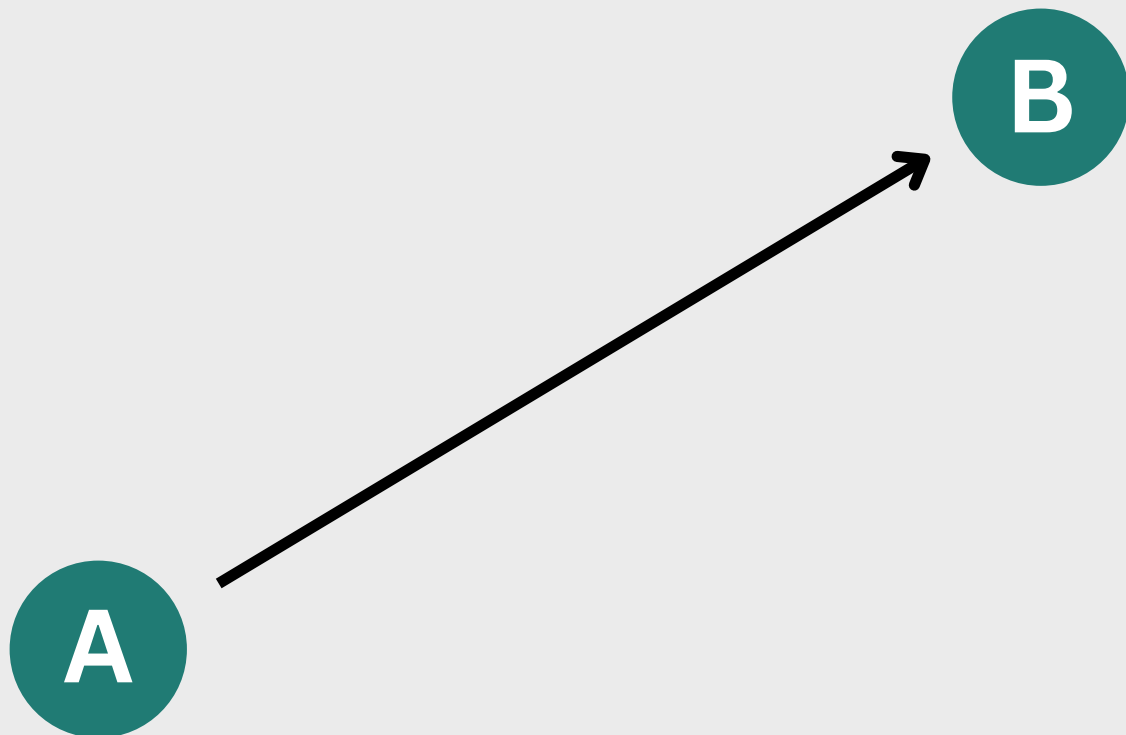


5 SHIFTS EVERY INNOVATIVE LEADER NEEDS TO MAKE



**FOR INNOVATORS, ORGANIZERS, AND
SPIRITUAL TRAILBLAZERS**

FROM CYCLICAL CULTURE



THE REIMAGINING

Even in the midst of uncertainty and rapid change, new kinds of faith communities are taking shape—rooted in love, built by bold leaders like you.

In many ways, the landscape for church leaders doesn't look good: previous ways of leading ministry don't seem to "work" any more, trust in church as an institution is eroding, and many of us feel burned out or discouraged.

If you're stepping into new ways of being church or building sacred community, you already know this work isn't easy. But you're not alone! You're part of a rising movement of faithful innovators reclaiming what it means to gather, lead, and love in community.

In this guide, we outline **five essential shifts** every leader must make to build thriving, inclusive, and spiritually rooted spaces in this new landscape. These aren't "silver bullets" guaranteed to instantly grow a large group. But these shifts will help you stay true to building the dream God has placed on your heart.

Let's make these moves—**together**.

SHIFT 1: **FROM “AUTHORITY” TO “AUTHENTICITY”**

WHAT IT MEANS

The days of the heroic Lone Ranger leader are long gone (in fact, I’m not even convinced that was a helpful model to begin with!). People don’t need another overly-certain guru or top-down institution. They need real leaders—honest, self-aware, and in-progress.

Share your story. Show your process. Let your humanity be your strength.

In many ways, your own transparency will become the greatest source of your authority as people see that you are growing in faith, hope, and love alongside them.

Of course, this means that your own faith journey must be real. We cannot undo the damage done by hypocritical leaders who preached one thing but practiced the opposite — but we can chart a different course for the future.

REFLECTION

How have you been shaped by authoritarian leadership models? Where have you been holding back your authentic self in order to appear “together”? What might happen if you let people see the real you?

SHIFT 2: **FROM “PROGRAMS” TO “PRESENCE”**

WHAT IT MEANS

Even if you don’t care for smoke machines or a set design team for your Sunday services, starting a faithful innovation from scratch can be daunting. You don’t need a fully formed “Sunday experience” or perfectly crafted 10-step discipleship pipeline.

