

ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE NORTHWEST REGIONAL CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)

A Report to the Region

Third Draft
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1

INTRODUCTION

"Behold, I am doing a new thing." Isaiah 43:19

How This Analysis Came Into Being

This diagnostic analysis of the organizational functioning of the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) was conducted as part of the *RISE Process* authorized by the Regional Board in the spring of 2006. The Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) recognizes that the nature of its membership, its context for ministry, and the thrust of its ministry must take into consideration the challenges of a new day. An era in the history of the church has ended and a new era is beginning, causing a veritable sea of change in the identity, role, and mission of North American churches.

Social Transitions

Along with all other churches in North America, the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is making its way through several complex transitions, even upheavals, which are occurring in western society: changes in the role and status of women, immigration and its effects, new ethnic consciousness among minority groups, new emerging economic patterns, new patterns of religious expression, to name just a few.

Living in the “None Zone”¹

The following observations have been excerpted from Patricia O’Connell Killen and Mark Silk’s book Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Northwest: The None Zone.

“Sociological studies about the Northwest identify the unique challenge and opportunity for ministry that faces the Region, as it looks the future. As noted in more than one of the interviews, in many ways the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), with its values of inclusion and openness may be uniquely positioned to respond to this ministry context.

In the Pacific Northwest there are simultaneous tendencies, at a different and sometimes the same moment, to cooperate across and beyond religious institutions, to almost sectarian religious conflicts and extremes, to religious indifference.... Here theological heritage, creative imagination, fascination with the new, and the promise of unlimited possibility coalesce to make religion present in both conventional and unconventional ways.

Throughout the region’s history most people have not participated in institutional religion, and the few who have are divided among many different groups. No single denomination or religious community has been present for any period of time in numbers sufficient to constitute a dominant public force with which all must contend. The absence of a single, persistently dominant, strongly institutionalized religious reference group colors all individual and institutional religiousness in the region.

Religion has never been a strong mechanism of social control. With minimal social pressure to affiliate with a religious institution, individuals are free to pursue or abandon a spiritual quest, as they will. Individuals and groups develop belief, practice, and sensibility under little pressure to conform and with considerable freedom to experiment and innovate. This physical and spiritual environment confronts all who enter the region with a set of religious tasks that involve clarifying individual religious identity, constructing social relationships, and making sense of the land itself.

Low levels of religious adherence (affiliation with an organized religious community), coupled with the lack of a dominant denomination, render religious identity, commitment, and long-term belonging within a

¹ Patricia O’Connell Killen and Mark Silk editors, Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Northwest: The None Zone (Walnut Creek, CA: Ave. Maria Press, 2004) p.9-13.

religious organization an ongoing problem. Each individual's religious identity and organizational affiliation can be a lifelong project.

Most people who come into the region do not come seeking to replicate what they left behind. They come for a better opportunity or to escape hardship elsewhere. One thing they seek to escape is the social pressure to conform. ... Each person who enters the region must choose whether, if, and how to reconnect. That choice is part of a larger question of community in the Pacific Northwest, a question about how an individual can be fully free, in nature and part of society. People seek community, often through churches, and yet feel ambivalent about the constraints that community entails. This ambivalence leads some out of churches and drives others toward intense commitment and ownership. This is our back yard and context for ministry."

Transformation: A "Yeasty" Opportunity

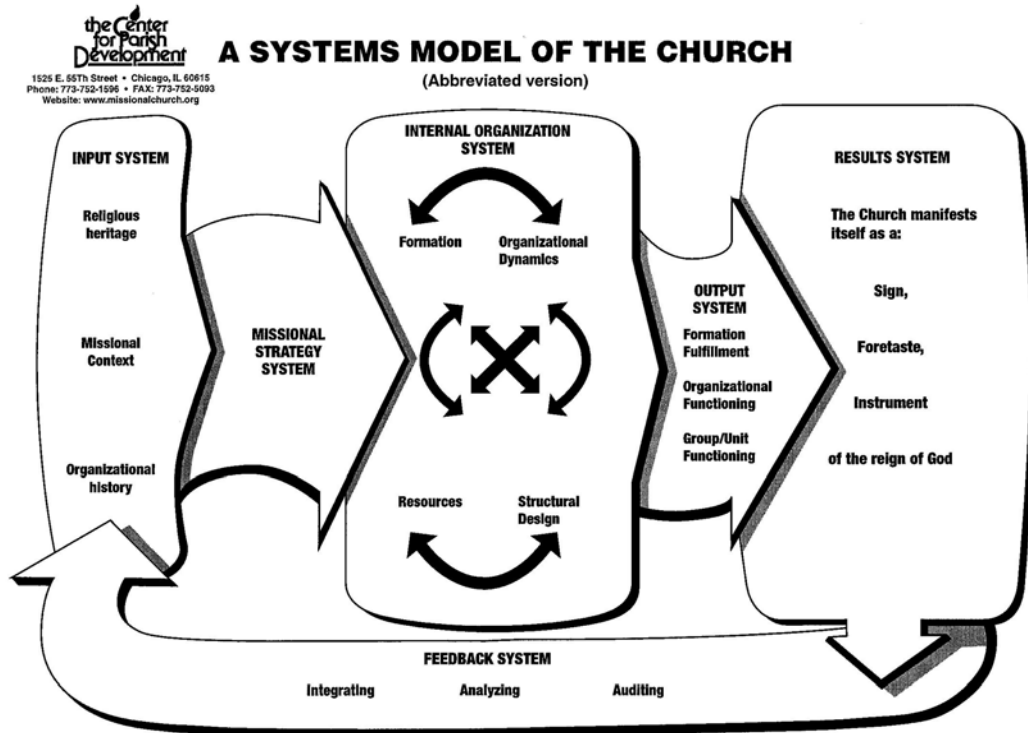
The church's role is being redefined at this moment in history. A strategic question for the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is this: *Who will define the role of the Disciples of Christ Church in the Northwest as we look to the future?* Will its role be defined by default by forces within the cultural /social /denominational /religious context? Or will the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) itself take the initiative to discern afresh its Divine calling, redefine its role and mission, and reshape itself for this new era?

