

Drifting on a Wave of Change Case Study

Martin Kramal has now come to the end of his seventh month as Senior Pastor of Grace to You Church. Martin assumed the pastorate after its visionary leader, Dr. Joshua Rojesh, retired. But now Martin is faced with evidence that the future of the church is far more at risk than he thought at the outset.

Effectiveness Crisis

Martin made a conscientious effort to discover why Grace to You congregation seemed to be sagging in vitality. His beginning point was to schedule one-on-one meetings with each member of the staff. He always began with the question, *“What can I do to help you be more effective?”* The first few staff members who were approached in this way were very surprised that Martin wanted to hear their opinions. Although the staff employees in had never been asked for such input, most had been very loyal to Dr. Rojesh during his long tenure. Soon the word got around, however, that Martin is a leader who wants to listen to the people.

It wasn't long before a troubling picture emerged of a church body that - by and large - was discouraged and poorly utilized. Some had been doing the same ministries for many years, and seemed satisfied. But others were quick to state they would move into other ministry initiatives if there were opportunities to do so. But this option seemed closed to most because of the fragile state of the church's finances.

Martin also sought out a few key people who had resigned or been forced out of the church, beginning with Noah Ellenberger, a youth pastor who had come with such promise. Noah summed up accurately the feelings of others like himself when he charged that *“Grace to You treats its staff and people like they are just parts of the machinery, not as fellow Christians with dreams and abilities.”*

Further important insights were provided by some of the leaders within the local evangelical network, most of whom Martin had known since college days. He asked each to give a frank evaluation of Grace to You today versus the earlier years. While most were carefully polite in their responses, Martin soon discovered that the church is perceived as being out of touch with today's generation. Upon hearing these impressions, Martin's mind quickly went back a few years to the time he introduced young adults to a series of discipleship

workshops. This was the first time he had turned away from the denomination's materials and used a new contemporary curriculum prepared by another publisher located in one of the western states. Martin was excited as he saw these young Christians grasp the reality of the gospel message in their daily challenges through these studies. Much to his disappointment, he found out this excellent curriculum was rejected for publication by Dr. Rojesh for the reason that it was too charismatic. Nevertheless, it is now used widely in many evangelical churches, in spite of the fact it is available only in cassette tapes and second-rate study guides.

Martin came to the unmistakable conclusion that change was necessary if Grace to You was to survive as a reputable ministry. Martin fell to his knees, asking God where he should begin. Within a very short time he met an old friend, Stella Habib, who now is the local manager of a consulting service working mostly with non-governmental organizations (NGO's) in many countries of the world. Much to Martin's relief, Stella volunteered to help in any way possible. Martin gratefully accepted her offer.

Coming to Grips with Change

Martin brought his the church's Executive Committee together with Stella for a one-day seminar. As tea was served, Dolly Mbisu began reminiscing about the dramatic ways in which Dr. Rojesh changed the church when he took over in 1975. She recalled the wonderful impact of exciting ministries and pointed to some of the now dusty tracts and books authored by some of the most creative and respected members of the congregation. The last book of that series, however, was printed in 1992. She said, "Those were exciting times."

Stella counseled against a longing for the "good old days." She pointed out that all churches struggle to keep up as times change, and little is accomplished by focusing on what went wrong. She went on to stress that her concern is for Grace to You as it exists today. The important issue now is, "Are you willing to change?" Dolly responded quickly in declaring, "We must change . . . but I don't know if we are willing to change." And there seemed to be agreement around the room.

Stella was quick to praise the group for their courage and conviction. She spent the remainder of the day outlining a suggested process designed to reveal ways of thinking

and practices that can either inhibit or encourage necessary change. She tactfully pointed out that the church is *drifting on a wave of change*. In other words, Grace to You is falling seriously short both in its mission and in the practices that are necessary if its people are to be empowered and unleashed to cope with change. Martin quickly saw that the church's survival is in jeopardy unless there is revitalization.

As the day-long meeting came to an end, Stella said the following:

"Ladies and gentlemen, the most important characteristic of good leadership is to have a clear sense of the future that makes real sense to those who must carry it out. Now is the time either to turn this ship in the right direction or to close the doors. It's up to you! You must go back to the foundations and discover just why Grace to You should even continue to exist. Then you will have to demonstrate that you are moving in directions that will make a real difference for Christ and His Kingdom."

Questions for Discussion:

- 1. Do you agree or disagree with Stella's assessment of Grace to You?**
- 2. What obstacles to change do Martin and the leadership team face?**
- 3. What specific steps would you advise over the next six months?**