

The Reverend Deborah Fae Swift, M.S., M.Div.
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THE CHURCH HAS LEFT THE BUILDING

*A CASE STUDY OF
ONE CHURCH'S STORY
OF TRANSFORMATION,
REDEFINITION &
NEW LIFE!*



"This story can open many fearful hearts in the congregations I work with."
Rev. Randy Lovejoy | Associate for Strategic Ministry | Presbytery of San Fernando, PC(USA)

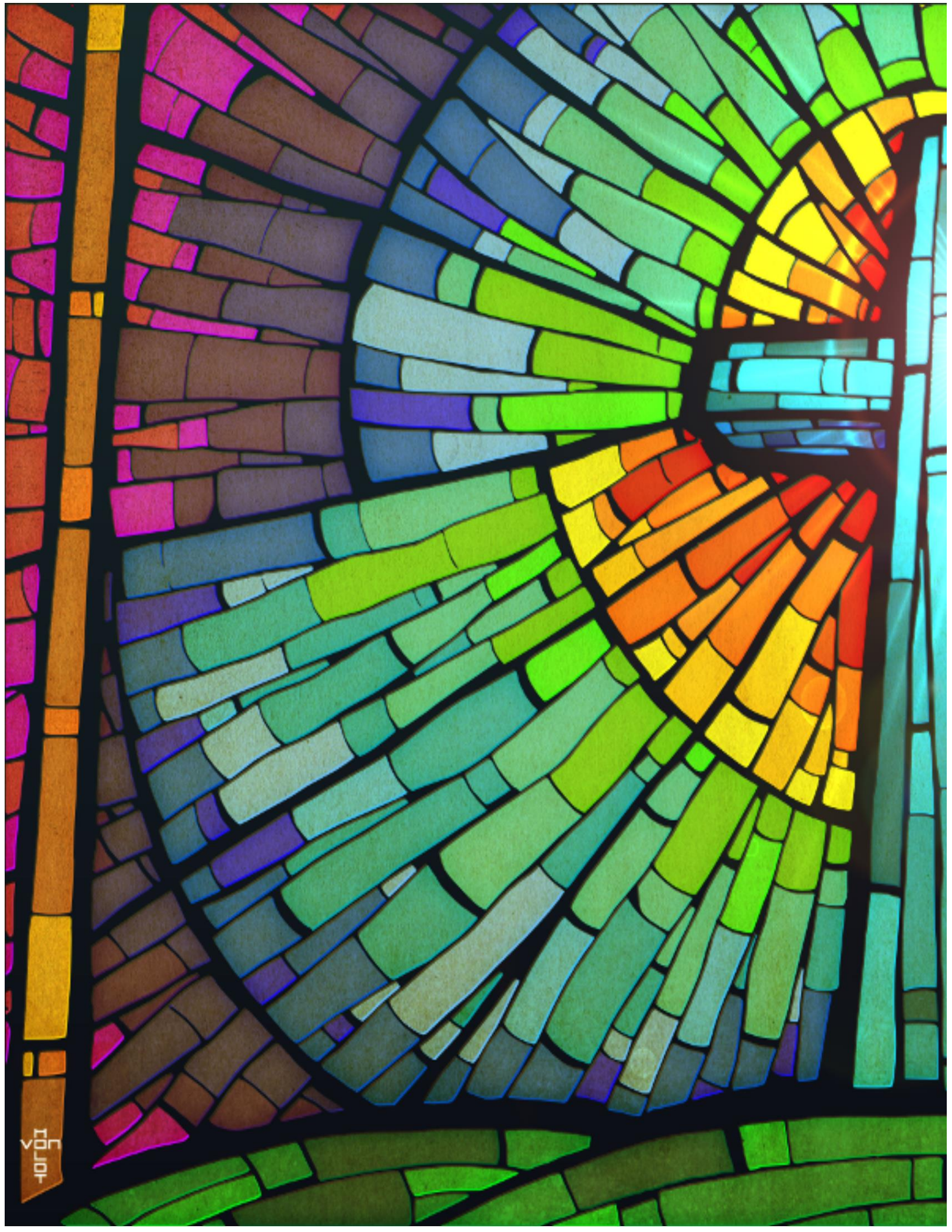
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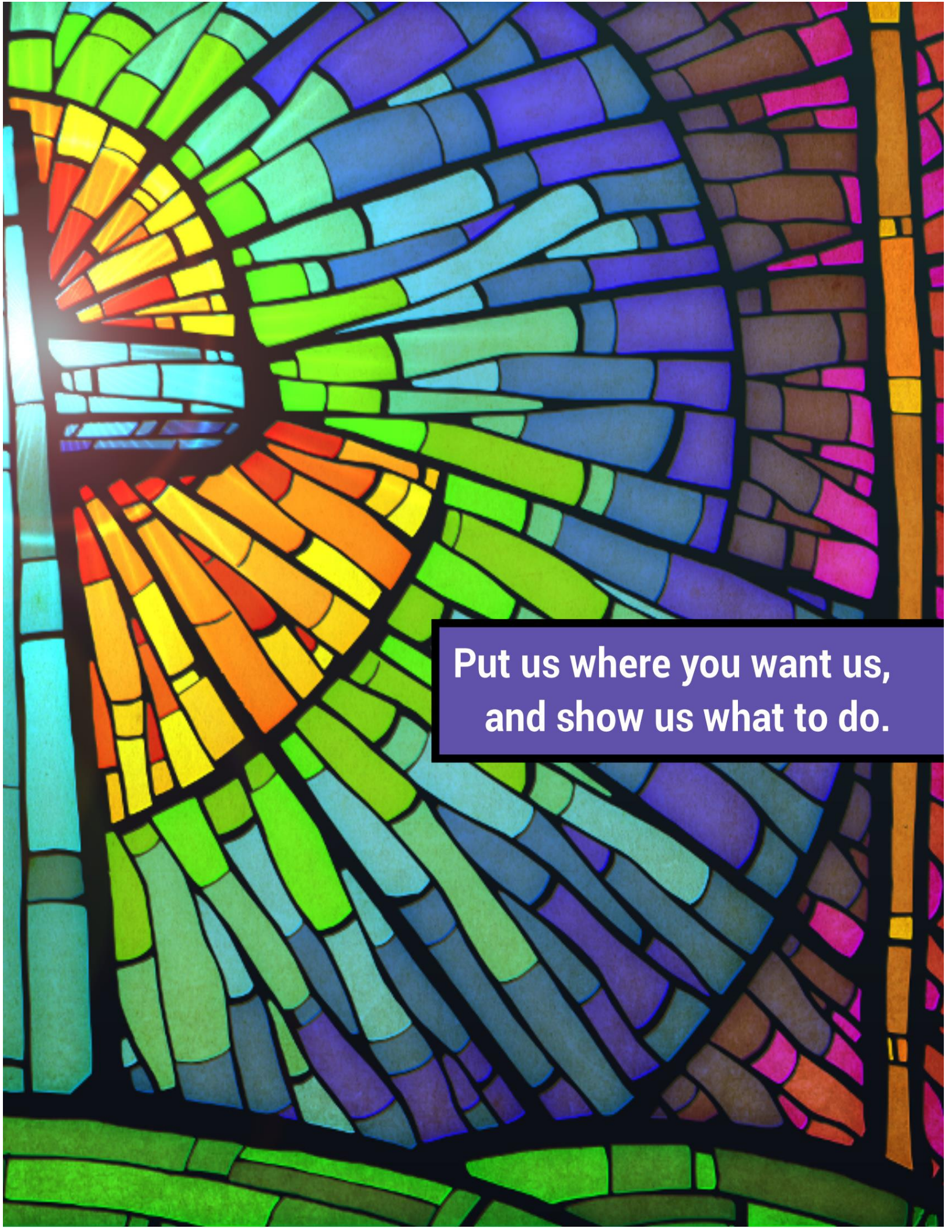
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The Church Has Left The Building