There is a growing body of knowledge to tell us that times like this can be the most valuable of times in the life of a church. Theologically, a time of transformation is a "time between the times," a time between the "already" and the "not yet," between the *resurrection* and the *eschaton*. It is a time between how the church once understood itself and its mission and how its identity needs to be redefined in a new era. A time of transformation provides a church body with an unusual opportunity to take stock of itself, to examine the direction it is currently heading, to discern God's call afresh, to choose a new direction or, perhaps, deliberately and with increased conviction, even to choose to continue on its present path, and to organize itself for the future. A time of transformation is therefore potentially a yeasty time, an exciting time, a time of unusual openness when something ends and something new can begin.

How the Diagnostic Analysis Process Works

The organizational analysis process uses a model, the *Systems Model of the Church*. This model is a diagnostic model based on general systems theory. It is used by the consultant to gather information about fifteen different factors in the life and work of the Region. A depiction of the

model is shown on the next page. Several data gathering and data-analysis processes are used, including observation, specific dialogue opportunities, and primarily a diagonal slice of interviews across the Region organization.



The data from the diagonal slice interviews with key leaders and members, along with the consultant's own observations, plus additional information from records and documents of the Region, are analyzed by the consultant. The consultant develops a series of hypotheses, testable but tentative statements of problems and their causes.

These hypotheses are shared in written form with the leaders and members of the Region. The sharing occurs in an appropriate setting so that the results can be properly understood. The goal of the analysis along with all the work of building a strategic profile of the Region is to enable leaders and members to have a common view of the major issues with long-term implications which the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) must confront. When most of the people can see the same strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats from the same perspective, planning and decision-making are greatly facilitated and unnecessary destructive conflict can be avoided.

As the process unfolds, both long term and short-term challenges and their causes are identified and explored. A consensus is developed about which of these challenges have priority. The process of building this consensus is essential to the success of all future steps taken by the Region.

The Persons Interviewed

Interviews were conducted from February into April of 2007 and were on average an hour and a half in length. The following persons participated in the interview process.

David Helseth	Griselda Rivera
Dawn Marie Turner	Bill Jennison
Eric Anderson	Gary Hann
Roger Lynn	Cherilyn Williams
Marvin Eckfeldt	Laura Jennison Reid
Tom Bannwarth	Annie Grogan
Connie Robey	Rod Smith
Loren Arnett	Amber Saladino
Ron Voss	Donna Voss
Roger Davidson	Joan Dennehy
Betty Clark	Ed Martin
Redhawk Rice-Sauer	Regina Morton
Paulo Lealaitafea	Youn Su Nam
Jong Hong	

Interviews were conducted by:

David Bell
Rebecca Hale
Gary Shoemaker
Sandy Messick
Ray Schulte

Edie Rice-Sauer
Cherilyn Williams
Wesley Strait
Dawn Marie Turner

Interviewers received training for this task from Ray Schulte of the Center for Parish Development. In each case, the interviewers gathered information and took notes on the conversation. Some quotations from the persons interviewed (without attribution) are found in subsequent parts of this report. The persons interviewed were, without exception, generous with their time and demonstrated deep commitment to Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). They provided thoughtful and careful answers to the questions asked, sharing their experience of the Region. Any misunderstandings or misinterpretations in this report are the consultant's and not those who provided the information.

2

HOW THE NORTHWEST REGION OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH'S ORGANIZATION FUNCTIONS

"The question which has to be put to every local congregation is the question whether it is a credible sign of God's reign in justice and mercy over the whole of life, whether it is an open fellowship whose concerns are as wide as the concerns of humanity, whether it cares for its neighbors in a way which reflects and springs out of God's care for them, whether its common life is recognizable as a foretaste of the blessing which God intends for the whole human family."

--Lesslie Newbigin²

Introduction

In this report we are concerned with organizational effectiveness and faithfulness. Most organizations want to be effective. Church communities are however concerned not only with effectiveness, but are also called to be "faithful" to God's purposes.

"Effectiveness," as used in this analysis process, is defined as the degree to which ministry, services and common life at individual, group, and

² Lesslie Newbigin, *Sign of the Kingdom* (Erdman's Publishing Company, 1980), p. 64.

congregational levels are similar to expected results as specified by the vision, mission and goals of the church.

