

DIOCESE OF THE CENTRAL GULF COAST

CONGREGATIONAL ENRICHMENT VENTURE

SESSION 1

NOVEMBER 17-18, 2017

KNOW WHO YOU ARE AND HOW IT AFFECTS WHO YOU WILL BE

DISCERNING OUR CONGREGATIONAL DYNAMICS

Saturday Speaker: Jacques Hadler, Jr.

Dr. Murray Bowen (1913-1990)

- ♦ in 1946, went to the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas, as a fellow in psychiatry and personal psychoanalysis
- ♦ thought that individual therapy wasn't enough
- ♦ in the late 50's, at the National Institute of Mental Illness, along with others developed family systems therapy, which dealt not just with the family member diagnosed with mental illness, then called the Bowen Theory
- ♦ defined the field of family therapy and started integrating concepts with the new Bowen Theory.

Rabbi Edwin Friedman (1932-1996)

- ♦ began a relationship with Murray Bowen
- ♦ saw all the dynamics of the Bowen Theory in his congregation and began to apply the theory to his congregation
- ♦ published Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue in 1985
- ♦ building on that work, Friedman's family and friends published A Failure of Nerve-- Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix, a resource for parents to presidents

We can think about our congregations as an emotional unit, influenced by culture, socio-economic forces, neighborhood, the Holy Spirit, etc.

e.g., A church might have old members who now live 20 miles away from the church and new members from the neighborhood.

Secularization - when God is not culturally visible, little time spent on "Where is the Holy Spirit?" and "Where is the Holy Spirit leading us?"

The more the secularization, the fewer people who take God into consideration; they are either hostile or indifferent to God

We are shaped by our denomination, diocese, church and issues

The Holy Spirit puts a dynamic in our church - can we be in touch with that?

Forces operating within our church

1. rational – as a production process - input to product to output; i.e. if you do this, there will be a particular outcome
 - ♦ survival mode of a church – need people to fill pews and to pay pledge
 - ♦ what do we want to happen, who do we need to bring in to get there?
2. organic - an emotional process, e.g., Vestry did not have emotional strength to get altar moved but the family who donated the altar did

Bowen Theory

- ♦ when a group of people get together, an emotional field is set up
 - ♦ if you act counter to the field, the field will tell you how to act
 - ♦ a new priest with an emotion different from the emotional field, makes it difficult for the priest to change things; slow, incremental changes may work
 - ♦ emotional fields look at the whole forest, not at individual trees
 - ♦ the self in a groups is always a relational self
1. a sick person is a symptom of the entire system; we should take those signals seriously because we are a part of that problem
 - ♦ cancer cells can't survive without other cells allowing it
 2. reciprocity – we are a part of someone getting sick, people acting out, etc.
 3. the field is more powerful than any individual, including the leader
 4. our family, i.e., our congregation is not dysfunctional, it is educating, healing and promoting the best in individuals
 5. family origins and customs have an effects
 - ♦ we all have some level of depression and schizophrenia, there is a range low to high, where are you on the continuum?
 - ♦ if it is diagnosed in a person, he or she will act out that diagnosis

Emotional guidance system of the self

- ♦ Dr. Roberta Gilbert [also studied at the Menninger Clinic and is on the faculty at the Bowen Center, whose primary interest is in Bowen family systems theory and its applications for individuals, families, organizational leaders and therapists] wrote Extraordinary relationships: A New Way of Thinking About Human Interactions

Progression of life

1. reptiles – give us emotional processes necessary to maintain life
2. mammals
3. human beings – have a cerebral cortex, an intellectual guidance system, judgement, reason

Effects of Anxiety

- ♦ the higher the anxiety in the field, the more we are driven by our emotional guidance system, not by our intellectual guidance system
- ♦ when we have high anxiety we are like a car in a snow bank – no traction
- ♦ a high anxiety congregation will be polarized by their emotional systems, people in the middle

won't stay

- ♦ how can I get myself calm to make me think clearly?
- ♦ use the intellectual guidance system to ask: What is going on in me or around me? What are my choices? How do I manage myself in the face of these forces that are swirling around?
- ♦ where are the people who are coming [to your church]?
- ♦ where do you want to take them, to become transformed adults?
- ♦ because God gave man free will, a good question is "How can God help me get through this?", not "Why did God let this happen?"

