

Entering a New System



***“If you love to listen,
you will gain knowledge,
and if you pay attention
you will become wise.”***

Sirach 6:33

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Fresh Start

Talking Points

When Ruth left her native land to accompany her mother-in-law Naomi to Judea, she had to figure out a way to become a part of her new community. She listened to what Naomi had to say, for it told her of the expectations and norms of this foreign culture and became a respected member of her new community. Similarly Joseph won a place of honor in Potiphar’s court. Surely he, too, paid close attention to the history, stories, and norms of the society into which he was sold as a slave. And surely in both of these cases, their success in the new society must have felt like a resurrection.

And what about the Vicar of Dibley? What struck you about her entrance into the system? What did you see or hear her do that helped her gain knowledge?

Facilitate a general discussion.

How about the entry of the new clergyperson (you) into your congregation? What has it been like? What questions has it raised?

Facilitate a general discussion, capturing any questions on a flip chart.

Focus on Relationships

“What is critical is the relationship created between two or more elements.... It is the relationship that evokes the present reality. Which potential becomes real depends on the people, the events, the moment.”

Margaret Wheatley



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Fresh Start

Talking Points

It's all about relationships! Building relationships is a two-way street, and the success of a new relationship is heavily dependent upon what happens during its early stages. This is a key principle behind Fresh Start itself.

Congregations as Living Systems



- History
- Culture
- Habits and norms
- Paradigms
- Boundaries

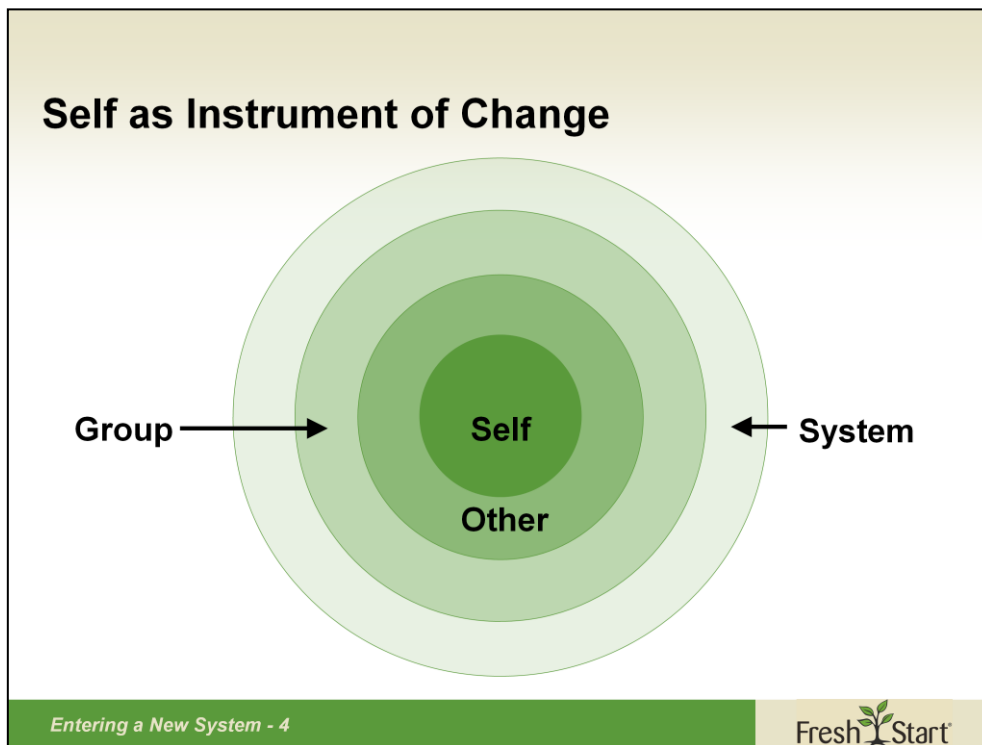
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Fresh Start

Talking Points

All organizations, including congregations, are living systems. They have a history and culture. They have habits and norms, and they see the world through paradigms which have been influenced by their experience. Living systems have boundaries, too, or they would be inchoate. When you enter a new community you are disrupting those boundaries – the community needs to expand to include you.