A case study of one church's story of transformation, redefinition & new life!





**Put us where you want us,
and show us what to do.**

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Covers and interior page design by Kevin J Fuller
Author photo by Carly Fae Logan
Second Edition: 2018

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Published by South Presbyterian Church
ISBN: 198-1-5323-7784-6

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Dedications

This book is dedicated to the people who taught me what faith is and how to live as a faithful follower of “the one who changes everything,” my parents, Dr. & Mrs. Frederic Fay (Norma) Swift

To Nancy, Bob, and Dave, my siblings - the first community I ever belonged to - who never let me forget that I’m the youngest and that they are not

To my daughter, Carly Fae, and the other children of my heart, Concetta, Imani and Malik, who remind me daily that I am who I am because of them (True ‘dat!) and who also keep hope alive even in the darkest of times

And to the people of South Presbyterian Church and the Acts of Faith Community who dare to believe with the fierce audacity that God can use “even us” to bring about the KOG if we will just be brave enough to pray,

“Put us where you want us, and show us what to do”



PREVIEW

Contents

Acknowledgements

Roadmap for the Journey	3
From the Pastor	4
Prelude	11
Part 1: 2008-2010	14
Part 2: 2011	36
Part 3: 2012	52
Part 4: 2013	76
Part 5: 2014	98
Part 6: Postlude	128
Appendix A: Motion Placed Before the Congregation	142
Appendix B: Guiding Principle	143
Appendix C: Easter Day, 2014 Sermon (excerpt)	148
Appendix D: Final Sunday Worship in the building	151
Appendix E: Sermon Excerpt	154
Appendix F: Ad Hoc Group Initial Meeting.....	160
Appendix G: Ad Hoc Report to Session on our Future.....	161
Appendix H: Pastor's Report to the Ad Hoc Group.....	162
Appendix I: The Acts of Faith Model of Ministry.....	168
Appendix J: Oft-repeated Mantras.....	175
Appendix K: Integrating New Ideas	176
End Notes	177

Acknowledgements

Several colleagues and friends are mentioned in this case study. They already know that I offer them my gratitude and thanks for their role in our collective life together.

In addition to them, I add my thanks to:

Linda McLean, extraordinary editor and proofreader, not to mention dearest friend;

Katrina and Kevin, the other two-thirds of the SPC hub, my partners in crime and creativity. What a team we make!;

my friend (and fellow Enneagram Type 8), the Reverend Dr. Rachel McGuire, who is the inspiration behind getting this volume online in a teachable format;

Avis Hooper, dear friend and fellow sojourner who believed in this from the very beginning;

Gordon and Stena Rickner, Barb Sixbey and Sonya Kennedy – the real Reggie, Katherine, Paula and Mimi – who have all become family to me and who carry me along when I am too tired to carry myself;

and, of course, my sweet Margery, who knows when to encourage and when to challenge, who accepts and embraces my faith even though it is not hers, who discusses systems theory with me and, when shifting archetypes and changing paradigms get to be too much for me, makes me the most delicious homemade dinners – feeding my body and soul. I'm so glad we are figuring this life out together.



PREVIEW . D

Roadmap for the Journey

When so many churches are in decline and closing, this is a case study of transformation and hope. Faced with dwindling membership and funds, South Presbyterian Church in Rochester, New York engaged in methodical introspective prayer and deliberate clarifying exercises to map out their future.

From the Pastor lays out Reverend Swift's background that led her to South Church: community organizer and public-school teacher. Both ground her administrative style as she brings the lens of her theology to every decision facing the church in transition.

In the **Prelude**, readers are introduced to two long-time members of the congregation through whose eyes we see and experience the changes taking place.

Grouped by years, each chapter does two things: outlines the events that occurred and explores what was going on in the leader's mind and heart. The first half of each chapter is a chronological narrative of events, but it is the second half that opens up the mind of the woman at the helm of this journey. Exploring her thoughts and theological reflections on the process of moving through those events gives a unique view into the process of intentional and Spirit-led innovation. Included are exercises for planning and executing deep, systemic and strategic change. Each chapter ends with thought-provoking questions designed to help the reader explore her/his own beliefs as they develop their own personal transitional leadership style.

The major topics of each chapters include:

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| 2008 – 2010 | Organic Reality
Who are we <i>really</i> ? Where did we come from? What's really going on around us?
What's our context?
The process by which South Church claimed its core beliefs. |
| 2011 | Identity
How connection affects the growing identity.
What does Jesus require of us? Evangelism when you hate "The 'E' Word." |
| 2012 | New Beginnings
Changing the locus of thought. Learning to think outside the box.
New Strategies, New Definitions.
Changing self-concepts and expectations. |
| 2013 | Designs & New Images
Social media, Guiding Principles, Logos and Websites.
The Acts of Faith Model emerges. |
| 2014 | On the Move
The importance of ritual and symbol.
Walking out of the building and embracing new life. |

Postlude brings the reader up-to-date on developments since South left the building, including: starting new ministries; the challenges facing them of how to handle membership and finances; and shepherding another church that adopted the Acts of Faith Model of Ministry.

From the Pastor

It is my honor and privilege to have been serving South Presbyterian Church throughout a pivotal juncture in the life of this congregation. I'm not sure if it's God's wisdom or God's quirky sense of humor that placed us together at this time. That still remains to be seen.

My children – both immediate and extended family – would want me to point out that I am a single mom and that I owe my success to their constant faith and abiding love. They are right, of course. It is also true that I am shaped by being a middle class, single, white, educated woman doing ministry in the urban center of the fifth poorest city in the nation (behind Detroit, Cleveland, Dayton, and Hartford).

