

# The Alban Institute

'The Alban Institute is an independent center of learning and leadership development with a focus on congregations. Located in greater Washington, D.C., Alban is a not-for-profit, membership organization that develops and shares knowledge through consulting, publishing, research, and education programs.' Alban offers resources, books, webinars, podcasts, consultation, an 'alban weekly' and other helpful resources for religious communities. <http://www.alban.org/index.aspx>

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## LOSING ONE'S SENSE OF CALL— INDICATORS OF PASTORAL STAGNATION



- \* **We become increasingly busy with little time for awareness of the presence of God.**
- \* **We tire easily; find ourselves ministering more and enjoying it less.**
- \* **We lose our sense of purpose and direction.**
- \* **We are driven by obligation instead of gratitude.**
- \* **Ministry feels ambiguous; our inner sense of clarity and conviction about our work erodes.**
- \* **We experience periodic depression.**
- \* **Preaching becomes a burdensome chore.**
- \* **Celebrating the sacraments is mechanical; there is no sense of Presence.**
- \* **We begin to doubt our ability, our effectiveness.**
- \* **God seems distant.**
- \* **Prayer life dries up.**
- \* **We become reluctant to talk about our personal faith and our relationship to God.**
- \* **We begin to long for retirement.**
- \* **We feel unauthentic as we are expected to interpret to others that which is no longer real for us.**
- \* **We wish we could see effective alternative ways to earn a living.**

## Toward Daring Discipleship



May 2010  
Thinking about 'church'



**Ed White and the Alban Institute help us to think about how we are *church* and how we are responding to our call and ministry as communities of faith.**

# THINKING ABOUT OUR FAITH COMMUNITIES



## Eight quality characteristics of Healthy Congregations

Below are listed eight qualities that have been identified by Christian Schwarz, a German Lutheran theologian as characteristic of healthy congregations. Ed White suggests placing an 'a' beside those qualities that are strong in your congregation, a 'b' for those moderate in strength, and a 'c' for those where you are weak and need growth.

1. \_\_\_ Empowering leadership...the kind that multiplies leaders rather than just attracting followers.
2. \_\_\_ Gifted service...people regularly discover, develop and exercise their gifts and talents in the life of the congregation.
3. \_\_\_ Passionate spirituality...people are involved out of joy and gratitude rather than duty. They are highly motivated and enthusiastic.
4. \_\_\_ Functional structures...the organization works well so that we are enriched by, but not imprisoned in, our past.
5. \_\_\_ Inspiring worship...worship is an exercise of the heart as well as mind. In worship we are both moved and enlightened.
6. \_\_\_ Small group life... small groups enrich the spiritual life and growth of congregants.
7. \_\_\_ Evangelism...highly effective at attracting and incorporating the unchurched and young people who have been 'outside the fold'.
8. \_\_\_ Loving relationships...life together is characterized by deep mutual caring and lots of healthy humor.

## Religious Institutions or God movement?

<u>Institutions</u>	<u>Movements</u>
Seek members to join	Seek needs to fulfill
Have mission statements	Have a mission
Elect officers	Inspire passionate people
Encourage endowments	Encourage selfless living
Measure assets	Measure passion
Led by qualified people	Led by called people
Exist for membership	Exist for the world
Focus inward	Focus outward
Maintenance-oriented	Mission-driven
Built with brick and mortar	Built with flesh and blood
Celebrate increases in numbers	Celebrate lives changed and healed
Make budgets and receive pledges	Make commitments and give everything
Depend on charitable givings	Depend on the Grace of God
Seek the first and best	Serve the last and least
Train leaders to manage systems	Create passionate and sacrificial leaders
Provide a safe environment	Provide risky opportunities
Depend on human resources to accomplish attainable goals	Depend on God's resources to accomplish impossible visions



## Transformation



- \* Dying to hopelessness and defeatism and rising to fresh new life
- \* Dying to worrying about or obsessing over numbers and rising to passion for authenticity
- \* Dying to self absorption, consumer thinking, and the desire to have one's needs met, and rising to passion to reach others with Christ and to attend to the poor, powerless and disenfranchised with the compassion of Christ...
- \* Dying to worship wars and rising to new openness for worship that embraces all.
- \* Dying to saying *we can't* & rising to saying *why not?*
- \* Dying to fear of conflict and rising to welcome conflict as healthy and needful to keep clarifying that the main thing must be the main thing.
- \* Dying to fiscal fears and an ethic of scarcity and rising to lavish generosity and an ethic of abundance.
- \* Dying to programs and rising to witness.
- \* Dying to the sense that the church is neurotic, and rising to a new day of optimism and vitality.
- \* Dying to deals, causes and spiritual self help & rising to passionate love for God's Reign.

↑ from Barger, Rick. *A New and Right Spirit*. Alban Institute, 2005 (...adapted...)

← From White, Ed - *Creating Disciple Making Communities*