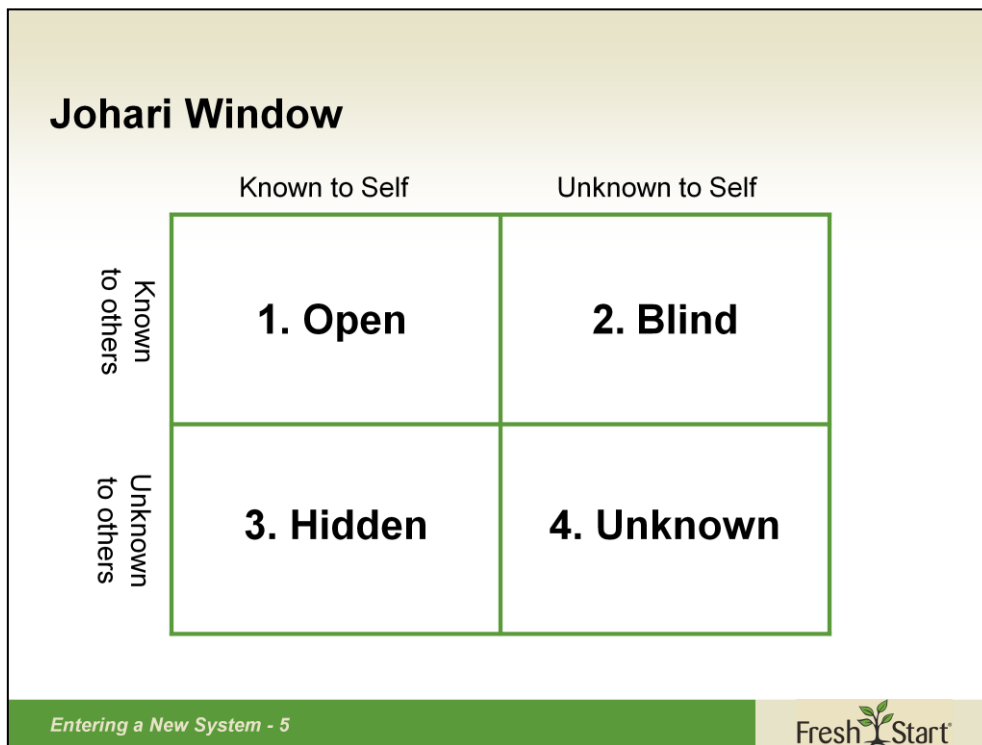
Even if new leadership has been called to “make changes,” the new person needs to enter the system carefully. As you enter a new system, you need to understand its mores and its expectations of you, at the same time you need to be clear about your own boundaries and figure out how you will be in this community.



Talking Points

Any time you engage with another, you impact that individual and vice-a-verse. Any group changes when its membership changes, whether new members are added or old ones depart. By the very fact of interacting with others you are an instrument of change.

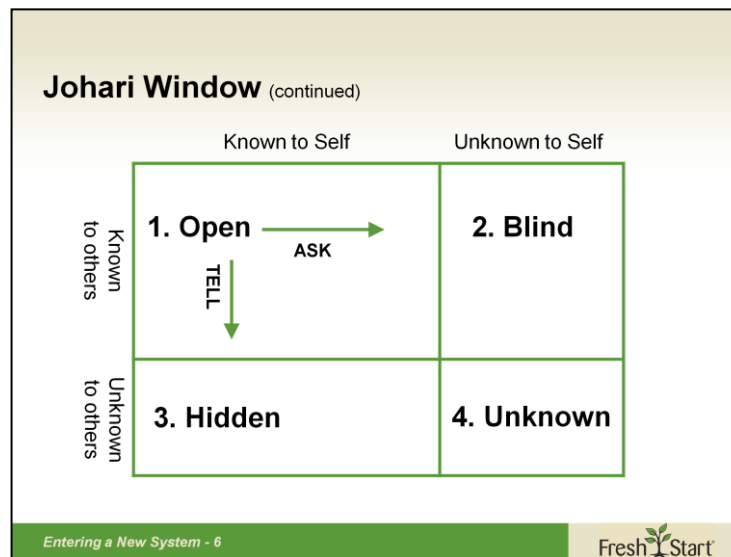
Who are you? Who are you when I am with you? Who are you in groups? Who are you in the system? Exploring the dynamics of you in relationship with a congregation and helping you gain self-awareness of who you are in relation to others (your leadership style, conflict style, etc.) are other key principles of Fresh Start.



