

Can Restorying My Organization Really Help?

William J. Salyards Copyright 2009 All Rights Reserved

Churches like businesses have stories that define them. Generally, these are myths. Not the myth of fairy tales but myth that reveals belief without reference to historical verification. Another way to think of this is to say, "I can't prove it but I believe it." The stories of our beginning or of an event that provides definition for us will rise to this stature until, in the minds and hearts of those we lead, they approximate the sacred. We don't consider them in the same context of scripture but like scripture, we hold their giving to be providential. Something like, "God showed up and this is the result." While this would largely be considered positive, some defining stories can be negative and cast a pall over the organization and its members.

In brief, an organization may need to be restoried if the defining story about it is either negative or one that mandates practices that are no longer supported by the culture the organization exists to serve. Take the case of the congregation that formed from an acrimonious church

split. Those who leave do so for a reason and when they maintain their group the shared pain of their rupture can be one of the bonds that sustains them. If they continue, what was an experience (pain) may become a story that in time defines who they are and what they will and won't do. Then there's the instance of the congregation whose story is that Sunday night service is when God visited us and we had our best growth. It's leaders and members may wonder at the disparity that has arisen between the morning and evening attendance but what is certain is that the culture in which the organization (church) exists does not support its product (Sunday evening service). In each example the organization may need to restory itself.

Before heading down the path of restorying an organization it must be recognized that more often than not the founding stories of lore aren't changed, instead new stories are brought alongside to replace them. This is so because whatever it is the founding story points

out actually, in some form, happened. You can't change facts but you can place another story alongside it that gains prominence as people make the choice to embrace the "new."