

Transition Word for the Week – June 13<sup>th</sup>

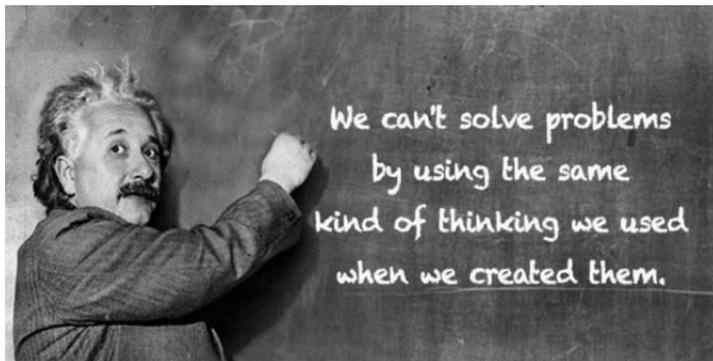
TRANSITIONAL  
MINISTRY  
Word  
For the  
Week

## wicked problems



There was a time when we approached problems with the perspective that the challenge was to find the “right” answer. We believed there was a solution that could “fix” the problem or answer the question we were asking. In the contemporary world of organizational theory, these would be labelled as “technical” solutions. The problem can be “fixed” by learning a new skill, finding a new approach, re-jigging the organization decision making chart. But increasingly, organizations are discovering that there are

many problems that are not so straight forward – within some circles these kinds of problems have earned the label of being “wicked”.



Wicked problems are the ones where there is no clear solution or answer because it is hard to name the exact problem. Every time the organization thinks it has found a way forward, what it discovers is that has actually

unearthed deeper layers related to the initial framing of the problem. Further, not everyone shares the same perspective on what the real issue is. It is viewed from different experience, different positions, different world views. It may well be as Albert Einstein suggested that these kinds of problems require a new kind of thinking.

This may seem all a little theoretical for congregational life but it is a description of where congregations in transition find themselves. We know there are problems, but we can't come to the place where we can all define it in the same way. We want a solution, but we can't come up with a simple way forward. And just when we think we are making headway, something points to another layer of the issues to be contemplated.

Living with wicked problems demands a deeper kind of conversation, and an openness to creative way of thinking that break outside the boxes with which we are familiar. An awareness of the challenges of “wicked problems” can free us from the anxiety of thinking that we are just missing the solution. It gives us permission to say this is complex; this is outside of our experienced; this is going to take conversation, exploration and creativity if we are to find a way forward.

Moving forward in the time in which we find ourselves, will not happen by applying former solutions. The normal solutions no longer apply. As people of faith, the gift that we bring to the wicked problems of

congregational transition is faith that the Spirit is with us and can be the source of creativity and openness.