

New soles for a new walk

By Nate Adams, Executive Director, IBSA

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I read an article recently about the upswing in business that cobblers and shoe repair services are experiencing in this down economy. With money tight, people are looking for longer life from their clothes, their cars, their computers, and yes, their footwear.



For many, the decision to repair rather than purchase new shoes is an economic one. But I've been doing it for years with a different motivation. To me, dress shoes are almost by definition uncomfortable. Maybe I just have fickle or hard-to-fit feet, but the very notion of "comfortable dress shoes" strikes me as an oxymoron. So when I've finally invested enough time in a pair of shoes to break them in, I want to hang on to them!

As a child and teenager I didn't learn much about shoe repair, because about the time I wore out my shoes I also outgrew them. But as an adult, I've learned that freshly sewn soles and a professional buff and shine can give me a pair of shoes that is actually better than new. On the outside they're attractive and durable, but on the inside – ahhh, the fit tells me they're mine.

Recently we asked pastors and church leaders in a statewide survey to share with us the top needs in their churches. Options included help with Sunday School, children's ministry, evangelism, discipleship, strategy and planning, and a number of other ministry areas. Yet the need expressed by more churches than any other was the need for spiritual renewal.

As missionaries and staff here at IBSA, we are driven to prayer by this expressed need, because we know that renewal in the hearts of God's people is the work of the Holy Spirit, and that our best help is given when we plead with God for the renewal so many in our churches desire. We also want to offer whatever experience or gifts we have, to consult, facilitate, train, to provide resources – whatever churches need most.

From my own experience, I would also urge churches to consider a specific, intentional church renewal process, such as the Church Renewal Journey. This can include lay renewal weekends, small groups and follow-up weekends that include instruction on spiritual gifts, and a number of follow-up steps that facilitate genuine spiritual revitalization and that can help turn churches inside-out into the mission fields of their community and world.

I had the opportunity to be part of the re-visioning process of church renewal when I served at the North American Mission Board, and today God is using the Church Renewal Journey to bring new life and direction to churches in many parts of the country. Bob Foy, the national director, is a dear friend, and

right here in Illinois Mark Shipley is now coordinating a growing network of leaders that can help churches begin a journey back to the first love Jesus spoke of in Revelation 2:4-7.

For spiritual renewal to return and grow here in Illinois among our churches, we need a growing base of mature leaders who long for it to happen, and who are willing to sacrifice for it. If you feel drawn to this ministry, or if you have need in your church for this kind of help, please pray and then contact Mark Shipley at shipleymark@comcast.net or (309) 361-3566. Sylvan Knobloch here at IBSA (sylvanknobloch@IBSA.org or (217) 391-3133) can also assist you in exploring this ministry.

Desiring spiritual renewal is one thing. But actually taking the steps to pursue it, especially in your own church, is quite another. Let me urge you not to fear discomfort as you might a new pair of shoes, but to let go of your worn out comfort for a little while, in order to regain a renewed church that is revitalized, stronger, poised for the future, and ready for a Spirit-filled walk with a new spring in its step.

Trudging through the last snowfall we had here in Springfield made me notice that my own broken-in dress shoes both have soles that are separating from their stitching. Not only were the cold and the moisture that seeped in uncomfortable, they made me realize that I was slowly ruining the upper part of my shoes, and my socks – and that ultimately I would ruin my health, if I didn't do something.

So I'm making plans now for repairs to my soles that will bring renewal to my walk. I want to be ready to journey through rain or shine this spring, when I see new life all around me. May the Holy Spirit of God renew our souls that we may be ready for that same kind of spiritual journey in our churches. And may we see new life born all around us as a result.