

The Unbinding the Gospel Project (Mainline Evangelism Project II)

**Fourth Annual Report to the Lilly Endowment, Inc.
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Overview

We have learned an enormous amount about congregational transformation over the last four years. This 2008-2013 grant focuses on helping 500 mainline congregations work with the *Unbinding the Gospel* transformational process we developed from findings of the Lilly-funded Mainline Evangelism Research Project, 2002-2006.¹ ***Our premise:*** if congregations further develop the three defining practices we identified in the nation's most highly evangelistic congregations, typical congregations can become authentically and effectively evangelistic.

The three key practices we saw developed to extraordinary extent in the nation's statistically most effective, evangelistic mainline congregations were:

- Laity have a deep, relational sense of faith in God
- Laity can articulate their faith comfortably
- Pastors and lay leaders hold a laser-like focus on people beyond church walls

After four years of testing, we stand by our premise. Typical churches can grow.

Purpose of the grant. The Unbinding the Gospel Project (aka Mainline Evangelism Project - Phase II) has two primary foci: (1) to help congregations to develop deeper faith, motivation to share that faith, and actual numerical growth; and (2) to study how this works - what are the most effective ways of helping congregations move from stagnancy or decline into growth? What forces militate against this healthy change? How can we work with these challenges most effectively? This report describes major findings, four years into the Project.

Summary of findings to date: We now know that the *Unbinding the Gospel* process works to help churches grow (12-15% increase in average worship attendance at the end of the first year of coaching). Even more excitingly, it works to help churches begin to grow without creating gratuitous conflict. Our emphasis at this point will focus on helping a greater percentage of the churches stick with the changes and not slip back to the old habits they worked so hard to change.

¹ All references to the "Unbinding" process refers to a Series of four books, all written by Martha Grace Reese, all published by Chalice Press, all beginning with the word "Unbinding." The foundational book in the Series is *Unbinding the Gospel*, 2nd ed. 2008. See www.GraceNet.info for more information.
Martha Grace Reese, Unbinding the Gospel Project Fourth Report to the Lilly Endowment, 4/30/12

What We're Doing - Statistical Overview

Numbers. By the time this grant is done, our coaches will have worked with over 500 churches, the earliest ones for a year, but about 300 of them for at least two years. In addition to the 500 congregations in the formal, two-year coaching process, I have personally conducted a series of one to three hour-long coaching conversations with 5000+ pastors in small groups of 3-10 participants. I have also conducted about 4000 calls/coaching sessions with probably 2000 individual pastors, lay people and judicatory ministers since the beginning of the grant in 2008. I have done over 250 individual speaking/keynoting/workshop engagements since 2007, but have severely curtailed this activity since 2009 in favor of the equally or more effective telephone work. Our best estimate is that 200,000 people will have worked through the books by the time the grant is done.

Denominations. We have worked with churches from all of the 7 mainline denominations in the original study (ABC, DOC, ELCA, PCUSA, RCA, UMC and UCC) together with congregations from multiple judicatories of the Church of the Brethren, the Episcopal Church, the United Church of Canada, the Presbyterians in Canada and the Anglican Church in Canada, as well as congregations from the Southern Baptist Convention, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the Cumberland Presbyterians, Missouri Synod Lutherans, former Metropolitan Community Churches, a Moody-movement congregation, and Community Churches.

Theological Spectrum. Churches with an enormous range of theological beliefs are working successfully with the Unbinding Process. The center of our bell curve is the center of the mainline church, but it's a very wide center and we are reaching effectively toward the edges.

Congregational Size. Coaching churches have ranged in size from 18 to 1850 persons in worship. We coach churches in collaborative groups with similar-sized congregations. We see healthy growth and change in churches all along the size spectrum, although the tiny churches are often very embedded in difficult demographic settings, with quite fragile leadership, so progress is slow. Five of these tiny churches have doubled in worship attendance. We are beginning to work with a higher percentage of congregations in the 300-600 average worship attendance range, with very gratifying results. (Our January 2012 coaching class averaged about 300 AWA.) The challenge to the tiny churches is allowing any change at all. The challenge to the large churches is to stay with the process deeply enough to affect change. Big churches are geared to a continually shifting buffet of options, so a deep-saturation, long-arc transformation process can challenge a kaleidoscopic stability of continual movement.