Forces present in Family Systems Theory

1. emotional field – the relationships among the people in any organization
 2. homeostasis – the persistence of form, the resistance to change
- ♦ ask yourself, "Why would a congregation be open to change when they weren't open to it before?"
 - ♦ with the power of homeostasis, is there any hope for change?

Where does change fit in?

- ♦ thinking of God as the creator who made this creation, God as unchanging
- ♦ but God made a creation that is continually changing – e.g. aging, seasons, weather, etc.
- ♦ God built in ongoing change that we continually have to adapt to
- ♦ God does not leave the homeostasis as it is, he keeps challenging the homeostasis, after a period of time we settle in and there is continuity
- ♦ the Holy Spirit is always doing something to move us toward the Kingdom Reign of God or individually toward the full stature of Christ, what is going to challenge us to the next movement in our life toward being in the full stature of Christ, as Paul describes it?
- ♦ God is about us adapting well, although God is unchanging in character, God seems to promote change by the way God has done the Creation
- ♦ God is very versatile in the way that God relates to us, God has a tremendous repertoire of ways in relating to us
- ♦ in the Covenants of the Old Testament, you get a sense of God meeting people where they are
- ♦ God can relate to us when we are children and until we are in our final phase of sickness and dying, God relates to us differently at each of those places

Homeostasis and Change

- ♦ any time we make change there are going to be some who will resist
- ♦ the power of homeostasis – if you are really working on change, you are going to get resistance
- ♦ this is one of Ed Friedman's greatest gifts to ministers, priests, and rabbis
- ♦ when you get resistance, it may be because you are succeeding, not because you failed
- ♦ a colleague who was coached by Ed Friedman said, "Can you hear resistance and complaint as clapping?", so that you continue. You may misinterpret the resistance and give up on what we are doing because we take it personally – if I am successful, everybody will be happy and if I fail people are going to be angry or whatever

- ♦ there are times to reverse that thinking, if people are going to be unhappy when the change that you do or implement begins to get great resistance
- ♦ e.g., a priest thought he was called to continue the growth of the church, he thought he was doing well but old timers told him they felt like strangers, they felt uncomfortable in their church
- ♦ in some churches it may be resistance and in some it may be full scale rebellion
- ♦ people don't come to church to get into fights, so many may back off instead of supporting the priest, if the people don't feel they have power, then they leave
- ♦ in a changing parish, for the "laggards" who are slow to change, it may be really important to hear people's grief because change is loss, any dissent is seen as negative and to be dismissed
- ♦ if you can stay connected to those folks and hear their grief for the change which for them is loss
- ♦ a book On Transitions by William Bridges in the early 90's – his great insight inside grief is that if the Vestry takes six months to make a decision and they give it to the parish and they expect the parish to take it right away, they are not giving the parish the same amount of time that they had to make the decision, it is a good emotional process to give the congregation that same six months to come to terms with it themselves

Anxiety

- ♦ Ed Friedman described in the early 70's an experiment of two one cell creatures without nuclei that were brought in proximity to each other, one disintegrated as it was brought close to the other one and for me that describes anxiety
- ♦ I as a human being coming in relationship to you, I have anxiety
- ♦ in any relationship that I am in, how much of myself can I be before you disintegrate me, or before you cut me off, before you say, "I don't want to hear that."?, how much of myself do I want to reveal before you want to do in the relationship, before you want to disintegrate me?
- ♦ how much of you can I stand before I want to disintegrate you?
- ♦ we all have some level of anxiety, low to high
- ♦ anxiety for Christians is the tension between the City of Man, the earthly city and the City of God, all of us live in that tension
- ♦ how Christian can I be in any of my relationships, at work, at volunteering, etc.?
- ♦ we all live with that tension, if we want to live like Jesus how much can I express with you?

Rabbi Friedman

- ♦ all of us have two kinds of anxiety
- 1. chronic anxiety – the level that we carry with us, the amount of anxiety that is in us or in a group, family, etc., if you light a high level of natural gas, it will explode; low anxiety in a family and no one explodes, high level of anxiety in a family and there will be explosions, there is some level of anxiety in all people, all groups
- What is the level of chronic anxiety in your parish? How would you gauge that?*
- 2. acute anxiety – it is situational, such as after 9/11, a church has a fire, there is clergy misconduct, birth, adolescence, marriage, sickness, death, etc., Friedman says that this is a good

time for rabbis, priests, to relate to the family, the Book of Common Prayer has good rites for these, these rites tend to bring our anxiety down, family homeostasis has to change; families reform at those points and some real healing may occur

- ♦ Bowen and Friedman both used this language as descriptors, none of the words are meant to be negative

- ♦ there is a level of depression and anxiety in all of us and that is not bad

- ♦ if someone is acting out, what does that say about them and what does that say about what's going on in the family or church?

