

MentorNet #16
NINE FREEDOMS OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES
Common to Church Planting Movements

Copyright © 2003 George Patterson & Galen Currah

As a mentor-coach or consultant, you will often face church leaders who hold strongly to their denominational traditions. Most traditions are good and very useful. Some are necessary to enable congregations to do their ministries “decently and in order.” Other traditions, however, over time, come to be abused. Jesus warned against this in Mark 7:6-13. Some leaders use traditions to bolster their authority at the expense of effective evangelism and church reproduction.

We see two main kinds of traditionalists in Christian churches. One kind follows denominational traditions because that is what they learned and is all they know. When these truly desire to win souls and start churches, they readily accept what you teach from God’s word. The other kind clings to traditions at all costs, because they are hungry for power and eager to settle in as the big duck on a small pond.

In training workshops with traditional church leaders, it can be both entertaining to them and a useful way of dealing with inappropriate customs without offense, to have someone wear a funny hat or a sign “MR. TRADITION.” While you present guidelines for church planting or other ministries, *Mr. Tradition* interrupts from time to time to say, “No! No! Not that way!” and proclaims the tradition in an exaggerated form. You, then, can ask the group unashamedly, “Now, that which *Mr. Tradition* recommends, it that what Jesus and his apostles did? Or is it a human tradition?” You can ask the participants to address their answers directly to *Mr. Tradition*.

Since it would be hard, perhaps confusing, to ask traditional clergy to relinquish authority, your task is twofold. Your first task is to urge them to delegate their authority to those whom they choose, train and supervise, allowing these co-shepherds to perform pastoral tasks as their assistants. Point out that, according to Ephesians 4:11, God gives to every church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. If clergy do not recognize them or let them do their ministry, then the clergy themselves stifle the work of the Holy Spirit. These gifted people, if kept from doing what God has gifted them to do, often become so frustrated that they leave the church, sometimes taking other members away with them.

Your second task is to help traditionalists to envision their congregation as a mother church which, as a living organism, should reproduce normally by spawning daughter churches. Traditionalists often lead large congregations, or they want their congregation to become bigger and wealthier. A useful analogy is to compare churches to elephants and rabbits. Elephants are strong and long-lived, but reproduce very slowly. Rabbits, by comparison, are puny but they reproduce rapidly. You must help traditional leaders to develop both kinds of churches, a few elephant churches that marshal their resources for big tasks, and many, tiny rabbit churches that can multiply rapidly throughout their city and region, taking Christ to far more people.

When traditional church leaders are willing to experiment with biblical freedom, you can help them to examine their practices and to identify hindrances that keep their churches from winning the lost and reproducing. Help leaders to find ways to delegate their authority, so that their elephant churches can also reproduce rabbit churches. In order to reproduce by the grace of God, churches must enjoy the freedoms that Christ bought

for them on the cross. Here are nine freedoms for churches that reproduce.

1. **Freedom for young churches to start newer churches as soon as the Lord makes it possible.** This is what Paul and Timothy let Epaphras do in Colossae, Laodacia and Heiropolis.

What would *Mr. Tradition* say about this? Perhaps something like this: “Our church policies require that for a church to start another church, it must first apply to our regional headquarters for approval, have a certain number of members and years of maturity, and a substantial budget, at least enough for a building and pastor’s salary.”

To help new churches start newer ones, assure their freedom to do the following:

2. **Freedom to obey the commands of Christ and his apostles above and before all religious rules and traditions.** Jesus welcomed sinners and rebuked traditional religious leaders for their traditions that hindered obedience, even though their theology was right.

Mr. Tradition may say something like this: “We must all follow the same policies—those that I approve. Conformity ensures unity.”

3. **Freedom to enter the homes of unconverted seekers, evangelizing them in their own familiar setting and making disciples within their own cultures and family networks.** Examples include Peter at Cornelius’ house and Jesus’ instructions to the seventy.

Mr. Tradition might argue, “Separate new believers immediately from the bad influence of friends, relatives and culture! And let sinners come to us at church if they want to be saved!”

4. **Freedom to baptize new believers without delay, and to celebrate the Lord’s Table wherever they meet.** Follow the example of the early church in Acts 2.

Mr. Tradition might insist, “Baptism and the Lord’s supper are performed only by ordained clergy, and baptismal candidates must first walk on the water first.”

5. **Freedom to serve one another in the Body of Christ as intimate, loving churches and cells, using all the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given to them.** That was normal church life according to 1 Corinthians 14:24-26.

Mr. Tradition might demand, “Do all things in decency and order. And the order is what *I* say it is! Only educated clergy should lead public meetings.”

6. **Freedom to provide pastoral leadership by those who meet the NT qualifications of elders, with or without salaries.** Peter urged other motives in elders (5:5:1-5).

Mr. Tradition might contend, “Our church by-laws require ministers to be ordained. Our by-laws list 756 requirements that they must meet first. They must have the specified academic agrees and receive the salary of a professional.”

7. **Freedom to apply any New Testament method of preaching and teaching God’s Word according to each group’s size and its leaders’ maturity.** Teach and practice the New Testament’s “one-another” commands.

Mr. Tradition might dispute this. “God has ordained oratorical preaching of the Word for this age. We need top quality and excellence in the pulpit.”

8. **Freedom for pastoral trainers to respond to immediate needs of new churches and leaders.** Bible models include Jehosaphat, Jesus and Titus.

Mr. Tradition might assert, “My training program has a standard curriculum and every student studies the same thing, starting in the same place and following the same path. What they learn is for some future application.”

9. **Freedom to provide regional coordinators who supervise new and immature churches and pastoral leaders.** That was the role Paul assigned to Titus.

If “Mr. Tradition,” is from a ‘free’ church he might object, “We do not want any godless hierarchy of bishops dictating to the churches what to believe and do. We hold to the autonomy of the local church.”

If Mr. Tradition’s church is hierarchical he might protest, “I am the Bishop named to supervise this area, and I want no other coordinators exercising authority in my area of jurisdiction, nor do I have time to coordinate any new programs! So we will continue as we have been doing!”

Download mentored training programs from <<http://www.Paul-Timothy.net>>.

To meet mentors experienced in a wide range of ministries who will serve you, or to explore various applications of Christian mentoring, please visit <<http://www.MentorAndMultiply.com>>.