

“Flying the Friendly Skies” - Part 2

As we walk this journey called life, we share much in common. One of those is flying. We can all tell our stories that bring a combination of laughter or even fear. I have a humorous story that still brings a smile to my face. It happened one morning early, as I was attempting to fly out to Grand Rapids, MI. When I arrived to the designated gate at the Minneapolis Airport, the Delta airplane was on time. Great, nothing unusual there. This is when it gets weird. First the flight was delayed a half an hour and then an hour. The passengers were getting restless because we all had places to go and we all love punctuality.



What came next over the public address system is something I will not forget. The Delta rep said, “Ladies and gentlemen, I have some news this morning regarding your flight to Grand Rapids. We can’t find the pilot!” Laughter broke out among the nervous passengers. Seriously? I mean how do you lose a pilot of a Boeing 737? He eventually showed up and did he ever get the “stink eye”.

Last month in the August newsletter, I shared some real-life correlations between flying and our relationship to the church. For seven years now in this position as Regional Executive Director, I have made some unique observations that are worth noting. As it relates to flying, the first thing a church must do is *know their flight destination*. The old maxim goes, “Your mission is what you measure.” Churches feel the gravitational pull to measure success by the ABC’s (attendance, buildings and cash). The problem is that you can be successful with the ABC’s, but be a circus. Knowing your church’s flight destination speaks clearly about mission. What kind of Christian is your church designed to produce?

Second, I have learned *you must realize that you don’t know it all*. In my opinion churches are living far too independently, even within our Association. How can you be a part of an association of churches that wants to help you stay focused on mission and say, “We can accomplish more on our own?” That’s the beauty of collaboration, networking, partnership, teamwork, alliance and relationships. We can work more effectively as we collectively come together as one to accomplish our mission.

Here are the remaining correlations I have learned.

3. *Always Expect the Unexpected*

Like every flight, this relationship between region and churches is unique. This year I have encountered some amazing unexpected surprises. I have seen storms, delays, inconveniences, and downright disasters. I have learned that it is not, “Will there be huge turbulence or full-blown crisis during the flight?” There will be. It is more, “How will we get through the storms?” that will make the difference. Realizing

that potential crisis is around the corner in every church helps me weather the storms that God provides for our growth. Now I pray, “God give me the grace and love to manage the unexpected.”

4. We Are in It for the Long Haul

The marriage relationship is designed to be forever. Those traditional vows state, “for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, till death do us part”, but does this forever commitment apply between churches and the region? I had a young millennial pastor ask me, “Will CBA be around in 50 years?” What a great question. I said, “Yes and I am in it for the long haul.” One of my biggest surprises so far has been some pastors questioning the value of CB North Central to their church. In today’s challenging generation, I am seeing that churches are no longer just loyal to an organization, but to the call to infiltrate the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a community AND THAT IS IT. Is the CB North Central perfect? No! Is it healthy? It is getting better! Does it have value and purpose for a hundred plus churches in our region? Absolutely! It is a long flight to our final destination of seeing the Gospel transform our communities for Christ as CB churches. Without reservation, I am committed to assisting our churches to the final landing of this long journey. It is about mission and nothing else.

5. Invest in Some In-Flight Entertainment

Some flights are boring and our relationship as churches can be a long flight. How do we keep ourselves from being agitated, cramped up, and downright miserable? You don’t just jump out of the emergency exit when you don’t like sitting next to that annoying passenger. As churches we have to remember why we are on the flight, who we are with, and where it is we are going. Let’s be real. Is the ride bumpy and turbulent within the church? Sometimes it is. Will there be times as a family when we just can’t get along? Expect it. I get involved in a fair amount of conflict mediation scenarios between leadership and church people. Many years ago I learned to joyfully embrace conflict. God uses it to conform the church into His image. It has been my experience on the flight that conflict is inevitable and it always reveals the character of who we are. God takes it from there and then what do we do? Sometimes you just have to smile. 😊

6. Handle the Takeoffs and Landing Carefully

The most dangerous parts of any airline flight are the takeoff and the landing. How well you get started and how you finish are also the two most critical steps in our journey as churches. My flight this past year has been very challenging with Karen’s diagnosis of cancer, but it has been filled with blessings. We have watched God display Himself so powerfully. I have had the joy of speaking in well over fifty churches these past years. Some have started well as a church and others are struggling to finish. Some have started well, struggled, and now are driven by mission. In every church visited, I have seen some degree of church health, a passion for God’s truth, and a love for the pastor and his wife. I have seen a presence of strong leadership, a deep expression of fellowship, and some desire to reach others with the Gospel. It is my conclusion that it is not enough that we take off strong. We must land and finish well until the Lord returns to take home His Bride.

Let’s remember that it is the choices we make during the monotonous stretches of our flight that contribute to our success. Enjoy the journey. We all know it is worth it as we wait for the end of the flight when the Master says, “*Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.*”

Fellow Passenger,
Pat Phinney