

CIRCUITRIDER *Reviews*



Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations

by Robert Schnase (Abingdon Press, 2007 ISBN 9780687645404)

Reviewed by Kenneth H. Carter, Jr., senior pastor at Providence United Methodist Church in Charlotte, NC

Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations by Robert Schnase

Robert Schnase knows that something is wrong. He has experienced the transition from the local church to the episcopacy, and one senses that he is trying to grasp the situation at hand. He looks most clearly at the geographical landscape that is closest to him—United Methodism in Missouri, but the reader can easily translate his insights into his or her own setting. This is a deceptively simple book that holds great promise for the church.

In reading *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, I was struck by Schnase's identification and description of the practices. These practices help to construct a common language, and again, I was taken with how easily the practices emerge and how accessible they are to congregations and denominational systems. Many have observed the conflict that makes such a common language impossible, at the local or denominational level, and yet one senses in these pages an entry into the heart of the matter, in practices that are defined, illustrated and commended to congregational leaders.

The five practices are radical hospitality, passionate worship, intentional faith development, risk-taking mission and service, and extravagant generosity. The author notes that these words are “dangerous, edgy and provocative” (9). The intent is to push the boundaries: from welcoming those like us to hospitality with those unlike us; from good worship to worship at its very

best; from education that is stable and stagnant to faith development that is intentional and lifelong; from mission that is safe and predictable to service that is risky and sacrificial; and from stewardship that is constricted by scarcity to generosity that is extravagant in response to God’s abundant grace.

Schnase writes clearly and compassionately about a church that he loves, but the love is one that calls us to recover a confidence and trust in the God who is the source of life and blessing. This God calls us through Jesus Christ to be disciples, to bear fruit (John 15), and this fruitfulness can be measured by our engagement in the five practices. He exposes our denominational weaknesses by telling the truth about shrinking churches, haphazard worship, a lack of interest in those beyond the walls of our buildings, our financial limitations, while also calling us to a way of life that is expectant, vibrant and transformational.

I find this to be a helpful and hopeful book. Schnase focuses on the congregation in a denomination that often displays a lack of trust or interest in the local church. He is on target when he writes, “The most substantial threats to the church’s mission do not come from the seminaries, the bishops, the general boards, the complexity of our ordination process, the appointive system, the guaranteed appointment, or the conflict between conservatives and liberals...The most significant threats come from the failure to perform the basic activities of congregational ministry in an exemplary way” (130).

Schnase is helpful because he tells the truth. He is hopeful because he imagines a different and more faithful future for the church. The “exemplary way” is one that expects fruit, blessing, growth and excellence. The practices described in this book will lead any pastor or leader, or better yet any congregation, toward renewal in the service of God’s mission.



BUY NOW