I came to professional ministry as a second career after having taught public-school music for almost a decade. Seminary brought me to Rochester, NY where I attended Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School. There I was educated in the strong tradition of the social gospel – Walter Rauschenbush, Helen Barrett Montgomery, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Howard Thurman, and others – and upon graduation in 1990, I served a one-year position as an Interim Pastor of a small, rural parish before embarking on a nearly twenty-year voyage as a community organizer in downtown Rochester.

During those twenty years I merged my musical background and my ordained status, serving as both Minister of Music and Parish Associate at an urban Presbyterian church in Rochester. My full-time job in those days included working as the Associate Director for two different Neighborhood Preservation Companies and Director of Operations for a ministry of the Sisters of St. Joseph that provided medical care and counseling to the un- and under-insured.

Those involvements – forming neighborhood and business associations, working with city planners, coordinating citizen response to proposed changes in housing, traffic, mass transit, and zoning proposals, working with citizen groups and first responders in both crime prevention and community emergency response teams – provided invaluable networks and rich experiences upon which to draw when South Church was faced with a series of events that challenged their ongoing existence.

I tell you this not because I am unique in these things, but because each of you reading this book brings your own set of experiences to your current situation.

This book is not meant to lift up South Church ... it is meant to share our incredible

journey with God in the hope that it might help you and your church write your own incredible story of your journey with God.

I say “church,” but this book is not just for church people. I believe that there are insights and lessons to be gained for anyone engaging in transformational leadership and organizational change at any level, but especially in grass-roots settings.

My experience tells me that it’s easier to start something new than to transform something that already exists. In the first case, you lean on creativity. The second requires not only that creativity but shifting archetypes as well. That shift demands change at the very core of one’s identity. Working with a pre-existing entity brings with it the dismantling and reassembling of who/what that entity has been.

But it’s precisely this challenge that speaks to some of us. Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than with the Christian Church in the United States in the twenty-first century: new fellowships seem to spring up daily, while established churches founder. South Church was called to create something new from a long-established traditional church and this is the story of our journey – a case study of one little piece of the Body of Christ as it seeks to faithfully be “reformed and always re-forming.”

To change the church in the third millennium requires Second, not First, Order Change. First Order Change is like shifting the chairs on an ocean liner and moving the tennis courts where the pool used to be. It calls for changing the schedule for dinner and the seating charts for who sits at the Captain’s Table.

Second Order Change is like changing an oil tanker into a luxury ocean liner but keeping the same crew who has to learn and embrace a new philosophy of their jobs. Too many church leaders prefer to engage in First Order Change when what’s often needed is Second Order Change. But Second Order Change is scary because to be a successful luxury liner, there can be no connection to the oil tanker beyond the corporate memory of its existence.

At the core of my being I am a teacher and, I pray, a woman of faith. My own theology and spirituality have been challenged, deepened and refined as a result of these last years at South. But I must underscore that all that has happened was not because of anything I did alone; it is paramount to remember three things:

1. Jesus Christ alone is Head of the Church, and by that we mean every church, every little grouping where two or more are gathered in his name. I have a colleague and every time we get together for lunch, we remind ourselves that this is the Kevin & Deb Church. We are all the church, all the time.
2. As Presbyterians, the Session (the local church council) holds all of the decision-making power, and all of the responsibility for the spiritual and fiscal well-being of a

congregation. I much prefer to err on the side of sharing too much with the Session as opposed to not enough. Our elders are fond of telling those coming onto the board that they better check their email at least once a day if not twice to keep up with my information dissemination.

3. There is a prayer that we, as believers, are all invited to pray ceaselessly if we are truly Jesus-followers. It must not be taken lightly, though, because it holds the potential to change everything. Partly because of its broad impact, we at South now refer to it as “the most dangerous prayer.” Yet if the church is really ever to be the church, we all must pray earnestly:

“Put us where you want us, and show us what to do.”

What South Church has done (and is doing) is amazing. It is humbling and awesome (in the true sense of being in awe as we stand before God), but it is not the only way to respond to the challenges facing our churches today.

There are as many “right ways” to do church transformation with faith and integrity as there are individuals seeking the will of God. This just happens to be the way that our “wee kirk” felt led to answer God’s call to ministry.

This is not a sad story of the demise of yet another small church at the beginning of the third millennium. This is the account of a positive redefinition of “church.” Some argue that it is a blueprint for returning to the first-century church in Palestine. For those of us living through the experience, it has been an opportunity for us to live out our faith. Every one of us has grown in both our personal and corporate relationship with God in Her/His many forms and incarnations.