"Faithfulness," as used here, is defined as the degree to which ministry, services and common life at individual, group, and Regional levels are similar to and manifest the vision and mission of the church as a "sign in and for the world of the new reality which God has made available to people in Jesus Christ."³ Whereas "effectiveness" is concerned with whether or not the church organization achieves the results established by its leaders and managers, "faithfulness" is concerned with whether or not the church organization achieves its divinely-given mission.

The analysis process used in Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) was designed to reveal people's expectations of organizational faithfulness and effectiveness, and to discover how the persons within the Region experience the Region as being faithful and effective.

Hypotheses to be Tested

Because of the recognition that the consultant undoubtedly has not seen the total picture, or may have drawn incorrect conclusions, the consultant's observations are put forth tentatively as hypotheses-to-be-tested rather than as judgments, final pronouncements, or unqualified assertions of fact. Each hypothesis, tentative as it may be, is supported by data from interviews, church documents and the surveys.

A hypothesis-to-be-tested is a statement made, supported by interview data, which summarizes one of the findings from the analysis process. The hypotheses-to-be-tested are stated in a declarative way, and sometimes in a provocative way, in order to stimulate a discussion. As part of the *RISE Process*, each hypothesis will be tested, argued with, explored, thought about, and possibly re-cast to make it more accurate. As presented in this report, the hypotheses-to-be-tested should be thought of as part of an analytical process, not a final word on the subject. As the data are reviewed, the hypotheses tested and explored, additional data will be shared and undoubtedly the key issues that need to be addressed will be identified and accepted as the part of the Region's operational and strategic agenda.

³ *Book of Order* G.3.0200 on "The Church and Its Mission"

Areas of Congruence

In this section several areas of strong congruence are identified. The objective of this part of the analysis is a limited one -- only to identify **some** of the strengths upon which Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) can build as it considers God's call for the future.

General Comments

We are united by the symbol of the Communion Table

The chalice is a central image and symbol that unites us.

Gathered as one around the table is a uniting symbol for us; Christian Unity.

Words that come to mind when we hear "Northwest Region of the Christian Church"

Church	Unreliable	Transition
Nepotism	Fraternal Order	Regional office
Administration	Leadership	The people I know
Churches in WA	Bigger church	Congregations
Camps and conferences x2		Turner lectures
Friends x2	Community	Moments of ministry
Disorganized	Fond memories	Cereal bowl together
Seattle	Help	Concern
Karl Cobb	Earl Van Doran	Where I served
Problems with staff	Board	Messed up, but improving
Connectedness	Web	

1. The Region has had a long-standing and consistent commitment to a set of priorities and core values. These represent shared commitments and strength on which to build.

When the Region has worth, its highest values are relationship and justice.

We have valued a sense of openness and diversity for instance gay and lesbian issues.

We are a diverse group that seeks to be inclusive. That is one of the reasons for being a Disciple. We take diversity very seriously.

Ecumenical involvement throughout the Region has been born out of our Disciple heritage.

The Region values women's work and search and call. The Region has valued staying connected with the whole church and has done a good job of helping churches realize it's important to go and give.

A passion for justice is held strongly in this Region. We have been concerned for human rights, diversity and all that encompassed that.

I think our openness of mind is one of our greatest assets in our denomination.

The core beliefs behind covenant that ties us to the denomination will always be in place. A tolerance for ecumenical collaboration will always be in place.

Education will be a value for the clergy to have and the congregation to uphold.

We are covenantally bound to congregations and to the general church. Disciple practices like communion and inclusion are pretty high. I have hope that any of the groups I am involved in are trying to get it? right. I have hope.

We have a hard-core value to be more inclusive, not only on gender issues but also poverty and people in need. It is now more manifested in the congregational focus on local missions.

The Region works to respect diversity, listen, and come together in consensus and discernment of the Spirit's leading. That has been done in very neat ways from time to time.

The Region has valued learning. Learning at camp and women's retreat and through the whole anti-racism thing. It has valued this because it has supported this.

We try hard to be inclusive and we fail a lot, but we try a lot. The old Board had representatives from all the groups; now we are trying to be geographically inclusive.

We have been committed to collegiality in the Region. There has always been a strong sense of connection in the Region, among clergy and folk invested in the Region. We experience the power of this at the Regional Assembly. This is why the last few years have been painful as it got in the way of that.

Youth ministry has been valued but I am not sure our structure or funding is bearing that out.

2. The Region has had a strong commitment to programming in key areas.

We have really valued programming. Camps and conferencing have been a huge part of what we have done.

We have valued youth, camping and Disciples Women. Even knowing that we made Camps self-sufficient, it is still valued. We've stuck in there and supported where needed. Involvement in camping shows the people of the Region support it and that support is deserved.

The Region has had a strong commitment to be ecumenical—more than the churches themselves—and has led the churches toward more ecumenism.

With the Turner Lecture series we do a really great thing.

RYC with the sponsors and youth leaders are dedicated to what we are doing and what were trying to achieve is bigger than just us. We're trying to put all our effort in it, and put ourselves out there and people can see who we are and what we are about.

