

We are familiar with pulling out our snow shovels and warm boots. We put a window scraper and an extra blanket in the car. We wear more layers and make more soup. And if we see our breath in the cold air or slap our mittened hands together for warmth, we don't mind. Spring will come again.

If we assume that our church is currently experiencing a "winter" season, then we make adjustments to stay warm and survive. It is commendable how church leaders have continued to enhance the quality of online worship, offer new ways for giving and creatively reach out to the community.

But viewing this time as a season of winter for the church, can leave us with the assumption that if we just hang on, spring will come and we will go back to "normal", doing things the way we have always done them.

It is at this point that authors Crouch, Keilhacker and Blanchard suggest the metaphor with the greatest challenge. What if our church has not simply entered a season of winter, but has moved into an ice age? An ice age brings lasting change. The climate and the topography of the land shifts and is never the same.

In Michigan, our lands and waterways were shaped in the Pleistocene Age. Great glaciers up to 6,000 feet thick moved over Michigan carving valleys and pushing up hills. When glaciers receded, they left behind newly formed lakes and bays. If we had been alive to witness the "before and after" of the most recent ice age, we might have wrung our hands and asked, "How can we get back to normal?"

What metaphor fits best for you and your church? Are you in the midst of a blizzard, moving from crisis to crisis, making decisions in response to immediate problems? Are you experiencing a season of winter, hunkering down and working to survive until things return to normal? Or are you and your church seeking a vision for a "post-ice age", where profound changes to the social landscape call for new approaches to offering Christ?

Change is inevitable and these pandemic influenced months have accelerated change for the church and in society. A new landscape for ministry is taking shape. We can be alarmed or dismayed, insisting that what we're experiencing is just a blizzard or a hard winter. But if we're willing to vision for an Ice age, we can anticipate the beauty and hope that change can bring.

We celebrate Michigan's lakes and streams, forested hills and rocky shores—beauty shaped by great glaciers. How are you and your church preparing for the new landscape of ministry to come?

Thoughts? Contact Sherry@UMFMichigan.org