

# On Holy Ground: Handing out Space for Grace

By Grace Stewart

I felt stuck. What had seemed like an ideal and fairly straightforward intervention was proving beyond me. It was taking up so much time, and yet despite my best efforts, it felt like we were going nowhere. I struggled between being flexible and going with the process, and the knowledge that deadlines were fast approaching. The Directors kept going off at tangents. They seemed to have lost hope. In desperation I prayed and came across a copy of a booklet I had called 'Creating Space for Grace'. I felt inspired to hand it out to everyone. After reading it, the Directors discussed what it meant for them. I listened as they identified ways that they had been ungracious and judgmental; how they felt overwhelmed with stress; how they had abandoned God's provision to rely on their own efforts. Creating space for grace had led us to holy ground.

I had been asked by an NGO providing mental health services to help them develop a framework for the future. They had grown rapidly over the past few years in response to plenty of opportunities in the environment. But a major national healthcare reform was currently in process. This would have a significant impact. The leadership was not sure where they should be going. Their vision was not clear. As one director articulated, "We are growing fatter but not stronger."

It looked a fairly straightforward piece of OD work. But as I got more involved, the process kept getting stuck. We kept going off at tangents. People looked demotivated. They lacked energy - even hope. I wondered what was going on. As I went back over my notes from the meetings, it seemed as if a pattern kept repeating itself - whenever we went off at tangents, it appeared to be precipitated by one of the directors alluding to their perceived failure. This was happening so frequently that it was difficult for me to determine what was actual failure and what were growing pains that the leadership lacked perspective on. The directors were burdened not just by work, but by a lack of charity for themselves and their professional community.

I found myself desperately praying for perspective and direction. How was I to run an organizational development intervention for an organization where the directors lacked hope? I knew that they genuinely wanted to change but a sense of paralysis hindered internal and external movement. Scanning through my OD tools for inspiration I came across my copy of, "Creating Space for Grace: God's Power in Organizational Change." Re-reading it, I felt firmly hopeful. At the next session I handed it out, but with trepidation and uncertainty. Had I got too personal? Had I gone too far?

The following meeting began with an air of anticipation. I glanced around the table and saw highlighted lines, and notes in margins. The discussion lasted three hours, during which I probably uttered twenty words. The directors identified ways that they had been ungracious with other staff, they confessed that they had invited each other to measure their worth strictly in tangible output; they admitted they felt hopelessly burdened. They acknowledged that they had sacrificed God's provision for plodding along at their work through their strengths and energies. The meeting ended in what the directors identified as: "a major paradigm shift". I found it startling that even their body language had changed, there was lightness in their posture and a resolve in them that I doubt could have been created using every OD tool a possessed. It was a privilege to witness. It was one of those moments where you just want to take off your shoes. I felt I was on holy ground.

Creating Space for Grace was an amazing catalyst for the Holy Spirit with this group of directors. It reminded us about the convergence of God's power and human responsibility. It focused our minds and hearts on the importance of grace. We have used, "Creating Space for Grace" as a touch point throughout the intervention. We leave time in each session to report instances where creating that room for grace daily, pragmatically takes form. I can't emphasize enough how much this article has impacted me personally, my OD practice, and those I have the great opportunity of working with. Many Thanks!