Talking Points

In the 1950's psychologists Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham produced this model of awareness in interpersonal relations which is still useful. Called the Johari Window, a coined term that combined the first names of the two inventors, the model consists of four quadrants. The first, "open," is that about you which is known to yourself and others either because it is apparent (your hair color, height and weight, for example) or because you choose to divulge it (e.g., that you were born in Wyoming). The "blind" quadrant consists of what others know about you that you are unaware of (for example, how they feel about you). The "hidden" or third quadrant are those things that you know about yourself but that you choose, for whatever reason, not to tell others. The fourth quadrant ("unknown") is the realm of the unconscious or subconscious, things buried so deep in your psyche that you are unaware of them.

Distribute Handout 1, the Johari Window.



Talking Points

To build a relationship, you need to expand the first, the “open,” quadrant. You expand into the second quadrant by asking people to share with you what they know, but you do not know. You expand into the “hidden” quadrant by being willing to share more of yourself. (Expansion into the fourth quadrant is the work of therapy.)

Especially during the initial years of a new ministry both the clergyperson and the congregation should strive to expand their “open” areas. This creates an environment for establishing mutual expectations and minimizes the opportunities for either to be “blind-sided.”

Interestingly, while the word “Johari” is a coined one it is also a word with significant meaning in both Sanskrit and Swahili. In Sanskrit it means “the God who sees within,” while in Swahili it connotes “the essence of things.” Both seem apt for the work of the first few years in a ministry.

Are there any questions about this model? Think about a time when you successfully entered a new system (e.g., starting school, beginning an earlier ministry). What stands out for you that makes this situation memorable? Applying this model, what were some of the things that you did that helped build the relationship? What did others do?

Facilitate a general discussion, capturing things that were done to build relationship on a flip chart.

Let’s find out a little more about those of us in the room.

Lead them in the “Evangelism Map” exercise in the Resource Section BEFORE moving to the next slide.



Talking Points

After you have captured everyone's "scores" on the flip chart of the model, distribute Handout 2 and debrief as follows.

Let's take a look at the different quadrants and the type of people who are likely to inhabit them.

Upper left quadrant: These are the contemplatives; people who go deep with God; quiet, seeking God's presence. They are the heart of parish prayer life and can be gifted spiritual directors. Mead puts people like Billy Graham, and Thomas Merton in this group.

Lower left quadrant: These anonymous saints simply go about their business day-to-day with a sense of call. They operate out of faith, though that may not be visible to others. They are often the 8:00 church goers, they hate groups and won't serve on the Vestry on a bet. Raoul Wallenberg and Dag Hammarskjöld might be in this group.

Lower right quadrant: The secular saints are aware of injustice and feel people's needs. They want to change things and will form task forces or committees to redress wrong. Frequently involved in community action or ecumenical groups, they are often impatient with those who do not sign on or see things the way they do. Sister Teresa, Martin Luther King Jr., and Desmond Tutu fall into this group.


Upper right quadrant: Builders of God's household are aware of how much people need each other and really care about the structures of religious life. They help people find place in community and nurture the life of the congregation, working on commissions and worship committees. Archbishop Rowan Williams may be in this category.

Obviously all these people are needed to carry out Christ's mission on earth. Looking at the "scores" of people in this room – if we were a congregation, what would you say about us? What are our strengths? What are our blind spots? Where might we need to nurture new leadership?

Facilitate a general discussion.

This exercise is a good one for you to use with a Vestry or even with the entire congregation. It helps you uncover what tugs at the hearts of the members and provides a non-threatening way to talk about differences. **Distribute Handout 3, instructions for doing exercise.**

Spiritual Care of Lay Leaders in Transition



“How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you?”

1 Thessalonians 3:9

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Fresh Start

Talking Points

Note: These talking points may need to be modified slightly if you are doing this module with a mixed clergy-lay group. If you have such a mixed group, you might want to have them share some of their stories of the transition journey with each other in parish teams using the questions below or have them plan times when they could do this back in their congregations.

