

## **THE MAINTENANCE MODE**

Is your congregation in the maintenance mode? Is the focus on paying the bills and living from month to month?

The “maintenance mode” is an indicator of poor health or identity issues. Generally this mode stems from a prevailing sense of meaninglessness and purposelessness. Often the primary goal is merely to keep the peace and bury the dead. This posture is fostered in a non-reflective lifestyle wherein the congregation ceases to discern who it is or what it is to be about. The ill health becomes visible in patterns of behavior that expect conformity to “the way we do things here.” It is typified with a rather blind allegiance to authority.

Tradition may be a more acceptable authority than any person- clergy included- who is not to be trusted, especially if they are viewed as being an outsider.

The key to understanding this condition may be discovered in the congregation’s history. Congregations in the maintenance mode may have been abused. Abuse thwarts healthy personality development. Authoritarian clergy may be abusive in their insistence that a congregation conform to their narrow interpretation and expectation of what it means to be of a particular denomination or of a specific cultural influence, i.e. Irish Catholic, Norwegian Lutheran, or Scottish Presbyterian. Pastors may also become abusive in their use of the congregation for their personal vision of the church. Deriding the congregation for what it is not, or for what it needs to do is abusive. This type of observation coupled with an absence of affirmation for the gifts, abilities, and ministry interests of the congregation, is abusive and takes its toll on the corporate psyche of the congregation. As the child who is raised with criticism becomes distant, critical, or even hostile, so it is with congregations.

The maintenance mode congregation often becomes focused on the

past: on a time when there was meaning. It remembers being the largest church in the community or having the best choirs, or being Norwegian, or German, etc. It more clearly understands what it was, than who it is. The congregation comes to believe that it will never be acceptable until it returns to that former state of glory. Or, in a state of denial, it believes that it is still there.

Healing and hope come as the congregation's giftedness is affirmed. Note, however, it may take a great deal of positive attention and continual reinforcement to overcome years of negative messages. The present active voices of self-diminishment will also need to be replaced with words of grace. It will take time, but the joy for pastor and people can be awesome.