Coaches. We have a gifted, diverse, collaborative group of coaches, each with deep piety and experience with congregational change dynamics. They have served pastorates that range from new church starts in Georgia, New Hampshire and Minnesota; small, historic churches in New England, mega-churches in the Minneapolis area, a rural Appalachian congregation and middle judicatory ministry. We have UMC, UCC, ELCA, DOC and PCUSA coaches ranging in age from mid-twenties to late fifties, with prayer and advice from a Presbyterian approaching his 80's. Working and learning with this group of coaches is an inspiration.

Grant progress. This grant ends officially on December 31, 2013, although work will progress until the summer of 2014. We have developed an ever-evolving, high commitment,

two-year collaborative coaching model and a quite sophisticated data-collection process. During the course of the grant term, I have written three additional “Unbinding” books to support the process.

Our focus is maturing as the grant term progresses. We now know that the *Unbinding Series* and the coaching process we have developed works. Even more excitingly, churches are growing with a minimum of conflict. We are too early into the process to have bankable numbers to show sustained growth percentages, but our emphasis for the duration of the grant will be to help a larger percentage of the churches stick with the new practices they have developed rather than slip back to the old habits and patterns they have worked so hard to change.

***What are we seeing so far? Two huge successes,
one dynamic of resistance***

We see two extraordinary successes and one dynamic of resistance that we’re thwacking away at! The two successes are important. First, the *Unbinding the Gospel Series* works. Congregations are developing motivation to change and are growing numerically, usually after decades of stagnation or decline. Second, the Unbinding process helps congregations develop motivation for evangelism and move into numerical growth *with a minimum of conflict*.

So we can help churches shift from decades of numerical decline into true growth (12%-15% increase in worship attendance among the churches that do what we suggest). *And* we aren’t blowing up the churches with conflict. These are two enormous victories. *But*, we’ve discovered a frustrating resistance dynamic: too many congregations that have experienced substantial change make choices (often passive choices) that cause the new momentum to drift to a halt. They don’t hold in place the new patterns of prayer, deeper relationships and focus on people outside the church long enough.

I am clear after 16 years of directing Endowment grants focused on congregational transformation and evangelism that the best way to help congregations shift from stability into active missional activity is to help them move into more vivid contact with Christ. The Holy Spirit can then choreograph individuals’ and congregations’ actions. The only path through the thickets in which we are mired is the pathway of a vibrant spiritual life, individually and corporately, and vivid concern to those outside church walls. Once we’re clear of the thickets, we must resist the temptation to dive back into them.

We’re doing more than telling people what change they need to make. The books and coaching lead them through a practical model that stirs up creativity, a sense of community excitement and purpose with minimal conflict. Churches are growing. These two significant advances in transformational praxis are clear from our enormous database of 500 / 5000 congregations. Now we want to work on the challenge of increasing “long arc leadership” to sustain long-term patterns of vibrant ministry. That’s our focus for the next two years.

Success #1 - Numerical Growth through the Three Practices

Churches throughout our coaching process report extraordinary shifts in understanding of faith, motivation for outreach, relational depth and creativity - often with a *decrease* in conflict. They tell us of new ministries, increases in visitors, adult baptisms, new members, giving,

individuals praying for and having significant faith conversations with friends, neighbors and co-workers. Worship attendance is almost always up. We hear the word “momentum” frequently.

Success stories overwhelm us. The *Unbinding Series* is engendering positive changes in individual lives and in congregations. We **know** that the process and the books work. Congregations that do the process as we counsel average 12% - 15% increase in worship attendance at the end of the first year of coaching. Our coaching churches average 85% participation in a 6 week, small group-based, all congregational study. Our data shows that this high participation rate both *increases* probability of people inviting friends (to church, into faith conversations) and *decreases* congregational conflict when churches do grow.

A large, historic Presbyterian church in a community with declining demographics has just set the new world record for participation in the all-church study: 149% of their average worship attendance. Worship attendance is up. Initially hesitant members are enthused about prayer and faith sharing. The pastor told me that one of the significant signs of change he sees is an unanticipated shift in patterns of generosity. This church of good stewards has traditionally had to go to the congregation in Nov. and Dec. with a plea for money. People sent in large, unsolicited gifts of stock this April. A check for an amount equal to 12% of the annual budget arrived from a member who “wanted us to consider it an answer to prayer.”

I asked the lead pastor of a United Methodist congregation, 550 AWA, with over 90% participation in their all-church study, for his advice to other pastors of similar, large, progressive churches. (This church experienced rather dramatic public difficulties and significant loss of membership three or four years ago.) He grinned and said, “tell them that if people really start praying, that it will mess up all of their organization and planning! I’m kidding. Well, I’m really *not* kidding, but it’s great. The prayer is changing the way we see everything. God is doing things we didn’t know were possible.” One of the lay leaders sent me this e-mail, “Our *Unbinding Your Heart* experience was incredible. There is a new spiritual life at 1st UMC. Our church is having a re-birth... We opened our hearts to God, big time!”

