

## Welcome to the conversation about our future



“Changing the culture of organizations, groups, and institutions—and even societies—is about changing the conversation...”

“For congregations that seek [authentic spiritual and institutional renewal], there are perhaps ten important conversations that they need to initiate, deepen, and sustain in their ongoing life.”

--Anthony B. Robinson

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## Our session today



- Review of our first session (10 minutes)
- Introduction to today's conversation: "And Yet...It *Is* about You" (10 minutes)
- Conversation sessions (30-40 minutes)
- Regroup and report (20 minutes)

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Review of our first session



## The new way forward

"The old way of organizing American religion has vanished. In the wake of the loss, however, some Christians are rebuilding spiritual community, and a new kind of Protestant church is being born."

--Diana Butler Bass

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Review of our first session, continued



## What do these churches have in common?

- Tradition (not traditionalism): finding "the voice of peace, justice, and beauty that emanates from the Christian soul".
- Practice (not purity): giving people the opportunity to grow into a deeper spiritual life.
- Wisdom (not certainty): a persistent search for meaning, asking questions, seeking together.

--Diana Butler Bass

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## How can we move forward into this new world?



### Our task

To engage the congregation in a multi-year process to re-envision, re-focus, and restructure Orinda Community Church

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## Possible outcomes: Our hopes



- A clear grasp of our calling as a congregation.
- An effective new outreach appealing to the wider community.
- A renewal and refocus of our core strengths, programs, and ministries.
- Spiritual, financial, and human resources that sustain our vision and our calling.
- A new organizational structure providing opportunities for fellowship and spiritual growth.

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## Our process



*Changing the Conversation: A Third Way for Congregations*,  
by Anthony B. Robinson

- Teacher of congregational leadership at Emmanuel College in Toronto
- Well-known expert in congregational transformation

Following Robinson's 10 "conversations" over the course of one year in a series of sessions, beginning on May 25



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Our process, continued



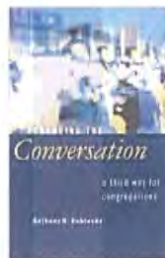
## The Ten Conversations

1. "It's Not About You" (May 25)
2. "And Yet, It *Is* About You" (Today)
3. "A New Heart" (Sunday, September 19)
4. "Why Are We Here" and
5. "Write the Vision" (Friday-Saturday, October 16-17)
6. "Who Shall Lead Them?" and
7. "Let's Get (Less) Organized" (Sunday, Nov. 14)
8. "The Church and the Public Square" (Sunday, Feb. 6)
9. "Death and Resurrection" (Sunday, March 27)
10. "Where Do We Go From Here?" (May)

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## Conversation Two: And Yet . . . It /s About You



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## “What, then, shall we do?”



“What is implicit in the idea of responsibility is the image of man-the-answerer, man engaged in dialogue, man acting in response to action upon him.”

*H. Richard Niebuhr*

“Religion begins with an awareness that something is being asked of us.”

*Rabbi Abraham Heschel*

It is up to us how we shall respond and thus how we shall answer the God who is at work in the midst of these enormous changes.

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## God is doing a new thing?



### If God is doing a new thing, would we notice?

- In the Old Testament (e.g. Ezekiel) and the New Testament (e.g. Gospels & Acts), God does new things, but his people don't always notice
- Hoping for the restoration of that which was lost prevents His people from seeing what God offers
- Today, stuck conversations about what has been lost tend to reinforce a picture of reality, of "what is going on," that is either inaccurate or self-serving, or both.

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## "Stuck" Conversations



As a pastor, teacher, and congregational consultant, Robinson has observed four basic "stuck" conversations

- Blame Games
- "We're not like them"
- "Where's the silver bullet"
- "If only..."

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## The Blame Game



### It's someone's fault that things are this way

–“We just need to get the right \_\_\_\_\_. If we only had the right \_\_\_\_\_, everything would go back to the way it used to be.”

–“This congregation just doesn't get it. No one here really wants to change. They would rather die than change.”

–The real problem here is the conference/the community/youth sports/the young people/the old people

Blaming others keeps us from looking to ourselves as the source of the solution

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## “We're Not Like Them”



### Defining ourselves by who we are not

“I thank you, God, that I am not like other people, and in particular not like that tax collector there!” (Luke 18:11)

Who are we not?

