

June 7, 2019

### Along the Way: From Convergent to Divergent

When I use my Google maps app to get somewhere, it shows me several routes, but they all converge to meet at the place of destination. But if I diverge from the suggested routes, the map app must recalibrate.

In our country's early history, even though our ancestors were coming from different places, they were quickly wanted to be identified as American first. This was a convergent culture. In the 1950s, congregations functioned in a convergent way. Worship began and ended at the same time each week followed by a standardized, determined form in which only the hymns, prayers and sermon title would change each week. Mainline American congregations thrived and grew in the convergent culture of the mid-20th century and, in some ways, religion was a source of convergence of the culture. Most people attended religious services weekly.

But today we live in a divergent culture. Individual congregations, even from the same denomination or historic origins, now use different liturgies and forms of worship. Generational differences have influenced the expression of worship through a variety of musical forms and the use of technology. More people now, than ever in our history, do not have any religious affiliation.

As a culture we have also moved from the convergence of shared large cultural identities to the divergence of individual preference. As a liberal church, we have been influenced by culture and been tempted to give the subjective feelings of individuals supreme authority. Our challenge as a church community, now living in a divergent culture, is to seek ways to be grounded and faithful to the unchanging truth of God's love and justice. It's an invitation to examine our freedom as individuals with personal sacrifice and spiritual practices that curb personal desires in favor of the greater purpose.

We are in a time of recalibrating. The map of our new landscape is not fully clear, but we are open eyed and waiting!

—Paula Northwood