This kind of excitement and change is not limited to large churches. Here are more articulations of change, all sent to me this March, from churches ranging from 50 to 150 in worship. Note the indicia of hope, positive change, numerical growth, shifts in perspective and wonder about the future possibilities:

I have begun to live into what true evangelism is. I find myself drawn to thoughts, discussions and books on the subject. God has even put Erika, an abused mother of 2 young children who has had more challenges in her short lifetime than anyone I know, in my path. Please pray that I may be the one who introduces her to Jesus in a way that changes her life for the better. God willing, she might lead our church to others who need Christ to literally save their lives. (*small UMC church pastor*)

We have had more total strangers sign up for our community garden than ever before. And a Pastor's Class of 7 people considering membership is forming. The Spirit is on the move here, with some resistance. I would ask for prayers for the resistance. I pray that folks will continue to feel the excitement and movement of the Spirit after the E-vent [the all-church study] is over. I know God will show us the next step and the path to follow, and I pray that we will be open to hearing and seeing what that next step is. If God is shaking us up and calling us to do something new, I hope we will have the courage to step out in faith and try. We are gathering momentum that we want to carry us into action. (*UCC*)

We have heard over and over how hungry people were for small group experiences and prayer. God is blessing us with many visitors---some who have come more than twice and I am following up on with lunch or dinner. Our leadership team is in prayer about where we will go from here. (*small PCUSA church pastor*)

The congregation has increased 110% - 22 when I arrived four years ago, 26 new members as of March 18th, with 60 in worship on Sunday. In addition, we had two adults baptized on Sunday (a 90 year old man who has been a member for a very long time told me he cannot remember ever seeing two adults baptized at once - by the way, he has a great memory). (*UCC*)

These experiences are typical. The *Unbinding* process works. Churches are growing. Our coaching model is increasingly refined, skilled and results continue to improve. Churches are changing as they develop the three practices we identified in the highly evangelistic congregations (deeper relationships with God, ability to articulate faith, and thinking about people outside the church).

Success #2 - Minimal Conflict, Maximal Change: Fix the Spiritual Problem First

We are very excited about the way the *Unbinding* process is working. I am equally delighted with our track record of working in a way that minimizes conflict and maximizes positive change.

The Unbinding the Gospel Project has taught us an important lesson: First Things First. How do you get effective congregational change toward statistically recognizable evangelism across the spectrum of mainline settings? ***First***, develop those three practices we saw in the great evangelistic churches (relationship with God, ability to talk about it, and thinking about people outside church walls). ***Then*** you can make the visible changes that can rattle people! You have to do something, but a subtle start minimizes gratuitous resistance. You have to work thoroughly with the whole membership, or you can create a backlash. Our data demonstrates clearly that if we begin this high bar process with a quiet start and thorough diffusion throughout the congregation; we see huge changes in attitude, practices and numerical growth. ***Then*** the church is ready to tackle the structural issues.

Our data demonstrates clear trends. A subtle start / thorough saturation process of spiritual deepening, relational development and helping people to start thinking beyond church walls produces the best results. The Unbinding model has a huge prayer and small group relationship-development component. Prayer and relationships are daunting for many people (and many pastors), who find more typical, “rational” revitalization models more comfortable. This grant project underscores my conviction that these “rational-fix” models don’t get at mainline churches’ key problem: we aren’t seeking God. You can’t fix a spiritual problem with a modern/rational process. If we aren’t praying, structural change has a rearranging-deck-chairs-on-the-Titanic character. If we don’t have honest, spiritually-based relationships with the church, we can’t navigate the tricky currents of conflict. I’m working with hundreds of churches that have spent years trying to get at transformation via structural shifts, most of which are desperately needed. It’s just not the place to start! These are the three prevalent transformation methods that I’m concerned don’t serve us well as a first step:

(1) Ignoring the problem, handholding, or hoping decline will change while doing the same old things. (Okay, this one doesn't work first, last or ever!)

(2) The most typical mainline attempts at church transformation focus on developing mission statements, vision statements, and elaborate assessments of congregational health. These efforts feel productive, take a lot of time and energy, but rarely shift patterns of decline. Leaders *talk* about transformation, *think* about how people should be disciples on a spiritual path, *decide* to grow, *vote* to change. Vision statements kick around the back of the closet, members keep coming to the same old church. These processes usually produce the fruit of a Rube Goldberg machine.

