

Framing the Path: Practicing Things New

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PRE-LESSON INFORMATION:

SESSION DESCRIPTION:

You have come to realize that the culture is shifting. Church is not as important in peoples' lives as it once was. You are also probably convinced that your congregation's approach to ministry with children, youth and family's needs to change. Maybe you even have some ideas! This session will help you frame a path towards change in your congregation. We will help one another identify and plan the steps we need to take to create the change we need to see in our congregations' ministry with children, youth and families.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

The goal of this lesson is to help participants frame a path towards change by:

- Being introduced to the importance of understanding the reality of a situation;
- Exploring change and why it's hard;
- Exploring the change process using sociological and faith resources;
- Highlighting an issue to be changed in their community and address it using the change process;
- Learning how to evaluate the effectiveness of change.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Handout: Charting the Change Course Worksheet
- Bibles
- Projector and a computer OR DVD Player and TV
- Speakers
- Internet access or previously downloaded video found at - http://www.ted.com/talks/malcolm_gladwell_the_unheard_story_of_david_and_goliath.html
- White Flip chart or large post it notes
- Markers

SESSION OVERVIEW and PREPARATION

(This section provides background information for the facilitator.)

This lesson combines sociology and theological reflection to help participants become better observers of their environments and learn how to facilitate change through a faith lens. Sociology is the study of human social behavior and its origins, development, organizations, and institutions.¹ Theology is the study of God and as Lutheran Christians, we understand God through the Incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. By combining these two ways

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociology>

of knowing, a new understanding of how we relate to each other and how the church relates to society can emerge.

The main sociological resource for this lesson is a book called [The Tipping Point](#) by Malcolm Gladwell. Gladwell is

...a sociologist and author who has been a *New Yorker* staff writer since 1996. Sparkling with curiosity, undaunted by difficult research (yet an eloquent, accessible writer), his work uncovers truths hidden in strange data. Gladwell has written four books. *The Tipping Point*, which began as a *New Yorker* piece, applies the principles of epidemiology to crime (and sneaker sales), while *Blink* examines the unconscious processes that allow the mind to "thin slice" reality -- and make decisions in the blink of an eye. His third book, *Outliers*, questions the inevitabilities of success and identifies the relation of success to nature versus nurture. The newest work, *What the Dog Saw and Other Adventures*, is an anthology of his *New Yorker* contributions. He says: "There is more going on beneath the surface than we think, and more going on in little, finite moments of time than we would guess."²

Sociology begins with an understanding that society is arranged using social institutions - complex, integrated set of social norms organized around the preservation of a basic societal value.³ In the field of sociology, social institutions provide a set of organized beliefs and rules that establish how a society will attempt to meet its basic social needs. Classical sociological theory recognizes five social institutions:

1. Family
2. Education
3. Economy
4. Government
5. Religion

Each of these institutions has a function, one that benefits society as a whole but has a different entry point into the population. Religion, as an institution, begins with an understanding that commonly held beliefs stem from a Divine power and provide guidance from a moral and ethical standpoint. This lesson uses the entry point of Religion as a method for introducing change in community.

Theological reflection is an important practice to cultivate as people of faith. God is an active participant in our stories and as communities of faith, taking time to discern the movement of the Spirit is critical in ongoing transformation. This lesson will ask participants to look at scriptures and engage in conversation around how God might be calling them to facilitate a change process in their setting. Combining sociology and theology provides an opportunity for facilitators to help participants reimagine how they view their context and introduces tools that are often overlooked in making change happen.

² Malcolm Gladwell Biography adapted from http://www.ted.com/speakers/malcolm_gladwell.html.

³ <http://www.sociologyguide.com/basic-concepts/Social-Institutions.php>

Each session has italicized parts that facilitators can say verbatim or use as a guide as they prepare to lead the lesson. This lesson provides much more information than can be shared in an hour and a half workshop. It is incumbent upon the facilitator to review the lesson and choose how much of each section will be shared based on the time allotted and the community gathered.

Remember, your key role as facilitator is to prompt discussion, invite people to share within the larger group and listen for key themes that emerge. Listening is probably the most important skill that a facilitator can cultivate. As you listen, think about connections that are made to the overall lesson and note places where people have particular interest or energy.

Lesson Outline:

OVERVIEW

(For participants and the facilitator)

Many people and organizations struggle with change even as it is an inevitable reality of life. Change elicits emotional responses that are deeply embedded and often times directly connect to a person or organization's knowledge and image of self. In order to introduce new ideas or deal with current issues, leaders need to first be clear of the problem or issue at hand and assess the probability of change happening before proceeding. Leaders must understand the process of change and what's really at stake as new things are introduced. The goal of this lesson is to help participants frame a path towards making necessary changes in their context.

