

Wednesday, November 10, 2021

Pr. Jeremiah Smith, our new conference Dean, included the following letter, written by the Rev. Rich Neal, in his recent newsletter:

Behold! I am about to do a new thing (Isa. 43:19)

Notes on change and creativity, because when you embrace change creatively, a richer life is possible.



Change can be hardest to accept and implement, one pastor and church consultant noted, when there hasn't been change in a very long time. (How many of us are in congregations that have strong elements of status quo in their nature?) "Change becomes more comfortable," he wrote, "when it occurs regularly." He missed an important point that, if recognized and accepted, could make life better for all of us: change is always occurring; it's constant, universal, and unavoidable. It becomes hard to accept and implement when we don't acknowledge it and embrace it creatively, when we don't dance with it as an integral part of living, when we don't give it regular, disciplined attention.

According to W. Edwards Demming, the American engineer, professor, author, and management consultant, two basic rules of life are: 1) change is inevitable, and 2) everybody resists change. He was correct about number one and wrong about number two. People don't resist change, they resist *being changed*. We're likely to resist change that's imposed on us from outside by factors beyond our control. But change we initiate, change we choose because of an inner desire or urge, change in which we choose to participate intentionally and attentively, is usually embraced enthusiastically.

One simple, effective way to help a congregation see change that's been happening "under the radar" is to create a multi-layer timeline. Hang a long strip of butcher or kraft paper on the wall and draw several parallel tracks horizontally with headings such as "Challenges," "Significant Transitions," "Spiritual Highs and Lows," "Congregation Vitality," "Connections with Community," etc. (You may want to add others.) Divide the timeline by decades left to right and ask participants to name events or items in each decade. The greater the number of participants, the more helpful the results will be.

Change happens. We don't have any choice about that. What we can choose is whether to embrace change and participate in it creatively. There are many good books that can help you lead change in your congregation. Two I'd recommend are *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*, 4th ed., by William Bridges (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2016) and *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* by Mark Lau Branson (Herndon, Va.: The Alban Institute, 2004).

Next month: a culture of change.

—The Rev. Rich Neal (Nov. 2021). Web: [linkedin.com/in/richneal](https://www.linkedin.com/in/richneal). Email: richneal@together.net. Tel.: 716-984-3541.

Although the above letter is written to pastors, it is applicable to each of us. I love the idea of drawing a multi-level timeline. This could be done in a family or by an individual. It would give perspective on this truth that change is always happening, that there are always multiple currents of reality going on in our life, our family's life, our community's life. This tactical model brings to mind a deep river with many different currents flowing, some strong, some gentle, some cold, some warm, some slowly moving us, others threatening to dash us upon the rocks! But our bedrock faith helps us to let go into the current of grace and trust that where we have been has been a preparation for where we are going, and that the God who loves us is in charge of the whole shebang. Lord, help us to trust more every day, even and especially in the midst of change, knowing your love and mercy endure forever, and that your plans for us are for our eternal good.

Suellen

North Shore, Boston, MA veterans appreciate your thanks, but ask you to start a conversation with them

Don't be afraid to ask how they are doing or what it was like to serve

Chris Stevens for Wicked Local at wickedlocal.com



Did you thank a veteran for their service today?

It's what you do on and around Veterans Day, right? Thank the men and women you encounter for their service and sacrifice to our country. But we wondered, is that what veterans need to hear or want to hear? So we asked some.

Yes ... but

Marine veteran Fransico Urena said he welcomes it when people thank him for his service. The former state Secretary of Veteran Services served from 1998-2006 with a tour of Iraq and posts at American Embassies in both Syria and Kurdistan. Urena said he appreciates the gesture because the Korean and Vietnam war veterans that came before him did not experience that when they came home, but what he'd really like is for people to take it a step further. "Don't just say 'thank you,' and walk away," he said. "Let it be the start of a conversation." Urena urges people to ask veterans how they're doing, try and get a sense of who they are. "Know that veterans are an asset to your community," he said.

Marblehead's Harry Christensen is one such asset.

If you ask Christensen, a former long-time selectman, when he served in Vietnam, he'll tell you it was from 1967-1968 and last night. "And that's a fact," said the U.S. Marine veteran. Over time, Christensen has become immensely proud and vocal regarding his military contributions, but he admits when he first came home, being recognized for his service was not easy. And thank you was not what was being thrown at veterans from his era.

World War II soldiers came home heroes and were honored with parades. Soldiers returning from Vietnam were greeted with protests, anger, and often violence. Christensen's service was followed by an eight-month stay in a VA hospital recovering from war injuries. From there, he went right into college where the first thing he learned was to hide his military involvement. "There was a lot of unrest on a lot of college campuses," he said. "I grew my hair long, got some Frye boots, wore jeans with holes in the knees, and pretended I didn't know what they were talking about."

But the anti-war sentiment hurt him deeply. "I still had buddies deep in combat over there," he said. Hearing people thank him for his service became a kind of punchline, Christensen said. "They always say thank you for ...," he said. "All I wish they would do is just shake my hand and say thank you — that's it." Like Christensen, Saugus Veterans Agent Jay Pinette knew what it was like to come home to less than a hero's welcome. Pinette was on active duty in the 1970s and served at the tail end of the Vietnam War. "Believe me, you did not hear 'thank you for your service,'" he said, "actually it was quite the opposite."

