

Edwin Friedman. *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. New York: The Guilford Press, 2011. 319 pages. \$32.00

As church leaders may know, often our church communities are not the Christian utopia that we hope that it is or should be. Change is hard and conflicts abound. There is plenty of literature addressing a myriad of conflicts in churches and how to work through them. One way of understanding the church is using family system theory and utilizing family systems therapy to address the problems and conflicts.

While *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* by Edwin Friedman was published in 1985, Friedman's reflection on Family Systems as it relates to the religious organizations such as the church or the synagogue can be very insightful for those of us who work in churches or even attend churches. This is especially important for Asian Americans, as we do often find our churches to be a part of our extended families. Thus, it is helpful for us to understand the interconnectedness of our fellow congregation members and the dynamics that exist.

Friedman's thesis is that all clergy are involved in "three distinct families whose emotional forces interlock: families within the congregation, our congregations, and our own."¹ The emotional forces of these families are interconnected and increased understanding can increase effective functioning. Using the framework of family systems theory, we can improve our pastoral care roles and functioning in our churches. Though Friedman is a pastoral counselor and family systems is used for therapy, this book goes beyond therapy to incorporate "counseling, administration, officiating, preaching, personal growth, and leadership."² Friedman emphasizes the importance of leadership being able to bring clarity and being a non-anxious presence that can define goals and values, helping those within the family to develop self-definition. This will allow for people to think about their roles in a more integrative way rather than to become defined by the roles they play.

Friedman utilizes his decades of experience as a pastoral counselor to provide examples and demonstrate his points. He guides the readers to take a step back to see the bigger picture of the interconnectedness of a "family" to see the whole rather than individual parts. The book is divided into four sections, beginning with an introduction to family theory, then discussing the families that exist within the congregation which leads into his argument of the congregation as a family system. Finally, he addressed the clergy and our families—as how clergy relate to their families can be important to how clergy interacts with the congregational family system.

One of his most important contributions is conflicts within the church should be located in a system, rather than in a vacuum. It does not look for blame, but to place the problem into the context of a community. This is an approach of clergy toward congregation members, both to provide care for members and help them better understand their problems, but also as a strategy to work with the different clergy-congregant relationship. In section three, Friedman looks at the congregation itself as a family system, which can provide a theoretical framework of better understanding conflict and its resolution because this approach tends to "redistribute the guilt and to take the strong out of toxic issues."³

Though his readers may not become professional therapists, having a basic understanding of family systems and applying this approach to congregational and personal families present an

¹ Edwin Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: the Guilford Press, 1985), 1.

² Ibid., 2

³ Ibid., 196.

opportunity for us to take on healthier leadership models as well as to address concerns of the congregation by identifying the informal family structures that may exist within the formal structure of the church so that the church can be the family that God intended.

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