In hindsight our journey may look rosy and as if we had everything carefully mapped out in advance. Nothing could be further from the truth. When we were in the thick of things, it didn’t feel rosy. It felt scary and overwhelming. But those times were punctuated by moments of clarity and comfort ... times of great excitement and exhilaration as we began to let ourselves believe that God really did know what God was doing! Those were moments of sheer Grace.

We knew that eventually we would have to sell our building because of finances, but during our process we experienced a shift of impetus; somewhere along the line, we realized we needed to sell our building, not because of finances, but to be faithful to God’s call to share the Good News. That shift in understanding brought with it great joy and a sense of purpose.

In hindsight, we believe that God used our financial situation to realign our mission and, in so doing, to guarantee the ongoing life of our congregation. We moved from thinking we were dying, to embracing our many strengths and gifts.

In the course of the process we developed a new way of doing church – the Acts of Faith Model of Ministry ^{APPENDIX I} – which has components that can easily be replicated in large congregations and small, by those with buildings and those without, and by people in urban, suburban, or rural settings. As one member said recently, “Jesus was telling us to go out and be the church, to live as disciples making disciples. Maybe other churches are called to keep their building as they redefine ‘church’ in their setting. We were not.”

“Church” has become an action verb to us. What others might call “outreach ministries” have the same importance as Sunday worship to us. We believe that every Act of Faith is just a different manifestation of the same acts of praise. Every Act of Faith – whether a book study, a walking meditation group, an on-line class, praying together, worshiping together or using music to create community – is a form of church: praising God through faith and works.

I have to say that in 2008 when I began my pastorate at South, I only used phrases like “Body of Christ” and “the will of God” in programmatically religious or theological settings. And, I dare say, most members of South Church rarely, if ever, used phrases like that themselves. After the extraordinarily transformative experience of these years together, however, virtually all of our members think in those terms; faith (and its attendant language) has come alive within us.

As Presbyterians, we tend to be a little heady. Why say things with five words when you can say them with twenty? For some, this book will fall short of their expectations because it is not meant to be an academic approach to a systemic challenge. I have purposely tried to keep this account informal and conversational. After all, I began life as a public-school music teacher. Any teacher worth her salt should be able to explain the most complex things in language that her class can understand and make it look easy. That is my goal. You’ll have to be the judge of my success.

I have changed the names of people within the congregation so that we work as a single unit of God. Occasionally the people mentioned are composites of more than one person with a few notable exceptions. Reggie and Katherine Young are a real couple but with different names. All of the details about them, their family, their participation and their gifts of ministry are true and accurate. Paula, our resident evangelist and Mimi, one of our Acts of Faith leaders, are also real people, and really did say and do the things attributed to them.

The names outside of the congregation have not been changed. I’m not sure why I did it that way – it just feels right to honor our many partners and lift them up with thanksgiving, knowing that you, too, might be able to use them, or their counterparts, in your own journey.

What is different about this book for me is the second half of each chapter. After summarizing the events that occurred each year in the opening part of a chapter,

I called myself to authentically share with you what I was going through as the pastoral leader of this process. It has been an intense experience to review hundreds of pages of Session minutes, eNews and printed newsletter publications, Annual Reports and thousands of emails in piecing together this roadmap of our journey. My personal journal and reflections have underscored for me that great changes also occurred in my own mind, heart and spirit as well as that of the congregation.

This second half is designed to give you a window into my internal thoughts, prayers, fears and processes.

Sometimes it wasn't a pretty sight, but what's here is real and again, I offer it to you because I believe we are all in this together, and when I was going through this, I couldn't find anyone else's description as reference points.

If you are part of a leadership team dealing with a similar situation, maybe it will be helpful to know you're not alone; if you are not part of a leadership team but are dealing with a similar situation, maybe it will be helpful to know what others around you might be experiencing. We are all part of the Body of Christ; what affects one affects us all. Hopefully you will find here what feminist and womanist writers refer to as the universality of particularity, i.e. the more specific I can be about my situation, the more you will be able to connect with something(s) in your own.

At the completion of each chapter will be Questions for Reflection. It is our hope that they will help open some possibilities and new thought lines for you in your situation.

As a literary convention, whenever I refer to the governing body of the congregation, the Session, I have capitalized it. If "session" is not capitalized, it is referring to a meeting or other such occurrence.

And finally: We expect this book to be constantly evolving – at least for the next few years – because WE are constantly evolving. If our story is helpful to you in your setting, we rejoice. If we are able to be a sounding board for you as you work to discern where God is leading you, we stand ready to do so. Give us a call or contact us through our website (www.SouthPC.org).