(3) The extreme of transformation theory is to attempt dramatic, top-down change - the "shock and awe / where angels fear to tread" theory of church revitalization. It's actually fairly easy to rush into a church system, stir up change with quick adopters, help create quick growth and blow up a church. I share the frustration and the temperament that underlie these methods. I've done it myself. Oh, do I wish this way worked! But dramatic, top-down attempts to militate change rarely work well in the long term, even in healthy congregations, let alone in embedded churches that have been in decline for decades. They can result in quick growth, conflict, an exhausted pastor who leaves (the new people often go with, or leave soon after the pastor), and a smaller, grumpier, older church grappling to regroup and restart with a new, hopeful, young pastor 8 years later.

Model #1 never works. Models #2 and #3, which take rational looks at mission, vision, and structure, can be very helpful *after* an *Unbinding* start. Just don't take five years to begin to fix the core problem, and don't blow up the church before it's looking to God for direction!

Conflict is an inevitable, and to some extent necessary, component to change. We need to deal with it and lead through it with a sense of humor, humility and flexibility. Of course everyone isn't going to want to move in the same direction at exactly the same time. Of course situations emerge where you need to keep moving despite some critique, disagreement and hurt feelings. Don't give cranky people a veto. All I'm urging is that we can help more churches make functional, effective change if we give people a chance to develop a spiritual dimension to their lives, spiritual relationships between church members, and the desire to reach out beyond church walls as a first step. This gives the Spirit much more room to maneuver in *our* spirits as we enter the choppy waters of structural change. (See *Unbinding the Gospel*, Chapter 9)

How to start? What moves churches toward authentic missionality? We're seeing that God must be a huge part of any transformation process. We need to help people *experience* a change in their faith lives, in their relationships with each other, and in their thinking about how faith could help their friends outside of church. Then they *want* to move. Board votes and restructure, missional decisions *now* can get traction. ***Here are our findings for the best ways to help a church start to fill the God-void, and to start moving toward missionality:***

1. The word "evangelism" terrifies mainline church laity and pastors. There is no merely rational way to temper it, prepare people to hear it, urge them to "do" it.
2. Given the resistance to evangelism, the best way to start is to Be Quiet, don't preach or write about it in the newsletter. Quietly start a test group to experience *Unbinding the*

Gospel - a small group, experiential study with a 40-day prayer journal and group exercises. (“Quiet” and “organic” are two words we like! **Don’t** start by “Getting the word out,” doing a book study once a month with the board, preaching a sermon series to warm people up to the idea, trying to teach the book contents with Powerpoint, asking the board’s permission to change the church with the *Unbinding Series*, explaining the full process to people before a test study, telling people that this can change the church, or using *Unbinding the Gospel* quickly in a board retreat. You will gain nothing. You will almost certainly create gratuitous resistance.)

3. Changes in faith are changes of heart toward God and toward other people. They rarely involve a mere intellectual assent to a proposition. People need to **experience** faith in order to even want to pass it on.
4. The *Unbinding* process isn’t a “book study.” It works best as a sequential, quiet ripple through the leadership, and then to all of the people and their friends. The more people involved, the better. The more “under the radar,” until the all church study, the better. It takes time.
5. A church’s test group of *Unbinding the Gospel* works best when pastors assemble an eclectic group of quick-adaptor leaders who have never met before as a group (i.e., don’t use the church council). The test study is most effective when it’s real - intense - 8 weeks in a row for an hour and a half, doing the groups exercises and the prayer journal, meeting once a week with a prayer partner.
6. Working with evangelism and prayer is the perfect vehicle for developing a new generation of lay leaders and enriching the leadership capacities of seasoned leaders. Leadership development is built into the Unbinding process. The model provides for leaders to first experience the process, then to lead it in pairs, while continuing to meet in a supportive, experiential leadership group.
7. Prayer/intercession by pastors and leaders is the sine qua non.
8. Pastors tend to be more resistant and skeptical about the Unbinding process than lay people. We see that it’s best for pastors to experience their first taste of *Unbinding* with a group of quick adaptor lay leaders. Even pastors have to do this experientially - then they frequently say that they haven’t felt so hopeful about ministry since seminary.
9. Most congregations benefit from structured steps, thoroughness in working with the process, check-lists and accountability structures to support doing this process slowly, thoroughly and well.
10. When the whole congregation has experienced the Unbinding study (*Unbinding the Gospel* for all leaders - 20% of the average worship attendance, then *Unbinding Your Heart* for the entire church - 85%+ of AWA) it is in a much better position to make big, visible changes (i.e., votes on dramatic new ministries, new worship services, board reorganization, physical relocation)

