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United We Decide

4 ways to energize the process of making a decision.

I Romans 15:1-7

Whether a church is considering a building project, adding a service, or changing its bylaws, decisions often divide. People take sides. But the process of making a major decision can be unifying and energizing. Here are suggestions.

1. Work as a team. Our culture accustoms us to the model of parliamentary debate. But this method usually entrenches individuals in their view as they seek to defend it, to disparage opposing views, and to persuade a majority to join their side. The discussion of issues need not be adversarial. It can be a team effort to find the right solution. With this approach, everyone works together at a given time on the same task. They explore advantages together, discuss problems together, talk about alternatives together, then make a decision together.

2. Put yourself in the other person's shoes. Sometimes, no matter how hard you try to work as a team, someone persists in antagonism. Instead of squelching the criticism, publicly and privately affirm the one who disagrees, saying: "You don't have to agree with every decision we make. Better decisions come about when differing views are presented and prayerfully considered. Thank you for speaking up."

3. Wait for the right timing. Five years ago, our board recommended building a \$2 million addition. Many people questioned the decision. "How can we think of such an expensive project when we still have a large mortgage on our facility?" some asked. The board backed off. Three years later, we tried again. We still met opposition. During the past two years, we paid off our mortgage. The congregation grew. This year the proposal passed overwhelmingly.

How do we know when the timing is right for a decision? First, look at the opinion leaders in your congregation. If many are opposed to your idea, put off a decision till after you've gained their support. Second, make sure all issues are addressed. Once our mortgage was fully paid and we had a viable plan for funding the addition, we eliminated the financial objections.

4. Do a congregation-readiness check. From efforts that failed, we've learned to ask the following questions to determine whether a congregation is ready to make a major decision:

- *Does a climate of mutual trust and caring exist?* Look for signs such as members who feel free to share their needs with each other. People responding with prayer and practical help. People who include others in their circle of friends and enjoy doing things with each other informally.
- *Do people trust that God is at work here?* If so, they'll be more willing to stretch and sacrifice. Building this spiritual environment involves small steps of faith that build spiritual momentum toward a larger vision.
- *Are members growing toward spiritual maturity?* Look for signs such as a growing commitment to prayer, Bible study, and ministry. Look for joy instead of duty in worship and discipleship.

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