



Changing Lanes

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Living near Milwaukee subjects me to those freeway signs that report the timing to certain exits. As I leave the office, I can gauge my commute home based on this ever-current traffic report. Sometimes the Good Hope Road exit is only 13 minutes away, giving me cause to celebrate. My spirits sink, however, when I see it will take 30 minutes or more to get there, usually because of an accident or just bumper-to-bumper traffic.

When I see these signs, I admit my first instinct is to change lanes...so I can get where I'm going faster. If the sign reports that Good Hope Road is 24 minutes away, I immediately assume I can shorten that by changing lanes. Of course, the sign applies to all lanes equally, not just the one I'm in.

I'm not an excessive lane-changer, but I do find it advantageous from time to time. Other days, when I'm in no particular hurry, I'll just mosey along in the righthand lane. Which approach do you prefer?

As the church, we find certain lanes that are moving at comfortable speeds. For the most part, I suspect we stay in those lanes.

Because we are in the final planning stages for our [short-term mission trip workshop on June 15](#) (register your whole mission committee now before you forget again!) I've been thinking a lot about how we do mission as the church. One familiar driving lane is charity or relief work. This often involves giving away items or money, so that people's immediate needs are met. It's a justifiable driving lane that takes us where we want to go. Most of our congregations have projects that include this mode of mission.

If you check your side mirror and turn on your blinker, however, you might want to move over a lane to development or empowerment mission. It seeks to understand the circumstances in people's lives that make them reliant on charity. Nobody is excited to beg for your canned goods, so if they keep coming back to your food pantry, then something is off at a deeper level. Empowerment mission might include volunteering to help people further their education or obtain their citizenship; it might offer childcare at affordable rates.

Continuing our metaphor, there's still another lane you can cross. It takes you into the lane of advocacy ministries, in which we seek to change whole systems and structures that are keeping people in poverty or exclusion. We might find ourselves advocating for affordable healthcare or improved immigration systems. Though we might not feel as comfortable driving in this lane and would prefer moseying along in the charity lane, our advocacy efforts can have a much bigger impact. According to the president of Bread for the World (a Christian hunger advocacy group) every religious congregation would need to raise *an additional \$400,000 each year for the next ten years* to make up for the proposed cuts to anti-hunger and anti-poverty programs in the 2020 federal budget. "While religious congregations and charities play an important role [in meeting human need], federal programs provide ten times more in food assistance."

Whether you're in favor of large government programs, it's clear that we either need to significantly step up our charitable giving or we need to start changing lanes. The signs of poverty are before us, reflecting the ever-current report of need. It's true that no matter which lane we choose, we are on the same journey and we'll get there together. But, we need to be intentional about our mission, not just comfortable. We regularly give our driving directions over to Siri to choose the best route. May we give the direction of our mission as freely to God through prayerful discernment. You might just hear the Spirit's prompt to check your side mirror and turn on your blinker because you need to change lanes.