Culture is shifting rapidly and the rate of change that many experience today is previously unheard of. The church is not immune to this change and has become an institution that is not as important in peoples' lives as it once was. Due to this reality, the way that leaders engage in ministry needs to be explored in order to be a relevant part of faith formation and development. The goal of this lesson is to help participants frame a path towards change by:

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SESSION 1: Look Before You Leap - Revisiting the Story of David & Goliath

It's helpful to have a story or situation to introduce a lesson or conversation. For this session, participants will watch a Ted Talk video by author Malcolm Gladwell and engage in conversation that will help frame the rest of the lesson. The facilitator should begin by saying the following:

The story of David and Goliath has morphed into an example of an underdog prevailing in a seemingly unwinnable situation. However, by taking a closer look through the lens that author Malcolm Gladwell provides, participants can begin to see a different story unfold; one that reveals that before you even address a problem, you have to have a clear understanding of the situation.

1. Show this TedTalk: [The Unheard Story of David and Goliath](#)
2. After the video is finished, ask the group to find a partner or, if the group is large, break into groups of three or four people to discuss the following questions:
 - a. What stands in the way of confronting issues in your context?
 - b. Why is it important to know what you are dealing with?

- c. Why is it important to know what you do or don't bring to a situation?
 - d. How have you seen problems framed in ways that elicit fear and intimidate people from addressing the actual problem?
 - e. What does this story teach us about the importance of assessing a situation?
3. After the group has had time to discuss the questions (no more than 10 minutes), gather them back together for large group conversation. The following question works well when facilitating large group discussions: *What stuck out to you?*

SESSION 2: Change and Fear

Invite the group to brainstorm ideas about why change is hard. The facilitator can say the following:

Many of us have had negative or difficult experiences with change. Why do you think change is hard?

As participants respond, make notes on your white flip chart/large post it notes and engage in conversation. **One of the main reasons that change is hard is because of FEAR. We will come back to this fact after the next exercise.**

Next, choose a blank piece of paper and ask the following:

Can you identify a situation when you had a positive experience with change? What were characteristics of this change that made the situation positive?

As participants respond, make notes on your white flip chart/large post it notes and engage in conversation. **Make sure that you are noting KEY CHARACTERISTICS of what makes change happen in a positive way. This will provide some insight for participants as they think through an issue or situation that they want to change in their context.**

After discussing both the negative and positive experiences with change, refer back to a key factor in why people DON'T engage in change - FEAR. Say the following:

It seems like fear is an underlying issue for many people when confronted with the unknown or when they are asked to think about things differently. As we are in a time where change is so rapid, this fear can literally be paralyzing and cause movements and ideas to stall. As people of faith, we are encouraged numerous times in scripture to "Be not afraid." This phrase, or some variation of it, can be found at least 100 times when doing a search of the Bible. This assures us that God knows that we will be fearful but that we are not alone in this fear and that our faith leads us through the fear.

As a facilitator choose a verse or verses for the group to discuss as they contemplate what scripture says about fear. You can either pick one for a large group discussion or break the group into small groups and assign different texts. **Make sure to read the texts before you lead this session and you can either use the questions below to engage participants in conversation or create your own.**

Text Options

1. Exodus 14:13-14
2. Joshua 1:7-9
3. Psalm 23:4-5
4. Luke 1:26-31
5. John 14:25-27
6. 2 Timothy 1:6-7

The following questions can be used to help participants reflect on the texts:

- *What does scripture say about fear?*
- *How does your faith help you deal with fear?*
- *How can we as people of faith and leaders in our communities help people view fear from a faith perspective, which is life giving, rather than from an intimidating perspective, which is life taking?*

SESSION 3: Making Friends with Change

After we spend some time discussing the nature of change and why it's hard, it's time to help participants make friends with the reality that is change. The facilitator can say the following:

Change is hard but inevitable. Based on our earlier conversation, change can be brought about in positive and negative ways. As people of faith, we are called to be agents of change that ushers in the gracious, loving and sacrificial kingdom of God. Whatever the situation or issue, the change we seek should be transformative and bring about abundant life. We are inspired to do this based on the promises we and others make during baptism.

At this point, the facilitator can share the covenant made during the baptismal service⁴:

To live among God's faithful people

To hear the word of God and Share in the Lord's supper

To proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed

To serve all people, following the example of Jesus

To strive for justice and peace in all the earth

Our promise to fulfill this baptismal covenant provides the foundation for why we are change agents. In the sacrament of Baptism we make promises to constantly seek transformation that is spirit led and God ordained. In order for change to come about, especially faithful change that seeks to honor the God story, we have to make friends with change.

⁴ <http://www.elca.org/en/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Faith-Practices/Living-Our-Baptismal-Covenant>

The facilitator may ask the following questions to get participants thinking about how they have made friends with change in their lives:

- *When have you personally embraced change in your life?*
- *How has God accompanied you during times of change?*
- *How does the baptismal covenant speak to the importance of embracing change?*

SESSION 4: Making Change Happen Part 1

In this section, participants will be introduced to key elements of the change process using concepts developed by Malcolm Gladwell. The facilitator will take on more of a teaching role and introduce these concepts to participants.