But Pinette said that tide seemed to turn in 1991 after the first Gulf War. He credits the war's swift conclusion, less than two months, with the over-the-top thank yous soldiers then received. "I found the response when we came home kind of embarrassing to some extent," he admitted. "We were just doing our jobs." He also thought it was probably over compensation for the celebrations that didn't happen for Vietnam-era veterans and for that reason, he is glad that "thank you" is being said more often.



A simple thank you will do

Marblehead Veterans Agent Dave Rodger said he is pleased that the country "is a little more thankful and conscious of those in the military today." But Rodger also mirrored many of the veterans he talked to when he offered his own thank you. "I have always believed those who stepped up and served after 9/11 have given a lot of credibility to the Korean and Vietnam veterans who didn't receive the recognition they deserved," he said. Rodger said he firmly believes veterans of the first Gulf War through the recent troop withdrawal in Afghanistan are the true heroes because they stepped up in a non-draft time to serve, "and I really mean that."

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That next generation

Interestingly, Medford Veterans Agent Mike Durham, who is of that younger generation, sees it the other way around. He said he's always deeply appreciated being thanked for his service and understands that "my generation has the Vietnam era to thank for this." Durham said he's heard the horror stories from veterans about how they were treated when they returned home. "You don't blame the soldier for the war," he said. "They don't dictate policy. Soldiers follow orders."



The Army veteran served from 2011-2016 and when someone thanks him for his service, "I always say 'thank you for paying your taxes.'" He laughs when he says that but adds that it's true. Durham said if it wasn't for taxpayers funding much-needed modern-day equipment, from mine rollers to body armor to medical training, he would have lost at least 26 more people from his unit when he was overseas. "I'm appreciative that our nation takes care of us overseas and sees fit to take care of us at home," he said.

But like Urena, Durham urges people to go beyond just thanking a veteran to starting a meaningful conversation. "People are often afraid of saying the wrong thing, appearing intrusive, or of somehow offending a veteran and triggering an angry response," he said in a Veterans Day speech given a few years ago. "So many people just default to just stating, 'Thank you for your service.' Don't be afraid to have a real conversation with that veteran. Reconnecting to peers within their age demographic is a critical step in successful reintegration for transitioning service members."

In their own words

Pinette found the question of what veterans want to hear intriguing and sent it out via email to some of his fellow veterans. Here is what they had to say:

"...As a four-year active duty Vietnam ERA Veteran who was never welcomed at home while serving, called baby killer, warmonger, spit at, things thrown at me while trying to hitchhike home to see my HS sweetheart, I am so thankful we have changed that since 9-11 and we honor our military and veterans for their service and I take every opportunity I get to thank a veteran or active military person for their service. The stigma from serving during Vietnam Era will never go away, but anything we can do to honor our current military and as they become Veterans is what provides me with some closure on how we were treated."

"...When people thank me for my service I reply 'It was a blessing to serve.' I'm not looking for recognition. I think the 'Thank you for your service' was borne out of guilt over how poorly Americans treated Vietnam veterans. On the other hand, it also opens up opportunities to engage in conversations with civilians about the unique experiences of military life."

"...More and more people have taken the time to thank us for our service. That alone is terrific others want to do more and I believe some of the ads and commercials thanking veterans are also very good things. On another note, the schools have had veterans appreciation assemblies and such. That seems to have gone away with all the difficulties going on in the world. Many of us, [Jay Pinette] included, are not looking for thanks or recognition just to have our citizens realize that freedom is not free is enough for me."

"...When someone thanks me for my service, I reply it was an honor to serve in the Marine Corps for my country. Also, I do not like it when someone buys my meal, I didn't serve for a free meal."

"...I myself am appreciative of someone saying 'thanks for your service' and don't expect or require more, but yet our homeless vets and wounded require much more but since everyone has cameras these days maybe a selfie with a vet and post to one's page as a gesture of appreciation may work or even a cup of coffee to those in need along with a simple prayer!"



Nine years ago Dave Grotke gave his neighbor a 'help wanted' flyer for a secretarial job at Trinity Lutheran Church. His neighbor handed me that flyer and I had a little nudge that this was just what I was looking for. Pastor Dan taught me the ropes, you good folks put up with all of my mistakes, and my lack of Lutheran knowledge, and the rest is history. Along the way I've learned that the most important thing is not what we differ on, but what we have in common: Jesus. You folks have shown me, in thousands of ways, how much you love Jesus and joyfully you "show and share" that love all around you. Thank you. For the job, the income, the flexibility, and all of that practical stuff that makes up the nuts and bolts of family life, yes. But, more than that, thank you for being Christ's visible presence in this community, and specifically to me and to my family. Through raising school age kids, through "sickness and health", through happy, busy times, pandemics and grief, you have been a tremendous blessing and gift to me that I will cherish the rest of my life. I promise I will not be a stranger, and you, too, please stay in touch with me. I'm counting on your prayers! With much love,

Suellen