In 2018 we will be launching a second website entirely devoted to the Acts of Faith Model as it is unfolding around the world, www.actsofffaith.life.

For us at South Presbyterian Church, ours was, and continues to be, an exciting, scary, wonderful, challenging, faith-filled path that has brought us new life and new energy for ministry and mission. And we are all very clear that *to God be the glory*.

The Rev. Deborah Fae Swift, M.Div., M.S.
Pastor, South Presbyterian Church
November, 2017

Questions for Reflection

Look at your own life up to this point. Whether you are a seasoned professional or a student about to embark on a new career, you arrived at the threshold you are standing on through life experiences that gave you skills you might not even think about.

What are 10 skills that you bring to where (or who) you are today?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____



COPY

PREVIEW

Prelude

Grandmother took his small seven-year-old hand and led Reggie down the three blocks to the brick building. It was 1939 and the first time that Reginald Young entered South Presbyterian Church.

This is the church he would join in 1945. This is the church where he would meet his beloved Katherine and take her as his bride. This is the church that sent him off to war and welcomed him home. This is the church that baptized their two sons ... both of whom were later married in this church. This is the church where he and Katherine have sung in the choir for over one hundred and twenty years, total. This is the church where he would be responsible for the boiler for 50 years until he received the honorific title, Bishop of the Boiler, upon completion of his service. This is the church where they both served on committees, attended classes and were both ordained as Ruling Elders and Deacons.

In the 165-year history of this church, this is the man who has been an active participant, mainstay and pillar for 77 of those years – almost half the life of the church itself.

So, how is it that on Easter Sunday, 2014, Reginald Young stood to his full 6'1" frame, smoothed back his silver hair, and at age 81 joyfully spoke these words at a Special Meeting of the Congregation:

"Madam Moderator, I move that South Presbyterian Church accept the purchase offer of the Community of the Savior as outlined in the accompanying document before us." APPENDIX A

The motion, having been made by the longest-serving member of the congregation, was then seconded by the newest member of the congregation who had joined within the last six months. And when the vote was tallied – approved by 32 of the 33 voting members present – this was the couple that led the move out of the brick structure.

What is it that allowed and empowered a 40-member, urban congregation that had boasted 900+ members fifty years earlier to excitedly embrace such a radical step? And how did this "merry little band of believers" establish themselves as those who were proud to wear T-shirts saying "The Church Has Left the Building"?

What follows is a case study in group transformation, recounted by the leader who spear-headed the movement. It includes both chronological and reflective information from the Pastor – reflections on this extraordinary journey – a time of great prayer and discernment for a bunch of ordinary people. It is an Exodus journey about building community, growing to welcome change, and embracing transformation as its members strive to be the Church of Jesus Christ in this time and in this place.





**PART 1: 2008 – 2010
Highlights of Events**

An Organic Reality

Online Outreach

Joy Group

**Money, Fears
& Mistakes**

Claiming Our Identity

Confirmation Class

An Organic Reality

Self-transformation often begins with small incremental steps. Lifestyle changes generally happen when we are able to correctly assess our readiness to change and then follow a clear process of incremental refinement of the behavior we have decided to alter. The word 'transformation', on the other hand, indicates a change that is so fundamental that our entire sense of self undergoes a radical shift. Such a shift may seem to occur suddenly but is often the result of many years of steady, perhaps indiscernible progress.

For many of us, a profound self-transformation is most cherished when it reflects an ongoing realignment with deeply felt spiritual values for which we have long aspired. Effecting such a practical realignment with our deepest aspirations can sometimes generate such a profound impact on our sense of self and our behaviors that we in turn begin to have a positive impact on our closest relationships, on our communities, and in some cases, the world.¹

Although Dr. Newell wrote the above about personal self-transformation, it strikes me how apropos it is for a church.

Prior to calling me in 2008, South Presbyterian Church had been without a pastoral presence for a year. Because of fiscal constraints and the fact that they had a member who was seminary-trained and could preach most Sundays, they had chosen not to go the route of an Interim Pastor. And they weren't too clear on whether they wanted a full-time or part-time Stated Supply which ended up being my role.

The last time there had been a called-and-installed permanent pastor at South was in 1990, and one thing I learned once I got on scene was that many members weren't too sure what it meant to be Presbyterian –

though I doubt that anyone would have agreed with that statement in 2008.

When they called me, the Session asked me to do three things in addition to leading worship: improve communication among members, begin a Christian Education Program for adults, and meet the pastoral needs of members who were increasingly finding themselves part of the "sandwich generation," i.e. those with responsibilities to both their college-aged children and their aging parents.

