



Charting New Territory

By Joel Fitzgerald

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I have grown up in the United Methodist Church my entire life. As the son of two pastors, I've been steeped in our method and way of being. And we love rules. After all our name comes from the "method" the Wesley's developed. Our organizational manual is called the *Book of Discipline*.

This tendency to set up rules is actually endemic in organizations. Ray Fisman and Tim Sullivan, in their surprisingly funny book *The Org*, detail why organizations emerge in the first place. Rules and standards are crucial for organizational health and survival; allaying risks and creating redundancy so the organization can survive. Their basic point is that humans will make organizations, and organizations will make rules and standards.

The problem arises when new situations require organizations to change. Sometimes new political, cultural or technological realities make an organization's rules obsolete or even counterproductive. This was the case of the Church of England in Wesley's day; an organization whose rules may have made sense at one time but were ill-equipped for a changed world.

So how can organizations innovate? How can they retain the benefits of standards but innovate around a new reality? There are no easy answers, but Fisman and Sullivan give one possible example: Skunk Works. Skunk Works is an internal division at Lockheed Martin that, while being part of a giant monolithic corporation, is given a great deal of autonomy and freedom. Skunk Works engineers think up crazy designs and are unburdened by many of the requirements of other divisions. Their freedom is not unlimited, but they are given space to dream crazy dreams and think up new ideas.

We in the church could use some Skunk Works (maybe we'll work on a better name). But we could use people and groups that know and love our Methodist DNA but can come up with wild and crazy ideas to expand that DNA in a new world. Ideas that no one has thought of. Ideas that have no guarantee that they will work. Wacky ideas like preaching in a graveyard,

setting up meetings outside of church buildings, and going to where the hurting people are (all things John Wesley did).

If you have some wild ideas, if you've been noodling on some fun, crazy ideas, I'd encourage you to apply for the Grace in Action Ministry Innovation Award. The United Methodist Foundation of Michigan and the Michigan Conference are partnering to grant funds to churches and ministry partners that are living in the spirit of Wesley, by extending God's grace in new, wild, maybe even scary ways. The application deadline is October 15 and you can find more information at umfmichigan.org.

What I'm reading: *Burnout and Beyond* by Don Easton. Hat tip to Rev. Joel Walther for this recommendation. Easton, a pastor in Australia, relays his experience getting into and out of burnout. He provides good examples of warning signs for burnout as well as how we might get out of it. Importantly, he goes into both the personal and communal ways burnout can be avoided.