



Regional Listening Conference

January 31, 2009

Bedford Presbyterian Church



Date: January 31, 2009

Title of Meeting: Regional Transformational Listening Conference

Location: Bedford Presbyterian Church

Part I: Identifying Proud Moments in the Region

Women taking on leadership roles (elders, ministers)

Youth camps and retreats

Leadership events for adults (e.g. Altoona)

2006 Regional Assembly at Messiah College; accepted new congregations which were “non-traditional” (e.g. Haitian and Hispanic congregations)

Fellowship experiences:

- Camp and conference
- Men’s women’s, youth
- Regional assemblies

Welcoming of new churches

Bussing of youth from camp to 2004 Regional Assembly

Miracle Day(s)

January training events

Purchasing of camps/churches using year-round

Multiple staff positions in state/general

Communication

Regional educational opportunities



Fall youth retreat

When every church had a minister

Very active youth/youth council (1990s)

Youth anti-racism training at Daytona Beach

The sense of community that can be found at camp

The large amount of youth attending regional activities

Increasing diversity of the regional church

Decommissioning service at Nordmont; a sense of hope; positive experience

Other observations:

Leaders need facilitators to connect to “the dream”; to become bigger than ourselves

What we do together, we cannot do apart. The church is meant to be a collaborative community.

What does ‘region’ mean? Community, coming together, being larger than ourselves, calling and challenging us to transcend, relationship!

The church has become too inward-focused, too insular. We’re not treating each other as one body; we should be ‘living stones’, one body of the Living Christ. We should be living sacrificially, for the sake of Christ and His glory.

Transformation should be ‘other-oriented’.

Leaders in ministry need to be fed spiritually. Region needs to re-address this issue. We must evaluate this region’s ministry through this filter: “Is this structure life-giving?”



Part II: Key forces and factors currently affecting the region (Keep in mind: the region *is* church.)

Questions to consider:

***What are the implications for the region if we don't act on these things?
Are there opportunities for ministry?***

Economics/shrinking finances

- Reducing of staffs/programs/cutbacks/survival mode, not going forward
- Opportunities for ministry: find new streaks of financing/focusing on stewardship/become 'lean and efficient'

Aging of congregations/lack of young families

- Implications: Dwindling numbers in leadership/narrow focus in ministry
- Opportunities: Expand the concept of ministry

Spiritual nurturing

- Without this, it will lead to burnout, fatigue, loss of focus, slow, painful death of ministry
- Opportunities: Retreats, camps, clergy consultation, telling our stories, training, workshops, making prayer the center of what we do

Embracing diversity

- Clash of style and culture: music, language, communication styles
- Implications: If we don't adapt, we won't be God's church



- Opportunities: Whenever we get together and communicate we gain a better understanding of one another

Role of the church

- Leadership of spiritual development
- Opportunities: Gospel has value

Transitional society

- Acceptance of diverse backgrounds
- Opportunities for the unchurched

Commitment and communication

- Lack of this is the death knell for church and region
- Disconnect/need more activities and opportunities to get together
- Opportunities: Building on leads to a stronger body; acceptance of youth and nurturing of their vision

Closed minds and bad attitudes

- Pushing people away/judgment/not truly 'walking the walk'/ church prejudices
- Opportunities: Connect with youth and pave the way to opportunities in ministry

Keeping younger members connected to the church

- If overcome, would be more open and accepting/become a stronger church family

Focus on church becoming dimmer, due to failing economy

- If overcome, the church would play a bigger role in everyday life



Other observations:

Spiritual nurturing will solve most of these concerns (reference to Diana Butler Bass' book *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, which emphasizes individuals experiencing vitality through some form of spiritual discipline)

What is the role of the church in society? Must become a driving force, but is often disrespected and devalued. The church of the 21st century has more in common with the church of the first and second century than all of the churches in between. A triadic community comprised of church, local community, and home has the potential to emerge

How is the church perceived? If the church is no longer relevant, it dies.

Modes of impersonal communication cannot replace the inherent value of meeting face-to-face. We are relational beings. How do we personalize our communication?

- Get together
- Discern ways to be better stewards of finances/share the burden
- Share our stories
- Ensure timely publication of events
- Recapture vision

Part of the transformation journey helps us to explore ways to be open to primary challenges and forming a process. Huge societal movements/cultural currents are out of our control. But if we internalize the blame, it can also become an excuse to avoid continuing the work of the ministry. Contextually, the Disciples of Christ became a denomination when 'becoming a denomination' was considered passé. Every living thing has a life cycle; they go through changes. The church must do this, also.



Part III: What are some essential, non-negotiable conditions which must be part of the regional transformation process?

(Keep in mind: Transformation is both strategic and systemic. We are assuming God will 'show up' and move/work/transform us. Conditions should be tools which are part of the evaluative process)

Questions to consider:

Who do you expect to be involved?

How long will the process take?

How inclusive will it be?

Realization that God wants/intends it to happen.

Need lots of courage.

Need the consensus of the people of the region.

Be transparent, "without guile".

Ready for and accepting of change.

Need individuals who are spiritual and faithful; who have a "mind to work", or the process is doomed from the start.

Utilize newest forms of communication/be transparent.

Foster commitment as a whole body (i.e. enough people to make it work).

Step-out in faith; not be afraid to fail; accepting redirection/be flexible.

Ensure all parts of regional life are represented in the transformation process.

People who are willing to change, open-minded, loving, united, willing to communicate, committed.



Define the target and develop a way to measure success (Don't do things for the sake of doing them. The target need to be well-defined. The 'old' ways of measuring success may no longer be relevant. What is the ethos of the region going to look like?)

Need mentoring through the process.

Trust between the region and the church.

Respect and inclusiveness (listening to and accepting everyone with respect without insisting on agreement)

Commitment/ownership (everyone must be dedicated and full-heartedly believe in everything being planned and executed)

Loving/caring (a church is nothing without a sense of family and togetherness. We must love and help each other as we would want to be loved/helped)

Communication needs to be transparent. All churches need to know something is going on so they aren't surprised when it arrives.

Prayer needs to be at the heart of the process. All churches need to be called on to pray in, around, and through

Participation must must cross-generational; cross-racial. Let all be heard.

The process needs to raise our hopes and expectations. Focus on the 'big', the abundance.

Honor the past and those things which worked well, but don't be tied to them.

Accountability.

Follow-through with strategies.

Other observations:

In the transformation process, there must be a component which suggests we are constantly transforming. The journey is transformative. If the system does not change, it will die. We are part of a cyclical process which should continue to feed life to the body. Complacency and lack of introspection will hinder the process. One of the key tasks of leadership in the transformation process is to continuously translate and encourage ("we make the road by walking").

What kind of leadership is needed? They must be enthusiastic, excited, wholly-committed to the task.



The process should be in stages, not marked periods of time. Continuously make new opportunities for others to enter the process.

Three phases of regional transformation:

1. Making the case for transformation. Ask the big questions, such as: “What is it about?” Learn about the context: “What is the picture?” Become students of the context.
2. Reinforce God’s vision for the world and the church. Articulate theologically through prayer, scripture, dialogue with one another (mission/vision statement). What does ‘region’ mean? Articulate, re-define, reclaim, re-commit. We cannot assume people will want to be a part of the process until they have a clarified understanding of what the region is.
3. Organize for mission. Actuate/live into it.