

Taking a gut check

For a few moments, stop running – like Dave or his treadmill buddies -- and settle down to some intuitive thinking. Grab a cup of coffee, tea or other refreshments; sit with a couple of leaders in your congregation and take a “gut check” that assesses your feelings about the present state of the world. This may be a good thing for all of you, especially if you’ve been “Sunday polite” with each other for so long that you actually believe that everyone’s just fine except you!

Take some time to get beyond moaning and groaning, and talk honestly about matters such as these:

- What will be the state of the environment or the economy five years from now?
- What kind of world will your children live in when they’re your age?
- What’s pushing you to live in ways that aren’t really working very well?
- How often do you say to yourselves, “Things just can’t keep going on this way?”
- What’s broken and isn’t getting fixed?
- Who’s secretly living simply because they have no other economic choice?
- Who do you know that’s downshifted or downsized? How’s it working out?
- What’s missing in the way you live?
- What are you afraid of? Why?

If evidence—statistics, stories, pictures, reports—is helpful alongside your intuition, talk about that, too. (A good question to start the accumulation of factual matter: “How do you know?”) But don’t turn this conversation into a head trip that deteriorates into arguments about accuracy or authority. What you’re after here is a sharing of feelings, so that you can see together the interior parts of your brain. So you can see how each of you is thinking about the thousands of decisions that comprise your lifestyle.

If you want to formalize this process, keep track of what you learn from each other, then form some more coffee-conversation groups and go through the same questions. Pretty soon you’ll accumulate a lot of good thinking. Look at your notes and see the patterns—repeated ideas, connections, causes-and-effects. If you’re willing to ask “What should we do next?” you’re ready to take the first action steps toward a congregation program.

If not, don’t worry. You still have the rest of your life to figure this out!