Vestries, Search Committees, Transition Teams and other lay leaders are instrumental in continuing the ministry of the congregation during the interim period. These faithful people should be honored for their dedication and commitment, both privately by you and publicly by the congregation.

Be prepared to let them take a rest from active leadership roles – they are probably tired. But ask first; don't assume they are not interested in continuing in some leadership capacity.

Who are these people in your congregation? What has been done for them?

Facilitate a brief discussion, capturing any “best practices” on a flip chart. If little has been done, you may want to add the following.

A relaxed time with them, perhaps over dinner or dessert, to hear what this time of transition has been like for them might be one way to acknowledge their work. How has their faith been strengthened and challenged during this time? What has helped them stay whole? What was the most exciting thing for them during this time? The funniest? The scariest or most difficult? This can also be a time for you, as the new clergy leader, to share some of your journey as well.

If it hasn't already been done see that the current leaders plan a public celebration for those who worked so hard during the interim time, preferably as part of the Sunday service, recognizing each individual by name. Just make sure that the focus is on THEIR work, and NOT on the outcome of their having called you!

Getting to Know You ...

- Stories of exits and entrances
- History-sharing
- Uncovering habits, norms and expectations
- Clarifying roles



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Fresh Start

Talking Points

Some of the same questions used throughout Fresh Start can jump-start conversations in the congregation. Learning how the previous rector (or assistant) exited the congregation, hearing the congregation's history and the faith journeys of its members, and having clergy and lay leaders jointly identify habits, norms and expectations and clarify roles are all good ways to be transparent about the congregation's culture. In the process windows are "opened" to sharing journeys and expectations.

Accountability

Vestry Retreat

- Team building
- Clarifying roles
- Identifying habits, norms, expectations
- Setting goals



Mutual review of ministry

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Fresh Start

Talking Points

Holding a Vestry retreat early in a new ministry is another good way to set aside the time needed to make sure that clergy and lay leaders are on the same page. The retreat should be at least a day long, preferably a day-and-a-half with an overnight, and should be held outside the parish. An outside facilitator to help plan and lead the retreat is essential. At the end of the first year, plan a mutual review of ministry – a look at how the congregation is doing in meeting whatever goals were set in the Profile or in subsequent sessions with the Vestry.

In Summary...



- Expand the “open” window
- Care for the spiritual health of lay leaders
- Start where the system is
- Go slowly with change
- Love your flock

Talking Points

Remember to look for ways that are appropriate to expand the “open” quadrant. Tend to the pastoral needs of those lay leaders who have kept the congregation’s mission humming during the interim period, and be willing to give them a break (if they want one) from leadership responsibilities. Any new leader is entering an existing system and needs to start where that system is. If the vision for change is too far out, it will be difficult to get people to follow. As Franklin Roosevelt once said, “It is terrible thing to be leading and look back over your shoulder to find no one is following.” Even if change is indicated, go slowly always honoring what was good about the past and building on the congregation’s strengths. Most of all, love your flock – and enjoy the honeymoon!

“... a community’s on-going life is tough and strong; ... You are, yourself, but a moment in their lives even if your moment is a long one. To have been that moment, for however long the blessing of it was given, (is) a delight.”

Barbara Crafton



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Fresh Start

Talking Points

Barbara Crafton was talking about interim ministry when she made this statement, but it applies to any ministry. Congregations, like any institution, have staying power. Individuals, on the other hand, never know how long a relationship, or even life, will last so we must work to make that moment truly a delight.

Distribute “Fresh Start in Your Congregation: A Resource for Clergy”, and, if appropriate, “Fresh Start in Your Congregation: A Resource for Lay Leaders”.

Here’s a booklet that contains some structured “getting to know you” activities based on Fresh Start modules that you can use in your congregation, as well as some pointers about calling for a Vestry retreat, etc. Take a few minutes to go through it and then let’s talk about what you could be doing in your congregation to insure that your first moments are, indeed, a “blessing and a delight”.

After they have had time to review the document, facilitate a large group discussion or break into small groups for participants to do some planning for what they could do “back home.” If the discussion occurs in small groups, reconvene the whole group for some sharing of ideas.