Regional transformation is important...it's good, very good. My hope is that congregations will become more aware of the importance for them to be looking for God's call.

Historically involvement ecumenically has been tremendous. We do a good job of reaching out internationally. Many churches have sent work trips, funds, across nation and world. We reach out well beyond our borders. This comes from a real sense of Christian community.

We have two camp grounds that have drawn energy and attention. Some people are very passionate about them.

To some extent the Yakama Mission has been part of the Region. It has moved from being more General church connected to more recently connected more to the Region

My understanding is that the number one job of the Region is to serve and strengthen congregations. I believe it should be. It has not happened well lately. Charlotte's influence and the Journey of Discovery is a big piece of that changing. I have lots of hope.

We have so much positive energy coming off the Journey of Discovery process and the RISE process. We had been struggling to survive. We are hoping these processes will help bring out for us a renewed and clear expression of what we are about.

We are trying to deal with anti-racism and pro-reconciliation

As we set programs we look at not just the money. We look at the wider perspectives as to whether we are serving our purpose and vision and affecting peoples' lives. It is important to do things for the right reasons, not just the money.

We have been a very loyal region in terms of the General Church. There has always been a consistent concern and connection.

3. There is a renewed sense of hopefulness and dedication in the Region as we begin to look to the future

I am very sure that God wants to be at work in today's Disciples Church.

I think the region is working in transforming into a more inclusive, spiritual region, but we cannot leave God out of it.

I feel more hopeful now after the change of leadership finally happened. Change was a fresh breeze. Healing has started to happen when the Board took responsibility.

I like to believe that there is courage that matters once it becomes ordered and focused and I hold a lot of hope in that.

I am very encouraged and positive that we can do just about anything; we are figuring out what we need to do. We have done a good job of calling Rebecca and the search committee should be thanked. The process and things we are doing for transformation are very positive.

I think the Region is on a real upswing. Regional transformation is important...it's good, very good. My hope is that congregations will become more aware of the importance for themselves to be looking for God's call. It shouldn't be new, but it is. This will help that awareness.

There is hopefulness as we search and try to discern who we are and who we are called to be. Those who have spent time with Rebecca are more hopeful than we have been in awhile. This began when the Board took seriously the financial questions as well. This offers a glimmer of hope.

Good things are happening but the fear is that there won't be a buy in from individuals in the pew.

The Region does not take the risk, push, work...yet. People are good hearted and have faith and this comes out of them...but as a Region-bland. I am hopeful and not angry.

I have a great deal of optimism for the future...with Rebecca...and the organizational structure of the church...a great deal of promise

In spite of the low point we hit last year there are so many possibilities and talents in this Region that can make really fabulous things happen and some really creative stuff can happen. We really try as a whole to be the Body of Christ. We have just stumbled a lot lately over the little things and our dysfunctional ministry.

I am sad that so often the driving factors for us to look at change have to come to us as negative factors: shortage of money, dysfunctional staff. How can we get to the other side of that curve so that we can be more proactive rather than reactive? I understand crisis can lead to learning. I am hopeful for what can happen. I think we need to be careful about what is realistic too. If we are faithful we will be blessed.

4. There are positive actions; programs and staffing that are forward looking, building hope, direction and leadership for the future.

Recent Board action, Journey of Discovery, RISE process, Interim Regional Minister are all very positive things as we look to the future.

I don't think we know what we value. We try to put so many fingers into the pie that we forget to focus on one thing. With the RISE program going on I see hope. I think we need to put value in our churches first before we put value in our region.

I think we see strong CWF groups; I think they are the backbone of the churches and the region. We are seeing an upswing of the regional youth; I see that in retreats and RYC apps and camps.

I see positives like RYC picking campers to develop leaders for retreats and camps, making that a breeding ground for church leaders. Good work has been done there in the past.

Another positive is women's work. There are times in the Region if it had not been for the grassroots leadership of women, we would have been in dire straits. In some ways I feel sorry for the women that they didn't get the respect they deserved for the stewardship education and mission emphasis they provided.

I know more about the Yakama Mission today and believe the mission should be better known throughout the Region.

Camps are important. Most clergy came to a decision to be a minister at camp. Most of those on our Board have been to a camp. It is a community unlike any other.

My understanding is that the number one job of the Region is to serve and strengthen congregations. I believe it should be. It has not happened well lately. Charlotte's influence and the Journey of Discovery is a big piece of that changing. I have lots of hope.

We have so much positive energy coming off the Journey of Discovery process and the RISE process. We had been struggling to survive. We are hoping these processes will help bring out for us a renewed and clear expression of what we are about.

5. We have committed and faithful people and groups.

Every time we have camp, assembly, and women's retreat—we develop friendships and support systems that may last a lifetime. That is filtered back to the churches. These are not small things. Think about kids affected by camp.

I'm still idealistic enough to believe our leaders are informed by the Gospel—their lives are shaped by that Gospel even when they aren't reading it to you. It is hard to imagine that not being the foundation and underpinnings. Sometimes we're very aware of the Gospel—fussing and discerning, hoping to find the will of God.

