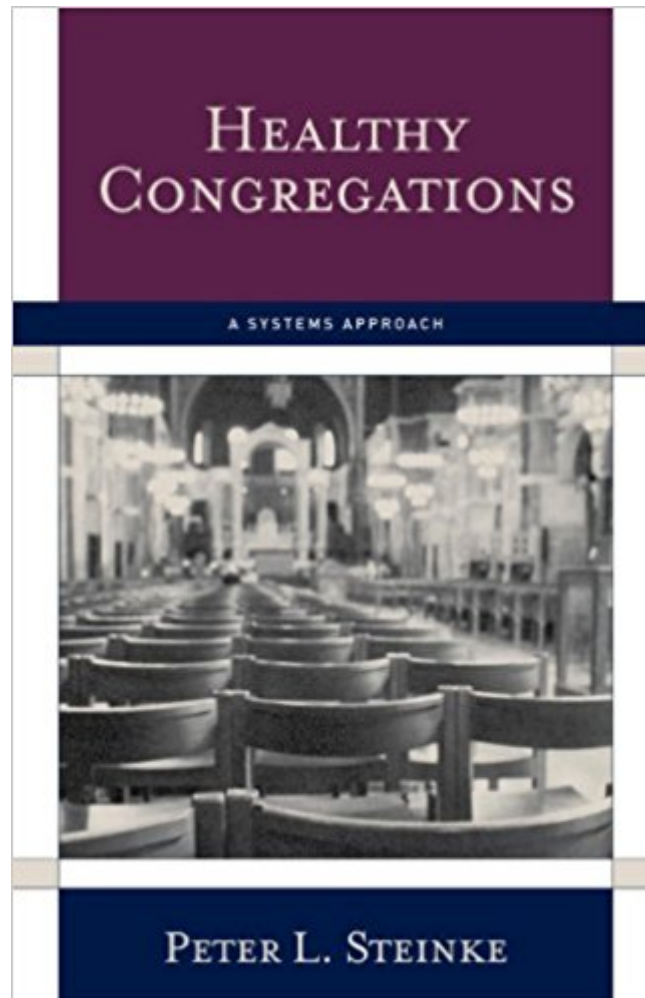




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Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach



Synopsis

In this sequel to *How Your Church Family Works*, Peter Steinke takes readers into a deeper exploration of the congregation as an emotional system. He outlines the factors that put congregations at risk for anxiety and conflict. Learn ten principles of health, how congregations can adopt new ways of dealing with stress and anxiety, as well as how spiritually and emotionally healthy leaders influence the emotional system. Featuring a new preface and a fresh redesign, this book is a classic work by one of the most respected names in congregational consulting.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Iâ™ll be mulling over these systems thinking concepts for years to come. . . .[Healthy Congregations is] worth reading a.s.a.p. (Words on the Word)

Peter L. Steinke is an internationally respected congregational systems consultant who has also served as a parish pastor, an educator, and a therapist for clergy. He is the author of the best-selling books *How Your Church Family Works* and *Healthy Congregations*.

Drawing deeply on the biblical images of the body of Christ as well as a variety of sciences, from biology to neurology to pathology, Steinke invites the reader to take a wide angle on reality, "the subatomic level of reality is systemic," he says, or to quote the Scriptures, "We are members of one another" (Eph 4:25). Congregations are living organisms

with a hidden connectedness. Health, much like a human body, is the result of how this living system responds to the inevitability of alien forces or disease. For Steinke, a healthy congregation is not one without troubles; rather, a healthy congregation is one that responds to dysfunction through internal healing processes. In other words, healthy congregations are communities that take personal responsibility for their own healing and thus, their own health. This being the case, this book is also a book about leadership or stewardship within the body of Christ. Leaders, as those who have taken up formal roles of personal responsibility, are the chief stewards that can enable health or disease within the body. Leaders clarify mission rather than enable over-dependency. Leaders retain a non-anxious presence when the body is put under stress. Influenced by Edwin Friedman who applied advances in family systems theory to congregational life, Steinke identifies leaders as self-differentiated: able to take responsible action and resist overreactive attacking. This book reads like sage counsel for congregational leaders who feel as though they are stuck in ruts, fire-fighting, or simply out-of-gas. That is why this is a book about hope. In a culture where many church's membership and resources are declining, Steinke recognizes the hard task of looking into the soul of a congregation. He rightfully deconstructs the maxim "healthy, growing churches". He writes, "Some organic growth is downward - a deepening, a rooting, a maturing process." In a culture who, from the very top, can only define success in terms of "big" and "winning", Steinke provides congregations a truer and more fulfilling lens through which to understand reality and vitality. Gratitude, graciousness, clarity, mood, and tone are words that help portray what a hope-filled, Spirit-led congregation looks and feels like. This is not a book of tactics, tools, and resources. It is rather a book about healing and hope. This is a short read with discussion questions that would greatly enrich any church's leadership body. The reader won't walk away with a to-do list; instead, the reader will walk with a framework to better navigate the emotional processes swirling around them in their congregation life, and a nurturing guide to help them enable congregational health.

Peter Steinke offers a look at what makes for a healthy congregation from the perspective of systems theory. There are other books that, in my opinion, do a much better job articulating just what, exactly, systems theory looks like (especially Peter Senge's book *The Fifth Discipline*), but this is helpful in applying systems theory specifically to congregations. Steinke identifies what "health" looks like in congregations (it is not the absence of illness, but rather the way the body responds to the illness), and how to promote it. I was particularly amused by the story of "Mr.

Schmidt" on page 18, and particularly helped by the discussion of the functioning of the human brain on pages 64-66. I loved this paragraph on page 70: "How many congregations believe they are in the 'we exist for ourselves' business rather than the 'we are in mission to the community, even the world' business? How many congregations confuse 'the way we have done things for decades' with the 'larger apostolic purposes'? How many congregations mistake the means for the ends?" But the heart and soul of the book is about creating a healthy congregation, understood as an emotional system. This book, along with Peter Steinke's other book *How Your Church Family Works* and Edwin Friedman's *Generation to Generation*, present basic theoretical concepts that every congregational leader ought to absorb if they truly want their congregation (and the people in it) to become healthier.

Useful information on many aspects of group dynamics and grounded in the reality of creation. Anchoring insights in the biological nature of the human body and how it parallels group dynamics.

Peter Steinke is the foremost interpreter of the work of Rabbi Edwin Friedman. Steinke makes Friedman's brilliant insights into family systems approachable. Whereas Friedman offers depth, Steinke offers clarity. Steinke continues to make family systems an accessible and powerful tool for Congregational transformation. The principles of family systems, popularized by Steinke, have helped me understand group dynamics in the churches I have served better than any other approach. Highly recommended! -Amos Smith (author of *Healing The Divide*)

Excellent, excellent, and again excellent! As a Pastor and Mental health Clinic Director the author provided new perspectives on this subject. The balance between some of the familiar ideas and alternative ways of thinking about healthy church, is helping me, evaluate my context further. Ed

Peter Steinke's book uses a systems approach to discuss the challenges Leader's face in building healthy churches. Don't let the title put you off. Using the physiology of the body and its function as an analogy to congregational life he then supplies useful practical examples, identifying struggles and solutions. Each chapter has a series of questions that can be used for self or group work. Bottom line: healthy leaders produce healthy churches. Using the family systems approach and applying it to congregations helps clarify strengths and challenges. As a church leader for 25 years I highly recommend it.

Many systems theory books use poor theoretical models, but "Healthy Congregations," seems intent on the pragmatism of leadership and shepherding. Highly recommended.

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