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Organizing Ministry, Enjoying Life

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Old Churches Can Change!



I go to church every week in an OLD church building that has a very YOUNG ministry format.

Earlier this year we took out the pews, replaced carpet, painted the building, gave away the organ, vanished the hymnals, painted the ceiling black, expanded the stage, added lighting and speakers, and mixed in tables in our general seating area.

Those are just the cosmetic changes we made. While we were merging with the First Baptist Church of North Miami we changed our name to Oasis Church! They started out talking with us while we were still the First Baptist Church of Pembroke Pines (dba Church of Pembroke Pines). At the same time we introduced the concept of the Campus Pastor and the concept of a Teaching Team.

Let me summarize that. **We changed all the stuff people fret about in less than 9 months without a single fight.** I don't even remember who picked the carpet colors. The music style went from island flavored classic hymns to passion conference style worship. We did lose a family over worship, but that was the extent of the controversy.

Seriously, from the perspective of the old timers we nearly made a night club out of their beloved church. Most of them made the transition with us and they are still an integral part of our church.

I firmly believe what we did could be repeated.

You can change an old church including the people's habits, the property, and the programs, but you have to follow a few guidelines.

1. **Be Invited!** We didn't push our way in. They wanted to continue to reach their community and they decided we could help.
2. **Check Your Compatibility.** These folks were older than us and they did things differently than us, but we had the same heartbeat to reach people for Jesus.
3. **Build Trust.** We gave ourselves to the support of their ministry long before the merger happened. We then worked through dozens of logistical and administrative issues for months after the merger. Before we changed the outward manifestation of church we journeyed together through enough decisions to begin to trust one another's intentions.


4. **Bring a Plan.** We didn't have all the details worked out, but we did have a plan.
5. **Set Expectations.** This means you tell them the good and the bad and work through their concerns. Don't start without clear expectations.
6. **Invest.** We invested people and money into this effort!
7. **Genuinely Work to Include Everyone.** We need them as much as they needed us to transform rather than replace, to merge rather than co-opt, to carry on rather than eclipse the ministry of 80 years that we inherited.
8. **Let people leave graciously.** Seriously, there is a way to do this! It generally involves hugging.
9. **Be Honest.** Don't pretend this stuff is just happening or that it is definitely going to work. Don't spring changes on people. Don't coddle them by saying they will like it or it won't be so bad or we'll do some of the old stuff if you don't plan to do that.

That's my list. Today there is no longer "Them" and "Us". There is only a newly combined "Us." I wouldn't want to go to church without getting a hug from my friend Vick or watching my friend Ruth serve in KidsWorld for a 6th uninterrupted decade!

Old churches can change because older people can tolerate and participate in change if they believe in the mission. I plan to be one of those older people who can change one day, but I'm going to give you holy hell if you don't follow my advice.

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