I think the Commission on Ministry is more important than I thought it was. Because of the way they connect with people wanting to be ordained and making sure that they are Disciple. Vetting people so that we do not end up with pastors with too many loose ends and needs of their own

There are many stories of good news in congregations and regional events. There are many experiences of young people living in community at camp. This is happening in congregations where there is an experience of love. Regional Assembly has been a time to focus together on the Gospel and what we are doing for the poor and the homeless.

Areas of Incongruence

This section describes areas of incongruence in the organizational functioning of the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The objective of this section is to discover points where developmental steps will be needed in order to strengthen church faithfulness and effectiveness. These areas of incongruence are stated as hypotheses-to-be-tested and are supported with quotations drawn from the interviews as well as other data provided by the Region. It is these points of incongruence where the energy can be found to participate more fruitfully in God's mission through the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Several areas of incongruence exist within the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). How could it be otherwise! The self-understanding, practices, and structures of the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) were formed in another era of the church's history. The Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) finds itself today in a missionary environment of a different kind. But it has not yet fully recognized and reoriented itself to ministry and mission in this new context.

All of the hypotheses-to-be-tested that follow are based on this fundamental interpretation of the context in which the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is operating today, and in which it must learn to operate faithfully and effectively tomorrow.

Hypothesis #1: Changing Circumstances – Destabilizing Effects.

The social, cultural, denominational, and religious environment for the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and its congregations is changing dramatically. To be faithful in ministry given its context requires that the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and its congregations be adventurous and open to rethinking assumptions it has held about its context, and what it will mean to be the church with a minority witness in this context.

Today churches in the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) are functioning in a religious and cultural context where their influence is marginalized. This has had a destabilizing effect on the Region and its congregations. This Region has not yet fully recognized and accepted this context, discerned how to assess and engage this context with the Gospel, and reoriented itself for ministry-from-the-margins for the future.

The culture is not only recognizable “out there,” it also exists “in here,” among us, in our congregations, in the committees and groups of the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Becoming aware of the cultural context and its impact on us is an essential skill for the Christian community. Reading the “signs of the times” is a condition of discipleship. It is within today’s and tomorrow’s changed and changing context that the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) as a community of congregations must learn to bear faithful and effective witness.

Changes in the cultural context

On a **macro-level**, this hypothesis invites leaders to explore how the religious landscape has changed on the North American continent and what its impact is on the Region and its churches. Where once the Christian churches existed in a "church-friendly" environment, it does so no longer. We are living in an increasingly secularized culture that competes with the church and bombards us with a different set of values. While some of those interviewed seem aware of the impact of our current cultural context many appeared less aware by their comments or lack of comment. The following comments indicate a variety of perceptions about the destabilizing effect of the changing context for ministry in the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

The cultural context affects what we try to do – the nature of society. In the Northwest we are unchurched. There is competition for people’s time. Church

isn't a priority in the Northwest. There are no free Wednesday nights and Sunday morning is soccer. We have not figured out how to relate to that and work with that. We are still pretty traditional, pretty Midwestern. We are not emerging church.

The hot-button issues in the nation influence us. It is good but does have aspects that are not healthy.

There are lots of things pulling at people out there. We look toward young families and it is difficult even for those who want to spend time together. There are so many other things to do. Until a person gets to a point where they want to be in spiritual activities it is hard to get the commitment... but it does happen and that is exciting.

Like the whole church we're transformed by cultural patterns. So many don't feel the need to gather and fellowship and get that sustaining spiritual encouragement. Regional invitations used to be special and now they are a chore.

There is too much to do and there are too many other things that distract people from spending their time on regional issues.

I see so many things going on nationally; the main thing is race relations but also getting more into sexual orientation and there is so much debate about it. I don't see the Region or local church saying much one way or the other. I don't see much response to social issues.

We are being impacted by the move away from the traditional Protestant denominations; we are seeing a drop in membership because of that.

Churches have become less a part of mainstream society and have become more counter cultural. It is not cool to go to church anymore.

We're still pretty isolated from the social angst that the rest of the country feels. In the Northwest racial and social inequality exists but isn't highlighted here. Here diversity isn't as obvious so it impacts how we reach out. Problems related to race and social class aren't highlighted here. The Northwest is laid back, Bohemian, oblivious to some social issues. Issues the Disciples embrace nationally, we don't.

There is a collapsing going on. Much of what we experience outside the walls of the church is happening with the Region. There is a structural collapse of denominations and the same is occurring regionally. This is not necessarily bad...but rather something good...perhaps moving towards stopping ineffectiveness.

This is the least churched part of the country. People do lots of other things. Even for those who are in church, church is one among many priorities and not necessarily at the top of the list. This is a challenge in terms of having enough of committed leaders to devote time to the Region.

Changes in the make up of the Region's ministry context

On a **micro-level**, this hypothesis invites the Region with all of its congregations to continue to explore and document more fully the very real environment in which it exists in Alaska, Idaho and Washington. What is the

shape of the changes that are taking place in the Region? Which shifts are projected to continue and what is likely to stay the same? What are the assets and opportunities that exist in our communities? What are the possibilities and the implications for the ministry and mission of the Region? Some of those interviewed tend to look at the current situation as more negative. The challenge/opportunity is to look also for positive potential and the capacity for the ministry of the Region's congregations.

