

# Sustaining Spiritual Momentum for Congregational Transformation

*A Travel Free Learning Article*

By

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How is it that some churches send their leaders to seminars, seize creative ideas, strike enthusiasm, energetically imagine their future mission, hone a strategy and get traction?

There are multiple complexities around why some churches carpe their diem and others not so much. I've observed at least one major dynamic around why congregations might do creative work on their mission, vision, and values then sputter when it comes to the next steps of formulating a strategic ministry action plan. I call it improper alignment. While this metaphor may fail to convey the organic nature of group spiritual energy and intentionality, we've all learned that if your car's front-end is not properly aligned and balanced, you are not only in for a rough ride, but ignoring it will cost you expensive repair work down the road. Fix it now or fix it later?

**The work of alignment proceeds through a process of discernment** involving the core spiritual leaders. If, through Scripture meditation, candid I-talk conversation and prayerful consensus building, the group has: 1) a clear confirmation of direction, 2) designed a course of action, 3) prioritized resources for effective, measurable accomplishment; we should be over the goal line in a jiffy, right? Yet a progress check may reveal weak and wobbly progress (fits and starts) which calls for a critical re-check of alignment factors. In the spiritual realm, a congregation's energies are aligned through two spiritual practices; namely agreement and intercession.

**1) The spiritual practice of agreement** is, first and foremost, our yes to God that offers up our surrendered energies to the Divine Purpose. As we come to understand this purpose, we stand under it awaiting the Spirit to illumine the path toward the next set of right answers coordinated with bold and timely action. In a community of faith, agreement has the additional dimension of saying our yes's and no's to one another. If we are not utterly explicit and courageously candid with one another, we can sometimes mistake another person's intellectual assent or tacit silence to a proposal for the kind of whole-soul agreement required to bond our communal yes together under God and release energy and joy.

I have come to understand spiritual agreement as our yes to God that requires mutual vows of availability, vulnerability and accountability to God which also binds our hearts together in the core leadership community as well. If we are just nodding and smiling and making nice without getting down into the nitty-gritty and hammering out our objections and verbalizing our reservations while testing our assumptions (perhaps even confessing our disrespect, lack of faith or failure to see any urgency), we haven't yet reached the kind of agreement required to move our congregation forward. Simply put: we are not yet in the sync of spiritual agreement.

The energy generated from this out of sync posture in the leadership circle, feels slightly off-center and produces wobbly, off-balance energy that clunks along in on-again, off again fashion but never quite ignites and gains traction. Observing this odd rhythm may be a signal to back-track and reconfirm, in an authentic come to Jesus kind of way, that we have indeed yielded up our spirits to the Spirit of God and are One in the bond of Love. Perhaps our spiritual energies are not yet harmonized in the depths. We may indeed be saying our yes to God and offering a tacit yes to the project, but silently saying an emphatic personal *no* to each other, which hinders spiritual alignment. Our unexamined attitudes may be creating atmosphere that either allows things to happen or keeps things from happening. Which? Courageous candor and unselfish love may well be the overcoming factors.

**2) The spiritual practice of intercession** molds deeper levels of alignment with one another, driving us further into the heart of prayer, sometimes exposing insight into the dynamics of spiritual warfare. Intercession begins with centering down into our spiritual core, where spirits human and holy commune. Sometimes in the process of centering down, things we might ordinarily treat as distractions are actually slivers of illumination; fragments that point to underlying dynamics, dimensions, or disturbances to our peace which we have been ignoring and dismissing yet may bear a poignant psychological message. By giving voice to our inner prayer and verbalizing these distractions, an unconscious communal chord may be struck that leads to pinpointing the essence of our corporate stuck-ness and calling it out. At other times, the simple prayer practice of holding one another up into the Light of Christ may illuminate the path. This may sound contradictory when expressed in words but most attempts to name dimensions of communal prayer are already well beyond words.

Through the spiritual leadership's commitment to a communal practice of agreement and intercession, more capacity is created in the core circle for energies to align through the process of spiritual discernment. Through a mysterious catharsis of spiritual energy we cannot explain but deeply appreciate and honor, the grace to ease into fresh ways of being emerges from the depths and is unleashed in worship and service, with the fruit being genuine joy. Healthy congregations find this joy so irresistible that momentum seems to flow almost effortlessly. Sustaining spiritual momentum is forged out of the depths of agreement and intercession then gratefully acknowledged as we go with the flow toward further congregational transformation.

**SUM:** I have tried to describe the mystery of grace that aligns us missionally and releases a spiritual momentum that emerges to carry us forward. Some folks seem to think missional momentum is sheer coincidence. All I know is that when we stop praying, coincidences stop happening. When the core spiritual leadership practices agreement and intercession, mojo is never far behind!

**CURIOSITIES:** Do I have to like you to be in spiritual agreement with you? Can you identify the rhythms or cycles in your congregation's momentum? What factors create a high tide? What drains your church's mojo? What one thing could we stop doing which would almost immediately improve our alignment? What role do you play in creating momentum? Where in your church life is mojo generated? Monitored? Nurtured? How does your personal devotion feed into congregational spiritual momentum?

### **Important Things to Know**

Gary Straub is a Ministry Associate with The Columbia Partnership. The Columbia Partnership is a non-profit Christian ministry organization focused on transforming the capacity of the North American Church to pursue and sustain Christ-centered ministry. **Travel Free Learning** is a knowledge sharing emphasis. For more information about products and services check out the web site at [www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org](http://www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org), send an e-mail to [Client.Care@TheColumbiaPartnership.org](mailto:Client.Care@TheColumbiaPartnership.org), or call 803.622.0923.