- ♦ anxiety is contagious, from one person it can spread to many, as in a church or in a seminary

- ♦ the higher the anxiety in an individual or in a group, the more distorted our seeing, the more we blame others outside ourselves, the more polarized our thinking, the more reactive we are, it can put us into quick fix thinking, which is common among can-do people on a Vestry

- ♦ the presence of a leader who is calm can calm folks down, bring order out of chaos, calmness can also be contagious, can just be the leader's presence, he doesn't have to do anything, e.g., Giuliani in New York City after 911

- ♦ step-up transformers – news leads to their increased anxiety

- ♦ step-down transformers – news leads them to be to calm

- ♦ clergy misconduct is a shock wave that can affect generations, e.g., 3 priests after some misconduct and some people will still distrust the current priest, same thing can happen in families, “How do I keep it from going down to the next generation?”

- ♦ Ed Friedman: there is no way out of a chronic condition unless one is willing to go through an acute, temporary, more painful time, putting it on the table is painful in a congregation or a family, does anybody have the guts, the courage to do that?

- ♦ there can be a deadly peace in parishes, peace can be as deadly as conflict because we won't talk about what needs to be talked about, we keep the peace by not talking about it, which looks peaceful and no conflict, but it sucks the energy out to not deal with what is really going on

- ♦ do I need to raise the anxiety to deal with something that is chronic or do I need to be calm to lower the anxiety so that we can think clearly?, that takes discernment on your part, how do I read my congregation, do we have chronic things that we need to deal with or have we been anxious with things like survival, which may not be what it's all about, it's about mission, what is our mission?, what is God calling us to? can we get calm and try to figure out what God is doing here, where might the Holy Spirit be leading us at this point in time?

Roberta Gilbert

- ♦ from her book Extraordinary Relationships:

- ♦ 5 ways heightened anxiety in a couple can affect the relationship

1. conflicting: argue back and forth, don't hear each other, the couple can last a lifetime, it's their homeostasis, speaking but not listening to each other

2. distancing: hardly talk with each other, don't know what is going on with the other, “I don't want to upset my partner.”, try to accommodate each other and keep a certain peace

3. cut-off: anxiety is so high, can't stand to be in the other's presence, “I can't be myself anywhere near you.”, too intense

4. over or under functioning: one member takes all responsibility and one takes very little, there may be an active alcoholic, AA and Al-Anon can be helpful, over-functioning one steps back and let under-functioning one have space to function up; that is a very powerful dynamic in churches, many churches are very priest centered and the priest is an over functioner and the congregation under functions

5. displacement: generally parents triangulating on one of their children, all the anxiety between them goes toward being anxious about the child who generally will be disabled by that because they are carrying way too much anxiety, the other children in the family tend to function fairly well but there is one who everybody is anxious about, which adds to the disability that child had at the beginning, if the child can take that amount of anxiety, he may then achieve extremely high from feeling very driven

Now apply this to parishes

1. conflicting: parishes may have factions, can be by generations, by ethnicity, by old-timers and newcomers (who will eventually leave if the anxiety gets too high because they respect the old timers), by service times (8:00 people vs. 11:00 people); *How do you work with that as a leader? How might a leader respond?* It takes deliberate effort by clergy not to take sides. e.g., priest had story nights so that different ethnicities could tell their stories, then had quilts made

2. distancing: can be a bunch of fiefdoms, each activity has a dominant person who sees their territory as theirs and won't easily give it up; none is working for the whole or even knows what it is but they know what their fiefdom is about, a leader coming into this situation can find leadership to be tremendously hard because people will not give up their jurisdiction very easily, this can happen after there has been *laisse faire* leadership that has allowed that kind of thing to happen or after misconduct when people don't trust the leadership and then people go back to their fiefdoms

3. cut-off: when churches were leaving the Episcopal Church, how do you help people getting around the polarized thinking they got into? churches were getting cut off from the roots where the church began, new people were coming in with a club or chapel mentality not a church mentality, we are anxious about people who are not like ourselves, old members didn't know these people or their history so the old people left in the church did not trust the new/younger people coming in, it takes a leader and someone who will engage the community which is alien to us