The Region has failed to respond to the baseline issues of the demographics of our region. We have turned what is a clear class issue into race issues that have skewed our ability to respond and communicate. Basically Washington State is made of two types of people, well off white people and not well off people, including a number of racial groups, but mostly they are white.

We have an influx of other cultures that are slowly being addressed (Hispanic, Korean). Some ministry is happening but more could be done to reach out.

I think the diversity of culture here is a good and bad thing. Challenging because we live with folk of different background and we do not have understanding of things. The east west divide provides a challenge. The real challenge is trying to make the Region cohesive. We are more diverse in the more urban west and diversity makes a difference to the churches out there. Churches on the east side tend to be more conservative.

We are the least churchd part of the USA. We have a Starbuck laid-back mentality. We have the Cascade curtain and people in the east wanting to lop off King County and Snohomish and we would be better off. We have agriculture and Hispanic farm workers and low-income groups that are very formative. I am not sure how we relate to changing populations when our church is 98% white. Affecting our ministry is race and economics.

"The church may be good for you, but I don't need it." – is the mission field right outside our doors. People don't think of church membership here, just glad to attend.

The culture is not having much impact. The Region is in maintenance mode. Energy is going to keeping the system going rather than engaging the culture. The consequence of this focus is slow death.

The problem is we are being impacted by the changes but not shaped to respond well.

I don't think we are being shaped enough. In the Region we don't have as much diversity as some areas, so we have to pull people into it. Instead of letting it flow, we're forcing it.

There are very creative and talented people here, especially with technology. Public education is a big issue over the quality of education.

We have the largest and strongest United Way campaign in the country. We have more registered boats than any other area in the country and we have a huge ski area. We have a culture of recreation and lots of environmentally concerned groups.

Changes in the make up of the membership of the Region's congregations

Gay and lesbians get more support and it is easier to talk about inclusion of those folk than to address race and the implications of that for our life together. Much of what we do is geared to middle professionals like our training opportunities that poor people and people without resources can't get to.

The Samoan group is feeling left out of the Region's work. The Region seems to be getting sidetracked in the chartering process for this congregation. The church would like to feel more of a connection with the Region in areas of continuing education, youth work and help with obtaining a physical plant.

In the Northwest there seems to be a need to preserve the tradition of the church. It's not theological, more cultural – keeping the other races out—maintaining purity. Races and cultures put more flavor into the worship experience. We need to have an occasional diverse worship. It is good to remember we are in 2007.

We now have Korean congregations that love and appreciate the Disciples denomination. However due to language and cultural barriers, it is not easy for them to get involved in the Region's activities. The Korean congregations are ready to join the Disciples.

We have four churches of color; these are our resources. Four reasons these churches can help us make changes. We are not cultivating, not utilizing what they can provide to enrich our churches.

Korean immigrants still have the Korean Way, so it is hard for them to adjust. There are times when individuals will choose the Korean way when it is to their benefit, and they choose the American way when that is to their benefit. This is a challenge facing our new Korean churches. They want people to experience God's grace. First they must focus on teaching about the grace of God. Experience God's love through community. They see the Disciples denomination as similar...faith, grace, freedom.

We have not built a new church building in our region for 25 years. We have nested a few in other buildings. We have buildings built for another time—the shape of the church 50 years ago. Many churches will not be able to support their buildings. We have an edifice complex. Churches have to get to the point that they can not ignore the obvious any more.

We have good acceptance of women clergy in the Region.

We have a huge migration of young professionals due to Microsoft and we have huge diversity. Persons of color number more than 40% in Kent. We have lots of small rural churches in areas that are being bought up by conglomerates.

We are continually challenged by issues of inclusion and how we do that with the dispossessed while still remaining loyal to the ones that have done the work.

During the next five years I believe many of the smaller churches will close or merge. The economy will effect the congregations and they will not be able to survive financially.

The availability of resources, particularly financial seems to be scarce. The resources are there but are not being shared with the church. We are not tapping into the potential.

It is difficult for our Korean clergy to fellowship with other Disciple clergy in the area.

The Region has to be shaped by the makeup of congregations. I see the makeup of congregations changing; they are working to break out of “the way it used to be” by being more aware and looking to include people interested in religion without putting a box around it.

We have been so impacted by financial and membership decline of our churches. Local churches are more oriented to local mission than global mission. I am not sure when that changed. We used to do a mission month and the regional newsletter was focused on overseas mission.

Hypothesis #2: Confusion about vision, purpose, and goals

Most persons do not know what vision is guiding the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). There is lack of clarity about the purpose, or reason for being, of the Region (what work it should do and why). This leads to unrealistic and competing expectations and haphazard participation in its life.

Lack of a compelling and shared guiding vision.

The interview process underscored that at the present time, the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has a vision gap. There is currently no clearly articulated, compelling, and broadly accepted vision to guide and unite the members of the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) as they move into the future.

Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) cannot afford to be without a vision for its ministry in the future. To be without a vision is to be without a direction. A church that lacks a vision will be a *reactive* organization rather than a *proactive* organization. It will drift without a sense of purpose. It will allow forces outside of itself to determine what it is and what it becomes. God is always calling the church into the future--out of the "already" and toward the "not yet." Vision is a gift from God that provides focus, energy, and the willingness to risk. Vision draws us forward into a creative and faithful future. The *RISE Process* is a focused and proactive initiative to discern God's vision for the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

The following comments reveal the vision “gap.”

