

# THE PARISH PAPER

## IDEAS AND INSIGHTS FOR ACTIVE CONGREGATIONS

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June 2008 - Volume 16, Number 6

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### “Teaching Moments” Strengthen Governing Board Meetings!

At lunch, four pastors attending a workshop discussed frustrations they often feel at governing board meetings.

“I wish a larger percentage of our board meetings felt like ‘worshipful work’ instead of political factions competing for control,” one pastor lamented.

Another said, “I often feel that the board is catching the vision I’m trying to communicate, but when we discuss specific issues that feeling often evaporates!”

“My board members are busy people,” another pastor added. “I wish we could redeem the time we spend together so it doesn’t feel like ‘just another business meeting.’”

The fourth pastor moved the conversation in a new direction by asking for their response to several questions:

- ◆ “How do you start your board meetings?”
- ◆ “What sort of tone do you set for meetings?”
- ◆ “Are you intentional about casting a vision at the beginning of meetings—or do you offer a perfunctory prayer or a few scripture verses, then launch into the agenda items?”

All three pastors said that they move right into the agenda—so as to finish the meeting before people start looking at their watches. Yet all three admitted that the meetings often lack focus and clarity; thus, many people leave the meeting frustrated instead of encouraged.

The fourth pastor responded by sharing experiences regarding (a) the usefulness of *teaching moments*, (b) how they can help set the tone for meetings, (c) how they can redeem the time that leaders spend together, and (d) how they can help to prepare a congregation’s leaders for future decisions and vision implementation.

#### What Are Teaching Moments?

More than a lecture-driven Bible study, teaching moments offer an opportunity for the board to see an issue or idea from a new perspective.

Jesus often used teaching moments, or parables, to help convey concepts in a tangible, picturesque way.

Preachers use teaching moments, or illustrations, in sermons to help people connect with an idea or concept.

In governing board meetings, teaching moments function in the following ways:

- ◆ Teaching moments happen at the beginning of board meetings and are fifteen to thirty minutes in length.
- ◆ Teaching moments combine a presentation of some sort with the opportunity for questions and discussion.
- ◆ Teaching moments help set the meeting’s tone.
- ◆ Teaching moments are interactive conversations, not just lectures.
- ◆ Teaching moments deal with an issue the board will discuss that evening or at a later date.
- ◆ Teaching moments serve as bridges that move the board from one place to another.
- ◆ Teaching moments help boards to “see and understand” what they previously viewed as abstract concepts.
- ◆ Teaching moments create “ah-ha” moments as boards see how the pieces of a complex puzzle fit together.
- ◆ Teaching moments provide opportunities to take the board by the hand and say, “Let me show you this, and let’s see if we can’t learn something together.”



## Plan Ahead

Do not try to “wing” teaching moments. Because they can play such an important role in the direction a meeting takes, plan teaching moments four to six months in advance.

Busy pastors are tempted to “punt” (say something off the cuff that scores far fewer points than a touchdown); then, launch right into business. Pastors who prayerfully consider the teaching moments in advance are far less likely to punt: they know that what they have prepared is important for their board to consider.

Of course, because the church is always in motion, pastors sometimes need to reschedule to this month a topic that they had planned to use a few months from now. Just make sure it is well prepared!

## Introducing the Concept

If your congregation does not currently use teaching moments at the beginning of board meetings, how do you begin using them?

One of the best ways to introduce this idea is by discussing your church’s core values or vision/mission statement. You never go wrong by reminding leaders about their church’s vision and values! *Research shows that the majority of leaders forget these values and visions within three months after preparing them.*

As a result of such teaching moments the board sometimes wants to begin rethinking or reshaping the core values or mission to fit the current era. Such conversations are usually healthy and productive in a variety of ways.

A few months may pass before your board fully understands the value of teaching moments. But as board members participate in discussions of issues related to the vision and values of their congregation, they begin to see the importance of teaching moments. They recognize that this tool can produce results that do not happen with any business item.

## What Do Teaching Moments Look Like?

The content of teaching moments can vary greatly. For example, teaching moments could be a Bible study that ends with discussion questions. To talk about the church’s equipping of members for ministry, the pastor might teach from Ephesians 4:11-16. To conclude the teaching moments, discuss questions such as, “How can our congregation intentionally equip people for various ministries?”

Open-ended questions challenge board members to consider (a) What am I doing *personally* to equip people? (b) How can we create equipping behaviors that penetrate and change our church’s culture? and (c) Do leaders who want to make a difference wait for someone else to do it?

A relaxed teaching-moment atmosphere encourages dialogue and allows board members to offer their thoughts. When board members see that their ideas are taken seriously, and as they begin to experience “ah-ha” moments, they understand the importance of teaching moments.

Another option for teaching moments is to bring in a resident expert. This person could talk about a project that the pastor or staff hopes the church will support. For example, a church was considering an adoption ministry that would offer encouragement and financial assistance to couples wanting to adopt. The pastor had talked to the board about this new concept. Although no one had objected, no one had stepped up to lead this endeavor.

So the pastor invited a couple that had gone through the adoption process—and had received support from their local congregation—to come and share for fifteen minutes about their journey. They showed video pictures of their new child and talked about the adoption process. At the end of the presentation, they invited board members to ask questions. When the teaching moments were over, the bridge had been crossed; the “ah-ha” moment had occurred. The board understood, first hand, what an adoption ministry looks like, and the church added that to their list of ministries.

## End Results

Teaching moments at the beginning of governing board meetings produce a wide variety of positive results—some of which are predictable and some of which are unexpected blessings.

A few examples of what teaching moments accomplish:

- ◆ Teaching moments can help to facilitate worshipful work at board meetings because they set the tone and focus.

- ◆ Teaching moments can help to diffuse tension that may exist over a “hot topic” to be discussed at the meeting.

- ◆ Teaching moments can set the vision and focus for the current meeting—or can help the board to creatively think through issues that will arise in coming months.

- ◆ Teaching moments can allow the pastor to communicate vision to the leadership board, while at the same time getting feedback from board members.

- ◆ Teaching moments can facilitate a new sense of meaning, purpose, and effectiveness among board members.

Boards that repeatedly discuss, and thereby more fully understand, how their congregation’s vision and values connect with specific issues, carry them out more effectively.

As their lunch conversation ended, the pastors were ready to go back to their governing boards and lead them toward knowledge and insights not otherwise possible.

Could teaching moments add significant value to your congregation’s governing board meetings?