4. over or under functioning: dominating clergy, overworking perfectionist clergy, father/mother knows best clergy, laity's abilities have atrophied in Vestry meetings, if you are over functioning in a committee you are leading, you atrophy the people on the committee, *Can you learn to "right-size" yourself and manage your anxiety about the outcome being right, instead of being overly large, to give space for others to exercise leadership and can I also develop trust that it will be done well enough?* It is OK to have somethings fail for the sake of having people to learn from that about how to do it the next time

5. displacement: new Episcopalians divide and remain, can get highly anxious, stressed; you need to bring previous issues to light and get them talked about

Bowen's Theory

- ♦ was strictly concerned with behavior and not with what is going on inside
- ♦ groups can apply this
- ♦ *What are some dynamics in your parish? I would like you to write a list of rectors for the last 50 years and a descriptor: clergy was/is ____, add any dynamics, anxieties, etc. Assess where you are now.*

Differentiation of self

- ♦ definition: the human capacity to not be determined by the natural forces
- ♦ a most powerful force
- ♦ makes a person different from an emotional mass

How to self differentiate

1. have the capacity to take a stand in an intense, emotional system; instead of being silent, to be able to speak up
 2. have the capacity to be an "I" while remaining connected (to other "I's")
 3. have the capacity to stay in the system or situation
- ♦ Bowen saw this in families, it was behavior that helped a family to move towards more help and being less symptomatic
 - ♦ Friedman saw this as a way of leadership, this is the basis for the book that he wrote on leadership for parents to presidents, any differentiating act that you do is an act of leadership from any position in the system
 - ♦ this can apply to clergy: as a way to read the situation that they are in physically, environmentally, spiritually, also a way to read scripture, to look at and read about Jesus' behavior, especially during Holy Week Jesus is extremely differentiated and is extremely calm in the face of all that is going on, he maintains his senses and makes choices about how he will respond to folks, this theory is good not only for hearing Jesus but also for watching Jesus "How am I behaving as a priest? true for the laity here, "How am I behaving as a Christian who is oriented toward the Kingdom Reign of God in this society when it ruled by earthly city rules and standards? "How do I navigate that behaviorly?"
 - ♦ Friedman gave numerous descriptions of self differentiation, he did not give a definition
 - ♦ for a definition I would use what I started off with – it is the human capacity not to be determined by the natural forces that are operative on me and to go a different way
 - ♦ three descriptions of self differentiation used by Friedman:
 1. the capacity to take a stand, to articulate where you are, in an intense emotional system, the more intensity in the system, the more anxiety, the system runs us rather than we acting independently in the system
 2. the aspect of being an "I", to be myself, to express myself while remaining connected in the relationship to others, to the church, the community
 3. the aspect of being in the system
 - ♦ Bowen said that the self is relational, that God is an active, relational God, Genesis 1, take seriously that we are made in God's image and for us Christians God is a trinity, God is very

relational and so we are very relational, God is a covenanting God, God is not a distant maker of things and then let it spin off on its own, We have freedom to love God and freedom to reject God.

How God relates to us

- ♦ We have freedom to love our neighbor and freedom to do our neighbor in. God does not want to dominate us – he is not an over functioner so that we atrophy in our functioning. God right-sizes God's self to relate to us so that we can relate to God.
- ♦ I think of the Holy Spirit and of demonic spirits as being able to touch our emotional processes. God can touch our affect and disturb us when we are messing up and can comfort us in our affect when we are doing well.
- ♦ The demonic spirit comforts us when we are on the road to Hell, wants us to self-destruct, so we get great comfort from the demonic spirit when we are messing up and the demonic spirit would disturb us when we are doing well, on God's path. In the Screw Tape Letters you will find that dynamic.
- ♦ I think God touches my thoughts, gives me thoughts at times
- ♦ "I just want to be spiritual." That has a very dangerous side to it. Which spirit are you dealing with? There are bad spirits out there. Just to be spiritual is not necessarily to be on the right path. That is one of the graces of being in church as opposed to being on my own.