Transformation with a degree of intentional investment in anti-racism is the vision.

There is a vision of searching and trying to discern who we are and who we are becoming and called to be. There is uncertainty about how to go about this. There is hopefulness.

The vision that we spout off is to be an anti-racism pro-reconciling church. In reality we have no vision. We have been trying to survive.

The current vision is healing and renewal. The Board articulates the vision; now people look to the Board for vision and guidance. No one feels ownership of the vision. People look to the Board saying, "I don't want that responsibility on my/our shoulders" "Its not my fault when things aren't realized." And it is not any one person's fault.

Lack of vision is guiding us right now.

From what I read the vision right now is change and trying to define what that change is going to be. I am not sure what that means. The Board and Interim Regional Minister have to communicate the vision. Communicate so too many people won't ask, "Who is the Region?" Maybe figure out a way to allow congregations to take action to buy into the vision.

At the moment I really think the vision is making sure we have room to find our future. Right now we are trying to maintain an open status quo, to let this process really do its work.

I hope our vision is not the status quo. I think the Region is open to new ideas, but the processes are not in place to move forward.

It feels like we are going from nowhere to nowhere and we continue to give authority and power to the most institutional thinkers and the least creative people.

The primary vision right now is survival and how we will look here in five years. I believe the transformation process will help us find that vision.

God has something for us and we are trying to figure it out. We have churches that are open and affirming and churches that are pretty conservatives; we are rural and urban and it will be hard to hold that together and have a sense of church in the midst of that.

Unclear Mission or Purpose

While the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has a constitution and by-laws it also suffers from some ambiguity about its purpose. Coupled with the lack of consensus around its guiding vision, this creates a powerful and potentially destructive vacuum as persons and key groups attempt to provide leadership. Based on Disciples polity and past experience there is a lot of hope and perspective about what the purpose of the Region should be. This provides a basis for the work of discerning direction for the future. It can allow the Region to begin to test assumptions that are made about the purpose of the Region.

The following quotations depict some of the confusion, but also some of the history and hopes that can guide us as we look to the future:

The Region exists to support and resource local congregations; enable local churches to do together what they can't do themselves; enable connection to the general and ecumenical church. It is an expression of church.

I believe our role and mission is relationship and justice. The main points where this touches down into reality is our youth, and our intentionally and sincerely hooking up in worship and in study and song and fellowship. This is an issue of gardening and intentionally growing a people bound together in this love – who is Jesus Christ.

I see the Region as a network, the connective tissue between the general church and the local congregation; a way of sharing information, pulling us together into some kind of community; doing things that we cannot do by ourselves. In a small church we help you connect with folk to go on a mission trip.

No one really knows what we're here to do any more. Used to be we were here to support programs out of Indianapolis, had multiple staff, doing things for congregations, on-going programs like Discovery, Vision Builders, etc. All of that has faded (Indianapolis is struggling). We can't rely on them, so the Region can't be consistent. If the congregations can't count on us, we're not here for any real reason.

Region is to give public witness and enable congregations to be more faithful. There is a gap between what it sees itself and what it is. Sees itself as an instrument of the congregation, but how effective that is, I am not sure.

The purpose of the Region is to provide a structure so that congregations can work together to accomplish stuff that churches could not do alone. It also exists to have a voice that speaks, even when not everyone agrees. The Region has a pastoral role speaking a word to congregations that can be important. We need a sense of "being region" before that can have much impact. This voice can be educational and prophetic.

Serves the purpose in institutionalizing the faith tradition so it can be passed on to future generations. It is an extension of the expression of the church that is locally based. Regional minister has a higher level of power to represent the church.

Our purpose is to draw individual congregations together. To provide ministry that congregations can use. To provide leadership including search and call.

The Region exists to help strengthen the churches, help them focus on their mission, be a resource to the churches for things like Journey of Discovery and search and call, to be the center of implementation for camps and conferences and other things we can't do alone but can do together. The Region is an agent to connect us to the whole church.

Unclear goals:

The Region currently has no clear consensus about its overarching goals. The lack of agreement about the goals of the Region weakens it as a vital and dynamic body, de-motivates its members, inhibits generous gifts of time and money, increases competition, and leads to distrust of one another and of leaders.

Are we doing too much? Do we need to get back to basics? How to prioritize? Who is the programming for? How can we deliver it? There is a desire to focus regional ministry.

The following quotations reveal the range of assumptions people across the Region have about its goals.

I do not know any goals. Each ministry teams roles and goals seem to have been gone. I am unclear whether we have specific goals.

I think the Region's ultimate goal is to serve and I just think we need to find some ways to actually do it.

I think we have so focused on balancing the budget that we have completely missed our purpose and role.

Our current goals are financial responsibility, program development, reevaluating programs like camps and figuring out ways to under gird and support this program--Transparency and accountability.

I think the Region is trying to achieve the racial integration area.

