



The Grapevine

CONNECTING THE CONGREGATIONS OF THE PRESBYTERY OF DETROIT

April 2013

Centerview: Resilient Congregations by Tim Shapiro



by the Rev. Dr. Allen D. Timm, Executive Presbyter

The following article written by Tim Shapiro, Director of the Lilly Center for Congregations, reprinted with permission, spoke to me about how congregations can be resilient, changing to meet our changing world. I recommend your session discuss at your next session meeting. I would love to hear your feedback on the article and how it spoke to your session. To read this article in its entirety, please follow this link: <http://www.alban.org/conversation.aspx?id=10200>

On my way to work I drive by two church buildings. One building used to be the home of a Methodist congregation, the other formerly a home for a Roman Catholic congregation. The Methodist building is a coffee house, now for sale. The Roman Catholic building has been renovated into office space for an architectural firm.

What happened to these two congregations? It is likely that a variety of factors contributed to their end, such as changing neighborhoods, poor leadership, death of members, lack of new members, more people becoming indifferent to religion, and so forth.

In that same neighborhood, on my

way home from work, I drive by two other congregations; one, again, a Methodist congregation and the other another Roman Catholic congregation. These two congregations have experienced challenges, they have lost members because of death, they have had leadership changes, and they exist in the same culture of growing indifference regarding religion. Yet these two congregations robustly respond to threats and misfortunes. They are resilient.

Why do some congregations carry on despite disruptions while others close? What creates resiliency?

To read the rest of the article please use the following link: <http://www.alban.org/conversation.aspx?id=10200>

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Clergy Ordination Anniversaries

April

Grosch, Adam	5
Kogel, Lynne	20
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THE PARISH PAPER

IDEAS AND INSIGHTS FOR ACTIVE CONGREGATIONS

Coeditors: Herb Miller and Cynthia Woolever - www.TheParishPaper.com

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Making Informed Decisions during Times of Change

Ann asked what seemed like a simple question: “We need more input and information before our committee can make a recommendation. How can we make sure that our decisions are wise and all voices are heard?” Congregations and regional bodies face this challenge when change or diminishing resources call for innovative approaches—such as new staffing configurations or shifting mission priorities. With many people involved—some with strong views and others with little interest or knowledge—how can leaders accurately portray the priorities of all those affected? One-on-one conversations about new policies are impractical in congregations. And when a regional governing body charges a task group with making proposals, the number of potential stakeholders grows even larger. In general, the larger the geography and the greater the number of stakeholders, the more complex the work becomes.

Where Do We Begin?

Obtaining accurate information means evaluating trends and reviewing resources (like budgets and revenues). Beyond that, the task group needs to hear a range of opinions and perspectives. However, some guiding principles for getting to the best-informed recommendation require the task group to answer some basic questions first.

What is our task? Without knowing the question, which serves as a kind of GPS system, the group is likely to find it impossible to arrive at their final destination. What is the need, problem, issue, question, challenge, or opportunity that prompted the formation of the task group in the first place? What purposes would be served by any recommendation the group might make? What do we hope to accomplish? What are our greatest hopes if the church or regional body acts on our recommendations?

What do we need to know (that we don't already know)? The group already knows more than they think they do. Begin by making a list of what the task group or committee already knows. Next, list what additional information would be ideal to know before making a grounded and well-informed proposal.

Who are the stakeholders? What individuals, groups, or organizations will be affected by our recommendations? If possible, list these in order, starting with those most affected and ending with those least likely to be affected (those parties least likely to notice or care). Stakeholders vary in their experiences with the congregation or regional body and in their level of knowledge and commitment. Thus, summing up all perspectives requires different kinds of data gathering strategies.

How do we discover our core values? Organizations—whether governing bodies or congregations—always act on their core values, not on their mission statements. Core values are those beliefs and convictions that determine the actions of the majority of leaders and members. A review of the recent past reveals the way core values operate in a regional body or congregation:

- What ministries are funded and where do members give time and energy?
- What programs and activities receive the most support?
- What assumptions or goals direct policies and planning decisions?



LOOKS LIKE ONE MEMBER FOUND
“STRONGLY DISAGREE” A BIT INADEQUATE
FOR EXPRESSING HIS OPINION

Although core values are partially invisible to members and leaders, they powerfully frame perceptions. Stemming from theology, past experiences, and current context, core values determine what we do and how we do it. Effective data gathering tools uncover actual core values and prevent preferred core values—what people think *ought* to be or *should* be—from creating circular arguments and meaningless proposals.