The day I started, I began the Pastor's eNews and shared online prayer requests, committee work, and news of the larger church with our members and those who were listed in the Directory as "Friends of South." This happened several times a week which, I was told, was the first time in their

lives that some of them had felt connected to their faith community on non-Sundays.

Most of the parishioners met this with excitement and enthusiasm, though some objected to individual prayers being listed. Now, mind you, these weren't the people the prayers were for... these were others who later admitted to feeling uncomfortable. They did not want to know about the challenges others were facing. After a couple of months, though, a new, open sense of sharing was evident.

Two months after I started as Stated Supply Pastor, we launched a summer Bible Study. Reggie and Katherine were among the class members. In fact, almost one-third of the congregation attended and through those classes, a New Member Class began to emerge. Studying scripture gave way to exploring spirituality.

The year before, many churches in our Presbytery had participated in the Natural Church Development survey which showed that virtually all of our members tested out to be low in spirituality, i.e., not very spiritual! I couldn't believe it. Those results were so not in keeping with my experience of the people at South. As I continued to engage them, I challenged them to pray to a different member of the Trinity than they usually did. For instance, saying Jesus instead of God, or Holy Spirit in place of Jesus. I came to believe that their test scores were less about not having a sense of spirituality and more about not recognizing and naming their spirituality. These folks were innately spiritual. They engaged in centering prayer, relying on God's presence and believing that the Spirit

was at work without even realizing that their thoughts constituted spirituality or "being spiritual." Embracing their spiritual dimension was such second nature to them that it did not warrant a title.

During that first year, the Session and I focused worship and adult classes on naming things as spiritual: talking with God in the checkout line? Spiritual. Eating at the diner after service and rehashing the sermon? Spiritual. Skiing down the slope and acknowledging the beauty of creation? Spiritual. Praying for your grandchildren? Spiritual. Pondering a PBS special on the Holy Lands? Spiritual.

In hindsight, I believe that God was leading us to develop our own spiritual habits and gifts because we surely would need them in the near future.

Whatever we did that year paid off. The next time we took the NCD survey, Spirituality was one of our highest categories. It proved that sometimes we all just need to name what we are doing in order to give it the power it deserves.

SMALL GROUP CONVERSATION

Question: When do you do your praying?

Woman: I pray when I'm driving ... especially at the stop lights.

Response from the Group: That's good, Ursula ... we all pray when you're driving, too.

Another focus for us in 2009 was stating our priority for Christian Education, especially CE for children. Although some Sunday school classes had always existed, there were only five children eligible at that time and lessons were hit-or-miss. The Session formed a task force (because after all, we are Presbyterian) to look at curricula. We found one that worked for us, and everyone in the church came on board because it paralleled the lectionary and offered material for all ages, including adults, every week. Finally, we began to develop a cohesive vision of education where everyone was studying the same themes at the same time.

Suddenly we had grandchildren of people who hadn't been active in the church in twenty or more years attending services and Sunday School, preparing religious pageants and often doing impromptu skits during the weekly coffee hours in Fellowship Hall. We were on fire with learning: the children focused on Bible stories, and the adults tackled everything from the Bible to contemporary issues.

This focus strategy was vital because it brought with it a sense of purpose, a sense of hope and a sense of possibility for everyone in the congregation. Church School was familiar. We could all remember growing up with a Christian Ed program and now we were offering it to our children and grandchildren. Stability was returning to Sunday morning, and it was an image of church that most of us could identify with.

ONLINE OUTREACH

When the program year ended in June of 2009, there was a real thirst for further

spiritual study, but people were tired of coming to adult classes all the time. We needed a break. It was at that time that The Thoughtful Christian (part of the Presbyterian Publishing House and from which we often download adult studies) came to the aid of our little gathering. For ten weeks during the summer of 2009, almost thirty people – both regular attendees and a couple who lived out of state but who were loosely connected to South – engaged in readings and online discussions that I established. We titled the study “Sizzling Summer Spirituality” and for each week in July and August, we read a common lesson from The Thoughtful Christian (www.TheThoughtfulChristian.com) and answered questions that I developed relating the lessons to our life at South.



PRESBYTERIAN PROUD.

As one long-time member said,
“I never knew we believed all this stuff. And I’m so glad to know it now because if I had to choose what kind of a church I’d want to belong to ...
this is it!”

