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## **Five Fundamentals Needing to Change**

By Tom Ehrich

I felt a sudden sadness when I walked through Times Square and saw a sign flashing the news that Eastman Kodak was preparing a Chapter 11 bankruptcy filing.

I wasn't surprised. The stories are legion of companies – and schools, orchestras, and museums -- that lost touch with a changing world, lost momentum, lost talent, lost business, lost their way, and eventually passed those management failures on to workers and pensioners.

To some extent, the ongoing collapse of the middle-class is the price we are paying for leaders who resisted change, shunned risk, dismissed technology, and came to believe the marketplace owed them an existence.

Kodak is just the latest victim of bad management and poor strategic decisions. But it hits home, because my father was a portrait photographer and Kodak's distinctive yellow packaging filled our home and our lives. He believed in its products and stability.

Unfortunately, Kodak wasn't nimble enough for a changing world. Once the entrepreneurial vision of George Eastman passed, managers built a virtual monopoly and rolled out unexciting products to serve captive customers. They became sitting-ducks for aggressive competitors.

I also know that the Eastman Kodak story is a metaphor for what mainline churches are experiencing. The world changed, and mainline churches ignored it, thought themselves above it, and took pride in resisting change, except for a few, bitterly contested changes that mainly satisfied certain internal constituencies.

Now many, maybe most, mainline congregations are living the Kodak story. Resisting change and misreading change, you see, meant resisting the human spirit and, in the end, misreading God

Mainline churches have a way forward. But it won't be a smooth evolution. We waited too long for that. Our way forward will be an upheaval.

Last week, I outlined four changes we must embrace:

- Clergy will need to become strong, assertive entrepreneurs, even in polities that believe in constraining clergy power.
- Institutions built on Sunday worship will need to channel resources away from Sunday worship.
- Constituents will need to embrace “harvest giving.”

- Leaders will take a fresh look at facilities – a long and strategic view, not a “survivor” view.

Today I want to add **five fundamentals that will need to change**, as well. This, in a way, will be hardest work of all.

1. Constituents who have seen church as a place to get their needs met will need to become **servants, self-sacrificial and radically inclusive**.
2. Laity will need to **let beloved institutions change radically**, and allow leadership to pass to risk-takers, upstarts, new and younger constituents.
3. Judicatory heads trained to manage institutional processes will need to become **advocates for a movement**.
4. **Seminaries** will need to stop preparing ordinands for a church that no longer exists.
5. People will need to let their faith be more than convenient religion, a comforting engagement with affirming fellowships, and instead **wade boldly into disorderly gatherings** marked by diversity and neediness.

I sense a growing momentum for letting go of the Kodak moment and moving forward. Those who embrace that momentum will be pioneers of something new, different, wonderful, scary and life-transforming. Those who “keep on keeping on” will join Eastman in the sad denouement of selling assets and closing doors.