What Way(s) Should We Gather Information?

Once the basic questions above have been answered, the group needs to determine which information gathering process(es) will build the most support for any final recommendation or action. At the end of the process, all stakeholders should perceive that they had the chance to contribute their views. It is fine if some constituents lack the interest to participate in any process as long as *they* make the decision not to participate rather than concluding that they never had the opportunity.

Most groups decide that they need more than one approach. Just as any building or renovation project calls for multiple tools—saws, hammers, nails, power or hand-held tools—groups need the same multiple-device tactic to investigate the best plan for organizational renovation or change.

Statistics and Trends. One category of information gathering uses numbers, charts, and figures to describe people, budgets, programs, or congregations. These methods are especially effective for illustrating the current state of things and to quantify change. Congregations or regional bodies should track some telling ten-year trends. For example: the number of congregations and total membership; average number of members per congregation; the total and per church number of baptisms and new members; average tenure of pastors; number of churches served by a full-time pastor; overall budget for the regional body; average contribution per worshiper; percentage of budget for staff, programs, or other expenses; programs and average number of participants; and number and kinds of people active in leadership roles.

Surveys. Questionnaires can be mailed, distributed during worship services, given out at meetings (such as church boards, regional meetings, or events), or set up online. (Beware: Although online surveys are inexpensive, they tend to yield very low response rates.) Survey questions can either be close-ended, where all the responses are provided (for example, a statement followed by “Do you strongly

agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree?”) or open-ended, where the person answering the survey gives a written response. For example, “What are some of the best things you see happening in your congregation right now?”

One example of an in-worship survey designed to help congregations discover their core values is on this website: www.TheParishPaper.com/free-resources. Another easy-to-use worship survey reveals a church’s current strengths and ways to build on those strengths (at www.USCongregations.org/survey).

Interviews. Other methods bring balance to the picture painted by numbers and figures. Capturing stories or recounting experiences make up the essence of this avenue. For example, regional bodies can conduct short phone interviews with all (or a sample of) pastors, committee chairs, leaders in similar regions, or national denominational staff. In a congregational setting, consider doing ten-minute phone interviews with Sunday school teachers, committee members, or other sets of members.

Focus groups. Structured group interviews give additional rich insights if the task group identifies small affinity groups (such as pastors who serve in small churches, pastors new to the region, or recently ordained pastors). Carefully designed questions, prepared in advance, generate good insights. For example: “Tell us about an occasion in the past year when you had contact with a regional staff member. What brought you together and what was an outcome of that contact? What’s an important challenge that your congregation faces? How has the regional staff helped you tackle that challenge?”

In a congregational setting, focus groups prove effective with similar individuals such as new members, young mothers, or retired members.

Final Destination: A Successful Recommendation

After compiling what they’ve learned, the task group draws on this knowledge to make an informed proposal. Good decision-making procedures include obtaining input from all stakeholders, permitting all opinions to be discussed in a respectful and open way, allowing the appropriate committees and ministries to reflect on proposals and offer feedback, and constructing a plan to evaluate the recommendation’s effectiveness in the future.

Presbytery of Detroit Calendar of Events

To have your Churches event posted please send the information to sandy@detroitpresbytery.org.