11. Change happens as the Spirit works in individual lives, and as leaders quietly pray, nudge on and support the change through necessary institutional restructuring. Lives do not change by fiat. Leaders do need to pray to dissolve resistance, and occasionally will have to be clear and firm. Waiting upon the Spirit and leading is a delicate art. And pastors need to lead - with clarity, consistency and courage. (See *Best Practices for Starting the Unbinding Series in Your Church* for a list of practical steps for working with *the Series*, available for download at the bottom of the www.GraceNet.info home page)

We are delighted with the amount of significant changes in perception, practice, and growth that this coaching process is engendering after a year or two. We see huge percentages of congregations praying, discovering deeper aspects of Christian faith and relationships, and “a real yearning to reach out to people who aren’t here yet.” We are thrilled with the increases in average worship attendance, adult baptisms, and stories of new ministries emerging from the *Unbinding* process. Now we want to increase the percentages of congregations that keep going and don’t return to the fleshpots of Egypt.

The Challenge - Long Arc Leadership to Combat the Dreaded Snap-back

Too many churches experience a huge success with the all-church study, increased attendance, new members, adult baptisms. Then they stop. One pastor wrote, “Every participant to whom I've spoken has related a personal story of growth in faith and a deepening in relationship with God and with other members of the group. Every person is anxious to have these experiences continue. I think it was not an accident that, at a mini reunion with some seminary friends a couple of weeks ago in California, I spoke with a friend whose church did an all-church study of *Unbinding Your Heart* a couple of years ago. She reported that, although it was very successful, the congregation did not intentionally continue -- and the dreaded snap-back happened. They are going to pick it up again, but . . . ??? I reported this to our group last Monday. Believe me, snap-back is not something anyone wishes to happen in our church.”

“The Dreaded Snap-back.” We have doubled the length of coaching and cut group size in half to keep more churches out of its clutches. First year coaching helps churches do the all-congregational study of *Unbinding Your Heart*. The second year is a “Year of Invitation.” The Year of Invitation has a dual focus: (1) to continue the new practices and behaviors of prayer, more honest relationships and invitation and (2) to integrate these new practices into the functional structures of the church. (See *Year of Invitation Leaders’ Guide*, available for download at the bottom of the www.GraceNet.info home page.)

We’re absolutely clear that much of the glorious, wild, swirling creativity the Spirit generates when the entire congregation prays and studies together won’t find channels into the normal ministry pathways in the congregation without conscious thought and planning. Outreach and invitation after decades of passivity won’t continue without continued prayer and conscious thought. Unless committees and ministry teams start operating in an “unbinding” way, with prayer and discernment, unless people continue to pray for others who are beyond church walls, unless the church looks carefully at its welcoming and integration patterns, the excitement will dwindle, much will go back to normal.

What stops momentum? We’re working against huge gravitational forces and most us aren’t used to bucking gravity! First, most churches welcome visitors. They don’t consciously

invite. Second, it is hard for pastors and churches to think in terms of the long, multiple-year arcs of ministry a change of trajectory requires. Third, most pastors have never experienced life in a cutting-edge, growing church. Fourth, most of us weren't trained to lead significant change. Fifth, because it's all so new, people get scared. Pastors get scared. Most churches' primary question is, "What do we want?" not "God, where are we going?" So a couple of cranky voices can drown out our better angels' hymns of praise. We decide to "take a break." The Dreaded Snap-back sinks talons into another victim.

Leading churches into sustained change involves working through natural resistance. Most congregations get a taste of the change possible, get a whiff of the power of prayer and deep relationships, close their eyes and hope it will all work out. That won't get us there! If we don't help the Spirit move new practices and realizations into the institutional structures of the church, the church will almost certainly drift back to old patterns.

Year of Invitation Congregational Practices: We have developed a new model for the Year of Invitation, the second year of coaching. We begin with a simple all-church retreat. We ask the congregations to work with four "Streams of Invitation" throughout the year (personal, committee/team, all-church, and small group). We ask that each church come up with a "Four Streams Plan" soon after the all-church study. We ask that each church form a Year of Invitation Team to shepherd integration of the Four Streams Plan into practice, led by a board member with savvy and gravitas. (See the *Year of Invitation Leaders' Guide*, available for download from the bottom of the www.GraceNet.info homepage.)