What your community craves is your presence. Be present in your neighborhood. Be present in your relationships. Be present to what the Spirit is doing now.

This overemphasis on programs goes hand-in-hand with how we measure “success” in the faith world. Even for leaders who deeply believe in missional praxis, the allure of metrics based on growing attendance, budget numbers, and programs can be dangerously intoxicating.

Faithful innovators do want to reach people — but the goal is not simply to fill an auditorium with viewers. Rather, we tell a much more powerful story when we can show that an increasing percentage of people involved in our communities are actively participating in our innovation’s mission. And that happens when we are fully present and engaged with the real human beings in the communities around us.

REFLECTION

In what ways is it easier to build more and more programs rather than focus on being present? Where is your presence most needed this week—instead of another plan? What is your metric for success in your faithful innovation? How would you tell that story to someone else in a compelling way?

SHIFT 3: **FROM “HOMOGENEITY”** **TO “HOLY DIVERSITY”**

WHAT IT MEANS

The “homogeneous unit principle” (groups of people who are similar to one another along racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic lines) may have led to rapid church attendance growth in the 1980s and 90s, but misses the mark when it comes to faithful innovation.

A faithful community must reflect the fullness of God’s creation. That means intentionally creating spaces that are inclusive across race, gender, sexuality, age, class, and ability. Diversity isn’t a bonus—it’s the baseline.

Even in nature, biodiverse ecosystems flourish and thrive. Contrast that with mass monocultural farming: disease and pest outbreaks spread rapidly and easily. That leads to increased pesticide usage, which causes runoff and pollution. These crops require a tremendous amount of irrigation because of the instability of the soil moisture. And they negatively impact the surrounding ecosystems, particularly animals and pollinators that rely on a variety of plants for food and shelter.

Diversity is a seedbed for faithful innovation. Creativity flourishes in diverse environments where we benefit from the multiple cultural and life experiences different people bring to the table. Sometimes, we don’t even know the right questions to ask — but someone with a different perspective can help reframe our way of thinking.

REFLECTION

Whose voice is missing in your community and leadership right now? How many onramps are you creating for people to connect? What gifts can you offer to support one another in different stages of growth? Are you sharing leadership, especially with people with different cultural and life experiences from yourself?

SHIFT 4: **FROM “CONTENT DELIVERY” TO “MUTUAL TRANSFORMATION”**

WHAT IT MEANS

You are not a content machine. Church isn't a TED Talk. A faithful innovator is not someone who simply distributes information or “comes down from the mountaintop” with decrees from on high.

Faithful innovation creates and holds space for collective wisdom and shared transformation. Yes, leadership still matters, but everyone who is a part of these communities — leaders and participants alike — are called to learn, challenge, and grow together.

Industrial models of faith emphasize a “one size fits all” approach. Leaders produce the “widgets” of religious goods and services as rapidly as possible and distribute them to as many consumers as possible. This model leaves little to no room for mutuality or relationship. Faithful innovators are able to make the shift from emphasizing only content to valuing both cognitive and emotional intelligence. Empathy, understanding, and genuine care are all vital components of mutually transformative relationships.

REFLECTION

How have you been influenced by models of leadership that emphasize one-way content delivery? How might you invite others to help shape the spiritual direction of your gatherings? Can you create multiple ways of engaging transformation?

SHIFT 5: **FROM “CONTROL”** **TO “CO-CREATION”**

WHAT IT MEANS

You’re not here to build your own empire. You’re here to co-create something sacred with others. While the “genius with a thousand helpers” model of leadership might boost the ego of the main leader, faithful innovators know there is a better way. That means listening deeply, letting go of ego, and making space for the Spirit to lead.

Having dreams for new ways of being church or building sacred community in our world is a beautiful thing. But even as we dream, we must be aware of the dangers of trying to control the outcomes. Dietrich Bonhoeffer powerfully wrote:

“Those who love their dream of a Christian community more than they love the community itself become destroyers of that Christian community even though their personal intentions may be ever so honest, earnest and sacrificial. God hates this wishful dreaming because it makes the dreamer proud and pretentious. Those who dream of this idolized community demand that it be fulfilled by God, by others and by themselves.”

Faithful innovators dream, adapt, and keep dreaming as they release control and invite others into co-creating new and better futures with them. It’s good for a leader to have vision — and it’s good for leaders to know that dreaming together comes closer to bringing God’s inclusive and boundless dreams into reality.

REFLECTION

What would it look like to lead in a way that’s more collaborative, curious, and Spirit-led? How open are you to feedback and/or pushback on your ideas? In what ways are you practicing becoming a more thoughtful, responsive listener — both to God and to others around you?

YOU'RE NOT MEANT TO LEAD ALONE

You're already making these shifts. Now imagine doing it with a whole community of faithful innovators who believe in inclusion, transformation, and the bold reimagining of what church can be.

Join us in Cyclical Culture Community. Applications are open now.

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