Change

- ♦ we can't change anyone or change the system, we can just manage ourselves and it is not easy to manage ourselves, but then we can be a non-anxious person to someone else, must focus on our own functioning and not on changing others, that seems to have an effect on the group, incrementally groups then change

The "self"

- ♦ the self has been shaped by our family of origin, even folks who are highly competent and driven, at some point that energy runs out but God's grace does something that elevates and gives energy beyond what the family (humanity) of origin gives
- ♦ if something looks impossible, and you get a sense that God is calling you to it, God may give you the energy to get there beyond what your own energy can
- ♦ we have a companion when we are aligned with God
- ♦ when being an "I", it is important to say descriptively: "This is how I think.", not "This is how you should think.", with the former statement, the other person also can state what he thinks – self promotes self
- ♦ Archbishop Rowan Williams stated, "The task of the church is to build up the self of its members." Ephesians 4

To Differentiate

- ♦ What are my guiding principles as I negotiate relationships with people?
- ♦ If I am going to be an "I" while being connected, what are my strengths that I can use to be myself, while not correcting weaknesses? Can I be aware of my strengths and not be apologetic

about them?

- ♦ some would emphasize Genesis 3 – the fall of human beings
- ♦ I would emphasize Genesis 1 where God said, “This creation is good and the creation of human beings is very good.”

What are the emotional dynamics and strengths of your congregation?

St. Andrews, Panama City

- ♦ emotional dynamic – resilience
- ♦ strength – a great degree of harmony and support for each other, we are a family

St. Simon’s on the Sound, Ft. Walton

- ♦ emotional dynamic – good leadership
- ♦ strength – good leadership

St. Michael’s, Ozark

- ♦ emotional dynamic – supply priests
- ♦ strength – we came together, sense of family

St. Monica’s, Cantonment

- ♦ emotional dynamic – resiliency

St. Andrew’s, Mobile

- ♦ emotional dynamic – resiliency, perseverance
- ♦ strength – faithfulness in adversity, family

Epiphany, Enterprise

- ♦ emotional dynamic - stuck in glory days
- ♦ strength – adaptable, welcoming

St. Cyprian’s, Pensacola

- ♦ emotional dynamic – resilience, strength to survive, in transition
- ♦ strength – fellowship, dedication

St. Patrick’s, Panama City

- ♦ emotional dynamic – perseverance
- ♦ strength – faithfulness while looking to the future

Epiphany, Crestview

- ♦ emotional dynamic – distancing, recent history of changing leadership, members of founding families have their own silos
- ♦ strength – strong and unique traditions

Trinity, Mobile

- emotional dynamic – strong community of members, tornado
- strength – leadership, adults engaged with children.

I am struck by the number of you who spoke about resilience. That is a word that I think came in the vocabulary of strength five, maybe ten years ago. I don't remember it being a word that was highly valued. Resilience implies, as some of you did, that we have been through some trouble.

What does the Kingdom of God look like in a church if we are in a dynamic relationship with God and God is relating to us?

- ♦ there are moments that everything is just right – *What do those moments look like for you? What do they look like in a community?*
- ♦ We are all together at God's table. We all get the same food, all being fed by God. There is generosity, not expecting anything in return.
- ♦ At the Children's Christmas Pageant, everyone is happy, in harmony, we act as servants to others, feeding the hungry; I set aside my self-interests for the sake of the common good
- ♦ being receptive to God touching us
- ♦ openness to hearing God
- ♦ some are individual and some are relational, e.g., with a neighbor
- ♦ see righteous men stand in the face of evil
- ♦ birth/adoption, baptism, evoke the miracle of creation and God's gift of life
- ♦ feeding with beans and rice
- ♦ reading names of folks who have died, ties you to them
- ♦ Cursillo closing programs
- ♦ a close call interrupted
- ♦ can be seen in children
- ♦ sun beams coming down from the clouds
- ♦ in a prison ministry, someone thanks you
- ♦ see a Godly possibility that would touch another person, the basis of church growth

Homework questions to answer

1. What is the founding story of your congregation?
2. What strengths and gifts are revealed by this founding? How do they fit with the Gospel?
3. What is God doing in your community?
4. What is God calling you to?

From Bishop Russell

I receive letters from confirmands and most say that someone invited them to church the first time, but not one was invited by a priest. Statistics show that every 37 years an Episcopalian invites someone to church. I challenge you to invite one person before our next meeting in January. I want to thank you for giving this day and I look forward to our next session at St. Andrew's, Panama City. They have done remarkable things with their architecture.