and teachers also demanded a miraculous sign.

In Matthew 12, Jesus answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given except the sign of the prophet Jonah."

Then, the Scripture says: "The men of Ninevah repented."

This was about "spiritual adultery"—some powerful words about being unfaithful to God!

You have probably heard about AI, artificial intelligence. I want to share with you an important approach to Scripture—and your journey of faith. It's called contextual intelligence.

Contextual Intelligence

All Christians, churches, and groups of congregations (as in denominations or spiritual movements) exist in the context of two important realities: *biblical faithfulness* and *faithful significance*.

The power of the Gospel is subject to delivery systems that change. During COVID, most churches became virtual for a while. That wasn't perfect for worship, and it challenged the concept of fellowship, which is important to the culture of faith. Dealing with COVID was a necessary challenge, but most Christians and churches made it through the ordeal.

Every Christian, and every congregation, faces two challenges: (1) remaining true to the Scripture and (2) equally important, changing delivery systems that are relevant to the people in their generation.

The challenge is that the context changes. A few decades ago, American churches collectively purchased over 2,000 organs each year. Now, that demand is miniscule. Some churches still have pews, even though theaters, restaurants, and sports complexes have discovered much better ways to seat people.

The challenge is not only among those in our churches who have been around long enough to say, "We've always done it that way." What they don't want to think about is the reality that most of their great-grandparents didn't worship in pews. Neither did Jesus' disciples.

When the context is ignored, the church becomes less competent to reach the next generation—or new Christians who "didn't grow up that way."

The Spirit of the Times

When Jesus walked the Earth, He looked like the people of His time. He fit the *context* of His ministry. Ironically, it was the religious leaders who were hung up with "the way we've always done it."

Good leaders—like Jesus, who modeled this—introduce change that continues to hold strong to the meaning but deliver it in the ***context*** of those who are being reached. Many churches are encumbered with facilities and practices that are not specifically biblical, but now, years later, deliver a message that screams "out-of-date." Do you have friends, adult children, or grandchildren who are absent from weekly worship?

It is ironic: Some churches are stuck in worn-out delivery systems, and other churches are not firm on the biblical truth of Scripture, which never changes. Yet, when the church delivers the biblical truth of Scripture *and* does so in sensitivity to the culture of its audience, the Christian movement flourishes. This can be described as *biblical enculturation*.

Matthew Kutz has reflected the idea of 3D thinking. It involves the orientations of time: hindsight, insight, and foresight.

> Hindsight: Study times past to chart a path for the future.
>
> Insight: Pay attention to the new, and being present.
>
> Foresight: Access the future through imagination and scenario thinking.

(Matthew R. Kutz, *Conceptual Intelligence: Smart Leadership for a Constantly Changing World*, Ohio: RTG Publishing, 2015, p. 68.)

God Makes All Things New

In Revelation 21:5, Jesus sits on the throne and says, "I am making all things new": our churches, relationships, worship, teaching, and preaching from Scripture make all things new.

Our language, ministries, and facilities ought to send the message of the Master, who makes all things new. Perhaps we, as Christians, need a mission challenge to *become* all things new again.

The content of Scripture—the message of Jesus Christ, our Savior—is not new, but *renewed* in the ways we do church. In that *context*, Jesus is *incarnated*—comes alive. This is the Jesus who is the hope of the world. Nothing can stand in His way, ***except*** His people, worn-out delivery systems, archaic language, and songs with words that sound like Shakespeare.

When Jesus chose people like us to be the conduit for eternal truth, He demonstrated more faith in us than we could possibly have in Him. Yet, therein lies the miracle we call church.