

The Unglued Church

Why the Unglued Church Project?

Many churches would like to leave behind anxious conversations that always seem to be centered on the same struggles playing in a seemingly endless loop - not enough money, not enough members, too big of a building, too small of a mission vision.

The Unglued Church Project is for congregations who are done with the "way we've always done it" mentality, but not quite certain what needs to change or how to make change happen. If you are ready to make decisions for the future based upon faith, not fear, fueled by the promise that God is doing a new thing in our midst-- the Unglued Church Project will be a good fit for your congregation.

In most cases congregations (pastors and elders alike) respond to church questions and needs with time proven "technical" responses that may not be effective in your current situation. Adaptive change is a way of examining your current situation from new perspectives that encourages fresh thinking and discovery of fresh options that might not otherwise have been considered

All of our churches, large and small, face adaptive challenges - problems that cannot be solved by our current know-how, or a new program, or a new curriculum, or any of our standard operating procedures. These are deep challenges that require experiments, discoveries, and imaginative thinking to help us discern God's desired future for our congregations.

What is the Unglued Church Project?

The Unglued Church Project was originally designed to help congregations in Pittsburgh Presbytery address the constant changes that the Church is facing today. It is a 6-12 month long process that focuses on adaptive change in a particular congregation. Since the program launched in 2013, the Pittsburgh team has worked both with individual churches as well as presbyteries in our region.

The Unglued Church Project utilizes a layered approach of advising and teamwork to assess financial, community and spiritual strengths/weaknesses to help inform decisions about future direction for the congregation.

Who's Involved?

A Church team (minimum of 3 persons) is matched with an Adaptive Change Adviser. Church teams are comprised of the pastor, and at least two more congregation members (one of which needs to be currently serving on Council/Session).

An Adaptive Change Adviser is matched with one church for a 6-12 month long relationship. The Adviser will be a Pastor or Elder that has identifiable skills in assisting churches. At the end of the Unglued Church Project, the Advisers will be able to lead additional congregations in their presbytery through the adaptive change discernment process.

The Leadership team includes Rev. Susan Rothenberg and Rev. Sarah Robbins. This team created and continually adjusts/revises/updates the Unglued Church process. We assist the organizational work, attend each church team meeting (virtually or in-person, depending upon the location of the church), and work with the Adaptive Change Advisers on a monthly basis.

Components of the Unglued Church Project

We endeavor to engage with churches to address these important questions:

1. Who are we as a congregation?
2. Who is our neighbor?
3. Why do we exist and what is our focus?
4. How are we called to follow Jesus?
5. Are we the ones God is calling to go and serve in our particular context?
6. How to share the discernment journey with the larger congregation?

Biographies

In 2013, in partnership with PneuMatrix and Presbyterian Mission Agency, Rev. Sarah Robbins and Rev. Susan Rothenberg designed The Unglued Church pilot project to help Pittsburgh Presbytery congregations develop adaptive change capacity to respond to the challenges of a rapidly changing religious environment. They have since expanded the program for additional congregations in Pittsburgh and other presbyteries.

Sarah Robinson Robbins was ordained by the PC(USA) in 2010 and has served as pastor for a small church in an urban setting, which sold their building and merged with a larger suburban congregation. During her studies at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, she earned a Masters of Divinity, as well as a Masters degree in Marriage and Family Therapy, out of her interest in systems theory and pastoral care. Sarah serves as Interim Head of Staff at Crossroads Presbyterian Church in Monroeville, Pa. Additionally, she serves on Pittsburgh Presbytery's Committee on Ministry and on a number of presbytery committees/commission.



Sarah's experience as a Pastor's Kid and the importance of family led Sarah and her husband to move back to Pittsburgh after seminary. She is married to another teaching elder, Reverend Ben Robbins, who is Head of Staff at Northmont United Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh's North Hills. Together, they have one miraculous and busy toddler named Liam.

Susan Maxwell Rothenberg was ordained by the PC(USA) in 2011 after a long career in advertising/public relations/marketing. In her first career, she specialized in and directed integrated marketing strategies, strategic planning, and market research for major healthcare, educational, financial and real estate companies throughout the mid-Atlantic region including The Johns Hopkins University, Chase Manhattan, and Humana Healthcare.

Susan holds a Masters of Divinity from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. She served as pastor to a small church in Pittsburgh, and has served the larger church in a number of capacities including Pittsburgh Presbytery's Anti-Racism Transformation Team and as chair of the presbytery's Commission on Ministry.



Susan has been a workshop leader for NEXTChurch, a frequent contributor to "Presbyterians Today," and has served as a church consultant with PneuMatrix since 2016. Susan's focus in ministry is to help churches understand, appreciate and respond to the deep challenges and exceeding joy of mission and ministry in a post-Christendom era, and to seek always the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in finding adaptive ways to joyfully follow Jesus Christ. Susan lives in the city of Pittsburgh with her physician husband Dr. Mitchell Rothenberg and their teenage son David.