

## Change agents

### To be change agents, light of the world, salt of the earth ... and so much more!

In his book, *Deeply Woven Roots: Improving the Quality of Life in your Community*, Gary Gunderson highlights the power of the congregation and pinpoints the multi-faceted way in which a congregation 'who gets it' can accompany, convene and connect, give context and sanctuary, plus abundantly bless, pray and persist.

These are the strengths and channels along which we can expect to find God meeting us and nurturing our communities. Gunderson defines the eight strengths of 'healthier communities':

**1. Accompany** – The church is not a meeting place; it is the people scattered and gathered even two at a time ... changed family systems and the resulting isolation calls us forward toward communities. In effect, communities that survive are those that find new ways to accompany their members through the tumultuous changes.

**2. Convene** – Nobody has to come when the church calls. But amid the decline of many unifying social structures, it can convene. It has the capacity to bring people together across lines that frequently divide; such as profession, economics, race and self-interest.

**3. Connect** – It is in relationship ... unity emerges. Communities can move together around problems and opportunities if people are nurtured in their faith to look for God amid the emerging connections. They sense that God is there in the stew and move toward it hopefully, not away from it fearfully.

**4. Sanctuary** – In a time when those on the margins are despised, unpitied and resented for their weakness, with mercy withheld self-righteously, it is even more important that congregations offer tangible sanctuary against this tide of hardness, that our faith places reflect the God we have come to trust.

**5. Context** – The congregation puts things in context by telling and reinforcing stories that explain who we

are and how we should act. It does this not only for individuals, but for families, communities and social movements.

**6. Bless** – The blessing we need cannot be sold or bought, only given through grace. This is why it can be found only in a community of sinners who have obviously needed grace themselves ... We need a place where the full complexity of our lives is welcome, forgiven, hoped for, included, blessed.

**7. Pray** – Congregations pray. And the prayer makes and marks the difference between them and other voluntary forms of association. It (prayer) is the experienced intersection of the holy and human ... but it is not only the experience ... it is always something as a gift, a surprise, an act of grace.

**8. Persist** – The historic testimony of hundreds – indeed thousands – of years of those who have shared our faith is that darkness has not put out the light ... Thus, while brokenness litters our relationships and communities, the mark of failure is not the last word. For God is not finished and has not left us alone. Consequently, brokenness also marks the "not yet", the incomplete that God intends to complete, renew, redeem.

May our communities be abundant in love, peace and good health!

Reference: Gunderson, G. (1997). *Deeply Woven Roots – Improving the Quality of Life in Your Community*. Minneapolis. Augsburg Fortress Publishers.

### Prayer

*God of Grace,  
You are present to us whenever we gather in your name.  
You call us to be a community of faith.  
We are the persistent sign of your presence in our world,  
Strengthen us always for the work of your kingdom.  
Amen.*

#### REFLECTION

> How can our ministries meet and nurture the needs of those we work with, accompany and support to create healthier communities?