In his bestseller, [The Tipping Point](#), Gladwell introduces an idea that called the “tipping point”, which is that magic moment when an idea, trend, or social behavior crosses a threshold, tips, and spreads like wildfire.⁵ Gladwell identifies three concepts that are regularly present when widespread change happens. These concepts are:

1. **The Law of the Few** - *Suggests that success and change is dependent upon a few people with a specific set of gifts. These individuals fall into three categories:*
 - a. *Connectors - People who know many others and specialize in making connections across networks; they have the gift of bringing people together; not just about how many people they know but the kinds of people they know*
 - b. *Mavens - People who are information specialist and accumulate knowledge; are also able to share this knowledge using various mediums; not only know a lot of information but they want to share it; they want to be helpful*
 - c. *Salespeople - People who are persuaders and have powerful negotiation skills; they are able to get people to look beyond the words they are using and gain an affinity for an idea based on their relationship and non verbal cues that the salesperson is communicating*
2. **The Stickiness Factor** - *Suggests that the content of the change has to have a memorable factor in order to make a lasting impact; people have to connect on a visceral level with the change being put forth; stickiness is about quality and an idea’s impact on peoples’ lives; inspires people to act*
3. **The Power of Context** - *Suggests that change and behavior are strongly influenced by environment; behavior is a function of social environment; there are physical things that we can change in a situation that leads to change happening; skillful use of group power*

⁵ <http://gladwell.com/the-tipping-point/>

It might be helpful to ask participants if they have any thoughts, questions or comments about these concepts. As you move into the next session, have the participants refer to their worksheets, which will invite them to reflect on the following questions.

- *Who are the people that you should invite into the process?*
- *What makes the change sticky and inspires people to act?*
- *How can the environment be manipulated to create the best outcome/situation?*

Session 5: Making Change Happen Part 2

In this session, participants will choose an issue/idea in their context and apply the Seven Faith Practices to creating change. The facilitator should introduce these practices listed below. For more information, visit <http://elca.org/faithpractices> and click on the “Program Planners” tab.

1. **Prayer** – Places us in the presence of God and allows us to intercede for the needs of the neighbor
2. **Study** – Informs discipleship. Entering the word of Scripture initiates us into a story shaped world and offers us a way to understand our own story
3. **Worship** – offers a unique way to come into the presence of God and to praise the God who called all of creation into being
4. **Invite** – We are called and sent to tell people what God has done for us and invite them to know the God who loves them and has redeemed them in Jesus Christ
5. **Encourage** – We are challenged to offer the Good News to one another in speech, comfort, friendship and the lifelong task of Christian Education
6. **Serve** – God meets the Christian in social roles and relationships with others; we are God’s hands in the ongoing work of creation
7. **Give** – Give what you have so abundantly received; a responsibility of the calling

An accompanying worksheet is provided to help participants chart their course. The goal of this session is to introduce a process of change using the concepts introduced by Gladwell and using the faith practices as a guide. Participants will be invited to do the following:

1. **Pray** and take time to discern where God is calling you to make a change - What issue or idea is God calling you to address?
2. **Invite** others into this process of discernment and those who have an interest in making the same change - Who should be a part of the conversations addressing this issue and idea?
3. **Study** the history of change in your context – what has worked and what has failed? What is the congregation’s and leadership’s relationship to this issue/idea? Has something been tried before? If so, what were the challenges? What examples of positive change can you lift up from your community? What were characteristics of these changes?
4. **Give** of yourself to support the change cause as needed - What is needed to make this change come about?

5. **Serve** within your community in ways that help introduce the change; be the example through your service - How is this change introduced to your community?
6. **Encourage** others who are key leaders in implementing change - How do you uplift those involved in making the change happen?
7. **Worship** together as change happens - Think of worship as a celebration. How do you celebrate together as the change unfolds?

Session 6: Evaluating Change

Evaluating change has to begin with an understanding of where a person or organization is, articulating where they want to be and being clear about why change is necessary. Participants should use the following questions to help them evaluate the effectiveness of the change that was implemented:

- *What was the preceding issue?*
- *Why was it an issue?*
- *What was the hoped for outcome?*
- *What was the strategy for movement?*
- *Did movement happen? If so why? If not, why not?*
- *What was learned in the process?*

Conclusion

We are not called to make change for change's sake. We are called to be discerning, faithful people who seek out the movement of the Holy Spirit and invite others to consider how God is calling them to respond. This lesson is provided as a tool to help people think about change and their relationship to change using sociological and theological resources. It's important to begin with reflection and this lesson invites people into a space to seriously consider what God is up to and how they will join in the ongoing transformation that happens.



This curriculum was developed for the Practice Discipleship Initiative. Practice Discipleship is a ministry of the ELCA Youth Ministry Network in close partnership with the ELCA and its synods. It is funded by the Congregational and Synodical Mission Unit of the ELCA as an extension of the ministry of the ELCA Youth Gathering. Permission is given to use these resources in your local context, so long as no organization or individual profits from the use of these materials. For more information please visit www.practicediscipleship.org.