Group members engaged each other online. Through the study they were exposed to varied spiritual practices and they learned that engaging the Spirit was possible in many venues. Many were amazed that while some people resonated with formal spiritual discipline and written prayers, others

Some questions which might be helpful in looking at your church “system” through new eyes:

1. What are the activities of your people which bring energy, excitement, and joy to you?
2. Are there activities outside of the church which some of you are especially drawn to (ex. Movies, book groups, dining out)?
3. Think about worship. What do you need to have present in order to feel like you are worshipping God?
4. What is the most populated place in your neighborhood? Barbershop? Gym? Café? Starbucks? Bar? What might it look like if three or four of you just went there to talk about life and ask each other, “Where’s God in that experience for you?” (If you put a sign on the table that says, “We’re just kicking around ideas. Wanna join us?” and had a couple of extra chairs at the table, how many weeks do you think it would take before somebody joined you?)
5. Pretend that you are just starting a brand-new church, getting together with friends in your community. What would it look like?

Here's what people are saying...

"This is a perfect story. The way that Swift honors those who have been faithful to the church for so long almost brought tears to my eyes. This story can open up many fearful hearts in the congregations I work with. It is written with humor (which I so appreciate!), with an openness to people from various theological backgrounds, and with lessons we all need to learn. Thank you for this!"

Rev. Randy Lovejoy
Associate for Strategic Ministry
Presbytery of San Fernando, PC(USA)

"Deb Swift describes the process of a church community changing how it understands its purpose, function, and very identity. She describes the essential inner work, on the part of community members as individuals and of the community as a whole, that is essential to this process: second-order change. Swift describes the faith, courage, imagination and hard work of continually moving towards an emerging vision - of collectively stepping from one lily pad to the next, with faith that the next will appear. She describes the practices that enabled her "wee kirk" to take these steps, and the authenticity and vulnerability with which she led her flock. This book offers inspiration and practical ideas, not only to small churches that face rising costs and inadequate incomes, but to anyone and any organization seeking to live a spirit-filled, authentic and service-oriented life."

Andrew Seager, Educational Consultant

"If you are pastor or lay church leader in today's shifting landscape, this book is for you. At this moment, across the U.S., small faithful gatherings of believers are wrestling with momentous decisions about their buildings, their missions, and their structures. Out of this struggle, many are discovering fertile ground for passion and innovation. Swift allows us to accompany her church on this journey, as they choose to sell their building and be born anew - as they de-center Sunday and generate more than a dozen Acts of Faith throughout the week - as they, with the Spirit's guidance, become a nomadic and multi-centered collection of lay-led ministries embedded throughout the city. This is a gripping story of community transformation, with all the human drama this entails. I could not put it down! Then, each chapter offers specific questions and issues for communities to consider and discuss relative to their own context. Lastly, throughout the narrative, we find rich detail about healthy processes and specific leadership strategies. After reading this book, you will have a treasure trove of tools. More importantly, you will have hope for the future of missional church as God's ongoing vessel of healing transformation in the world."

Rev. Rachel A. McGuire, PhD Founder
Community Learning Systems, LLC

"We rejoice that there is more than one model of ministry alive in the Presbytery of Genesee Valley! South Presbyterian Church, with the leadership of the Rev. Deborah Fae Swift, has led the way in imagining what ministry in the city of Rochester looks like "when the church has left the building." The Acts of Faith model is bringing ministry and community into new places throughout the city, including the Rochester Psychiatric Center, a subsidized housing center in the Northwest corner, neighborhood diners, and a retirement community. New leaders continue to emerge as the work spreads. This is a compelling and inspiring process!"

Rev. Amy Williams Fowler
Presbytery Leader, Presbytery of Genesee Valley

About the author...



The Reverend Deborah Fae Swift is pastor of South Presbyterian Church in Rochester, NY. A single mother of college-aged young adults, she blends her call to ministry, with earlier careers in music, education, and neighborhood organizing. She is a sought-after mentor to young clergy and a recognized leader of innovation in the PC(USA). Swift has transformed her once small church into an integrated set of lay-led missional networks via her Acts of Faith model. Deb is a gifted visionary who is both a detailed organizational thinker and a developer of relevant metrics to measure new models of ministry.

The Church has Left the Building is her annotated, well-documented case study of South Presbyterian's movement from a traditional, attractional church founded in 1847, to the missional Acts of Faith Community, launched in 2010. With 48 members in 2017, their twenty Acts of Faith (ministries) touched the lives of 1,350 people who participated in them at least once during the year through their 10,000+ points of contact. With five distinct worshipping communities, the 120 active participants gauge the success of their work through their E2 Index - What is the Energy & Excitement generated by this activity? An exciting read, this workbook provides a window into the thoughts and spiritual struggles of this dynamic, authentic transformational leader and provides insights to assist other leaders on their own transformative journeys.