–We're not like those mega-churches

–We're not like those evangelicals either

–And we're certainly not like those fundamentalists

Who, then, does God call us to be? What testimony do we offer about God and God's work in our midst?

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## “Where’s the Silver Bullet”



The “silver bullet” will slay any enemy or magically solve any problem

A congregation’s idea of a silver bullet could be:

- A newer building
- A better pastor
- A bigger budget and more programs

Often the problem is not really “out there”, it is internal to us. If so, a change in our hearts and minds is required.

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## “If only…….”



A belief within a congregation that one thing will change its circumstances, and nothing else is required.

For instance:

- If only we had 100 new members, our budget problems would be over
- If only we had 500 children in Sunday school, things would be like they were before
- If only we did a contemporary service, we’d attract new members

“When we face up to our own internal situation and turn to God to help us with the changes we need to make, amazingly, we seem much more interesting and attractive to others.”

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## Technical Problems & Adaptive Challenges



Robinson argues that difficulties facing congregations fall into two main categories:

- Technical Problems
- Adaptive Challenges

And that problems result when these difficulties are confused with one another

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## Technical Problems



Technical problems are knowable, clearly described and named

For instance:

- The roof is leaking
- There isn't enough room for the nursery

Similarly, the solutions are clear and known

For instance:

- Hire a contractor to repair or replace the roof
- Expand the nursery by adding an adjacent room

With technical problems we also know who does the work – experts and authorities

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## Adaptive Challenges



Adaptive challenges are different.

For instance:

- Sometimes we don't even know what to call the challenge
- We don't understand the nature of the challenge
- We don't understand how to solve it
- It's not clear who will solve the challenge, or how we'll know it is fixed

Facing adaptive challenges entails learning and change to name, understand, and solve the challenge, and everyone is involved in the process. Engaging in adaptive challenges is "inherently spiritual work".

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## Grief



Engaging in adaptive challenges involves change – recognizing the change that has already occurred, and changing the way we respond to the world

As change brings new approaches it inherently involves the loss of that which is left behind

This is the repeating story of death and resurrection

Grief for the loss comes before the joy of renewal

Recognizing the loss and honoring the grief is necessary

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## Urgency



Moving on after the grief requires building a sense of urgency to help us adapt to our changing world

We can build urgency through :

- Describing our situation (e.g. the market share of mainline churches has declined by more than 40% in the past 40 years)
- Feeling the pinch of reality (e.g. the analysis of the Financial Study Group)
- Empowering leadership from the outside or below
- Appreciative inquiry – drawing attention to what we are doing well
- Changing the story we tell about ourselves – (e.g. God is still speaking)
- The Gospel – belief in our message and community, loving, life-giving, healing, and full of hope

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## Conclusions



Many people out there long for a meaningful spiritual life, for a connection with God, and for a community of authentic people who are making a difference

God has brought us to a new time. There are things we miss about the earlier era of American Christendom. There are parts of the experience that are precious and that we must carry forward into a new time; but there are also things that are expendable. Sorting out what is precious from what is expendable is part of the important work before us.

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## Questions for Conversation



1. Reflect on or talk about an experience when you, or someone you know, "rose to the occasion" or "answered" life's changes and challenges with courage and grace. (Roger)
2. Of the four "stuck conversations," which one have you heard in our congregation the most often? Is there another stuck conversation that you think is important to name and discuss? (Anne)
3. Identify a technical problem facing our congregation, and identify an adaptive challenge facing our congregation. (Sabine)
4. What are some indications, where you live or work, that the predominance of white Anglo-Saxon Protestants is a thing of the past? What feelings do you experience about these changes? (Bob)
5. Of these six ideas for developing a sense of urgency, which seems most urgent to you? (Kurt)
6. All groups: Why do you love our church? How could you share that with someone who could become interested in our church?

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## Keeping the conversation going



### Keep in touch and stay informed

- Dedicated email address for the committee: [rec@orindachurch.com](mailto:rec@orindachurch.com)
- Presentations and notes can be found on the church web site
- Anthony Robinson's book, *Changing the Conversation*, is available at Orinda Books
- Mark your calendars for our next session: September 19

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