May 2013	
4	Presbyterian Men's service project 9:00 am to 3:00 pm. Gathering at St. John's Presbyterian Church, 1961 E. Lafayette, Detroit, MI 48207. Click here for flyer
7	Taizé Worship 7:00 pm at Dearborn, Littlefield
17	Healthy Congregations 2013 Leadership Series "Polarization in Society and Congregations: Understanding It and Addressing It." at Calvin College in Grand Rapids. Click here for more information
19-25	Hurricane Sandy Mission Trip to New Jersey. Click here for flyer
27	Presbytery Office Closed in observance of Memorial Day
30	Ecumenical Theological Seminary 7th Annual Spirit Awards Banquet. Click here for more information
June 2013	
4	Taizé Worship 7:00 pm at Dearborn, Littlefield
4	TRAINING in Prepare/Enrich being offered at Samaritan Counseling Center of SE Michigan, Nardin Park United Methodist Church, Farmington Hills. For more info and registration go to www.samaritancounselingmichigan.com
8	Session 1 for the reading of the 2012 session minutes and records from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm at Detroit, Westminster, 17567 Hubbell, Detroit, MI 48235
11	Session 2 for the reading of the 2012 session minutes and records from 6:30 pm to 9:00 pm at Plymouth, First, 701 Church St., Plymouth, MI 48170
25	Presbytery Meeting at 4:00 pm, Cherry Hill Presbyterian Church, 24110 Cherry Hill Rd., Dearborn, MI 48124; 313-563-4800.
30-July 5	Covenant Gathering 2013 "Seasons of Faith" at Michindoh Conference Center, Hillsdale, MI. More information on the Covenant Gathering web site http://www.covenantgathering.com
July 2013	
2	Taizé Worship 7:00 pm at Dearborn, Littlefield
4	Presbytery Office closed in observance of Independence Day
16-20	Presbyterian Youth Triennium 2013 at Purdue University. Click here for the Detroit Delegation Registration information and forms. If you have questions please contact Matt Nickel at mnickel@fpcro.org
August 2013	
1-3	World Mission partner conference at Big Tent. The Power of "We": Collective Impact in God's Mission. Click here for more information
6	Taizé Worship 7:00 pm at Dearborn, Littlefield
19	Board of Pensions Orientation for New Clergy 12:00 pm to 3:00 pm at Ann Arbor, First 1432 Washtenaw Ave., Ann Arbor, MI 48104
20	Board of Pensions Discussion of the Coming Change in Health Benefits 10:00 am to 12:30 pm at Ann Arbor, First 1432 Washtenaw Ave., Ann Arbor, MI 48104
20	Retired Clergy Luncheon 12:30 pm with Board of Pensions Rep. Allison Seed at Ann Arbor, First 1432 Washtenaw Ave., Ann Arbor, MI 48104
27	Presbytery Meeting at 4:00 pm, St. Paul's Presbyterian Church, 27475 Five Mile Rd., Livonia, MI 48154; 734-422-1470
September 2013	
2	Presbytery Office closed in observance of Labor day
3	Taizé Worship 7:00 pm at Dearborn, Littlefield
21	Warren, Celtic Cross Fall Holiday Craft Show and Bake Sale from 9 am-4pm and table rentals will be \$25. For further information please contact Celtic Cross Presbyterian Church, 11451 E. Ten Mile Rd., Warren, MI 48089 or call 586-757-7832.

	October 2013
1	Taizé Worship 7:00 pm at Dearborn, Littlefield
10-13	Take a Pilgrimage Through Faith with a group at Howell Conference and Nature Center. Sponsored by Presbyterian Pilgrimage. Click here for more information
26	Month of Mission Breakfast 9:00 am followed by Presbytery Meeting at 11:30 am at Grosse Pointe Memorial, 16 Lakeshore, Grosse Pointe Farms, MI 48230
	November 2013
3	Daylight Savings Time Ends - set clocks back one hour
5	Taizé Worship 7:00 pm at Dearborn, Littlefield
28	Presbytery Office closed for Thanksgiving Day
	December 2013
3	Taizé Worship 7:00 pm at Dearborn, Littlefield
14	Men's Advent Communion Breakfast 8:30 am at Park United Presbyterian Church, 14 Cortland, Highland Park, MI 48203. Speaker is the Honorable Kurtis Wilder, Judge, Michigan Court of Appeals and member of Plymouth, First.
24-25	Presbytery Office Closed for Christmas Holiday
31-Jan 1	Presbytery Office Closed for New Year Holiday
	January 2014
28	Presbytery Meeting at 4:00 pm, St. John's Presbyterian Church, 1961 E. Lafayette, Detroit, MI 48207; 313-567-0213. Installation of Moderator and Vice Moderator.
	February 2014
22	Presbytery Meeting at 9:00 am Location TBD This is a Saturday Meeting
	March 2014
	April 2014
26	Presbytery Meeting at 9:00 am Location TBD This is a Saturday Meeting
	May 23014
	June 2014
14-21	General Assembly Here - No Presbytery Meeting.
	July 2014
	August 2014
26	Presbytery Meeting at 4:00 pm Location TBD
	September 2014
	October 2014
25	Month of Mission Breakfast 8:30 am followed by Presbytery Meeting at 11:30 am Location TBD
	November 2014
	December 2014
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