Pastoral Leadership and Change

The pastor's leadership is a definitive element in a congregation's ability to sustain positive change, even factoring out issues of congregational health, history and demographics. Combined traits of intelligence, energy, leadership savvy, depth of personal piety and the ability to envision and sustain long arcs of ministry are key.

Pastors who lead congregations into sustained change have an undergirding vision of the importance of faith that provides driving momentum and motivation for ministry. Many brilliant, gifted pastors lack this drive and vision of the crucial nature of faith. Pastors who can sustain a long arc of transformational ministry see faith transforming lives. They want to see *more* change. They yearn to reach new people with the glories of the faith. This overarching vision provides direction. It propels change.

Our Project Administrator, Elinor Campbell, expressed this beautifully in an e-mail response to a question about why I contrasted vibrant evangelistic pastoral leadership with "chaplancy" of a congregation. (*Unbinding the Gospel*, chapter 8). Ellie got it just right:

"We have found that unless the pastor takes the lead in evangelism, makes it a priority, is the chief INVITER, and holds inviting and being open for opportunities to share his/her faith as his/her first priority with all other aspects of ministry intricately interwoven with it, then congregations almost always focus inward on their life as a church family.

We've found that a huge majority of pastors list caring for people/sharing people's lives/relationships as their favorite part of ministry - they love the pastoral/chaplancy

part of ministry. Only a few say their favorite part is 'introducing, inviting, re-introducing, re-inviting people into a relationship with Christ.' Everything a pastor does needs to reflect that primary heart-centered focus on evangelism so that it permeates the message of the sermon, administration, teaching, leading ... this cannot be over-emphasized.”

Two practices to develop evangelistic leadership? How do we help more pastors enter into the power of a depth vision of the glories of God, of the joy of reaching new people with the Gospel? How can we help them be more realistic and effective in leading their congregations into their communities? We are going to ask pastors to spend their time differently, to go against our churches’ strongly-embedded patterns of internal focus.

The *Unbinding Series* is grounded in the premise that typical congregations will grow if they enrich three ***practices*** (behavioral patterns) we identified among the mainline’s most statistically effective evangelistic congregations: (a) deep relational faith in God; (b) the ability to articulate it, and (c) thinking about people outside the congregation. We now know it works.

So we’re going to try Step Two of practice development - this time to help enrich the pastors’ evangelistic leadership effectiveness. We are asking Year of Invitation pastors to adopt two practices that we identified among the highly evangelistic pastors in the original Mainline Evangelism Project (2002-2006), and among the pastors whose churches are demonstrating significant, sustained growth in the Unbinding the Gospel Project to date:

(1) ***Continued daily, personal prayer*** (80% of pastors entering coaching tell us they prayed less than 10 minutes a day when they entered coaching. They agree to pray daily during coaching, but we have identified a relapse in pastors’ individual prayer *after* the first year of coaching.)

(2) ***Personal outreach and invitation*** with people outside the congregation. Pastors in growing churches are spending large amounts of their time out in the community, having personal conversations and inviting people into faith, and focusing on the newest members.

As of this week, we are asking churches entering the second year of coaching to re-delegate responsibilities so that this year, on a trial basis, their pastor will allocate time in the proportions more resembling those we identified in the highly evangelistic congregations in the original Mainline Evangelism Study. (Those pastors reported that they spend 25-30% of their time out in the community, meeting unchurched people, working with the newest visitors and members, focusing on outreach and invitation.)

We believe that if our pastors work on these two key practices we identified among the highly evangelistic pastors, they will be able to lead congregations into much more effective, sustained evangelistic outreach. These practices should help the pastors be more attuned to God, to people outside the church, and to the subtle opportunities into which the Spirit can lead us. Will these faithful pastors have more authenticity and authority with the people they serve? Will they have a clearer sense of when to lead, what is important, how to navigate the mysteries of congregational opportunity and resistance? Will they be braver? ...More protected in their spirits from the critique change can engender? Will they develop a passionate, long-arc vision?

Will churches keep growing? We'll see. We *want* to see more churches moving from the inspiration of the all-church study of *Unbinding Your Heart* into sustained outreach beyond church walls. We want to see the momentum that the Spirit has created channeled into reformed, more responsive institutional structures. We want to see churches reaching out. We want to see churches inviting in. We know it takes pastors to lead it.

We'll let you know how it's going in a year!