Women's work has always been a piece of what we do. Youth and RYC and camp and conference are key areas of result. Social justice, education for ministers and the Commission on Ministry are key areas.

Our goals are: search and call, congregational enrichment, congregational fellowship, used to be outdoor ministry and leadership development.

One of our key areas is getting the budget under control. I think growth in terms of membership of congregations and new congregations is an area in which we are working hard. Right now the Region is working on communication.

I hear all the time youth, youth, youth. In action, I don't see this. Camp programs have been affected due to cutbacks; RYC has been affected due to cutbacks.

A goal is increasing the youth population, at least its RYC's goal. For RYC it is to develop youth leadership within the church and the Region and make stronger leaders for our communities.

A goal is anti-racism and developing diversity and more open mindedness.

Whom Do We Serve?

When asked about the key groups the Region is in ministry with there is a wide variation of responses. This indicates that there is some confusion, perhaps a gap requiring clarification and strategic choice in this part of the planning for ministry.

We serve clergy groups, Westside groups, individuals who find lots of places to speak, some hold or withdraw funds to try to get heard.

We are not diverse; we are predominantly white. It is time for a change; if we don't change now our kids will suffer. The church is not ready for the multi-cultural reality. In Washington State there are still a lot of communities that are predominantly white.

I think we are trying to be in ministry with the youth.

Key group that the Region is involved with are the people that have always been involved. It seems to me that you rarely see new faces at regional events.

We serve the youth, or at least that is who it should be. The region needs to get into communities.

We serve congregations in transformation, youth, women, and pastors (through Turner Lectures and area meetings).

Congregations ought to be number one. Some subdivisions might be youth, women, outreach groups. There has always been a social justice emphasis.

We serve ministers. This happens to greater and lesser degrees. Some clergy fall through the cracks and drop out of sight. Youth are served well by and large. It has been an area that has received attention. Used to be a paid staff position.

There are congregations that have fallen through the cracks; those on the fringes or that have not quite so progressive leanings and have felt distanced from the life of the Region and fallen off the radar. We do not see them at Assembly or clergy gatherings

Hypothesis #3: Region: An Office, A Set of Programs, or An Expression of Church?

On of the central questions before the Region is to become clear about its own identity. There are different understandings and expectations operating about who or what the Region is. Is the Region the office and staff, a set of programs, an expression of church, a covenanted community of communities? Prayerful discernment of this fundamental question is at the heart of helping the Region look faithfully to the future.

What is the present "shape" of the regional church?

Underneath all of the sociological, environmental factors that impact the church today lays a system of "notions" about the church. These understandings underlie the behaviors of members and leaders of the church; they are expressed in our actions and in our choices. One way to make the distinctions between different notions of the church is to contrast three different "shapes" or concepts for understanding and describing the church. By identifying these shapes our intention is not to pass judgment upon past or current understandings of the church, but to provide a contrast in order for you to become clearer about the desired future direction of the Region

and how it might differ from the current situation. All three of the notions are operating in most of us and across the Region. In the Northwest Region where do you see the emphasis? How does this compare to what we believe God calls us to?

1. **The region as a *place*.** The regional church is primarily identified as the office where certain things happen. People go to a particular building or particular events at a particular time to engage in particular religious activities. Staff is the central focus of the Region's ministry since they are trained in the tradition and are in charge of making sure that the activities of the Region are carried out in appropriate ways.
2. **The region as a *vendor of religious services and goods*.** Within contemporary society, we have come to view the regional church as a vendor of programs, services and resources designed to meet the *self-defined* needs and wants of clergy and congregations. Clergy and congregations become "customers, for whom the programs, services and goods produced by the 'region' are intended.
3. **The regional church as a *covenanted community of communities called by God and sent on a mission*.** The church as "place where" or "vendor" is thoroughly foreign to the New Testament portrayals of the church community. The biblical description of the church, while expressed in different ways in different writings reflects an understanding of the church, local and regional, as a community of people called by God and sent on a mission. The mission upon which it is sent is to "be" a faithful sign, foretaste, and instrument of the reign of God. The regional church illustrates the reign of God by living a covenanted life of love for one another, compassion for one another, living at peace with one another and service to one another as a witness to God's transforming power in a broken world.

The following quotes from key documents begin the reflection:

The Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples Christ) is a sacred entity created by the spirit and desire of the congregations in Alaska, North Idaho, and Washington states to join together in covenant as one body shaped by a unique geography. (From our By-Laws)

From the Northwest Region Vision and Purpose:
The current focus of the Regional Church lies in three areas:

- *Supporting the transformation of the congregations;*
- *Committed to becoming an inclusive, welcoming, celebrating community of Christ which seeks to heal brokenness by being agents of reconciliation and hope and by*
- *Offering itself up to the work of transformation on its own behalf.*

Comments from those interviewed illustrate different understandings of the shape of the Region:

We are perceived as a provider of services and people when they perceive they are not getting those services. We also strive to build up the membership as the Body of Christ. I hope that the perceptions shift so that we are perceived as a place where ministry is done together.

I see the Region as a network, the connective tissue between the general church and the local congregation; a way of sharing information, pulling us together into some kind of community; doing things that we cannot do by ourselves. In a small church we help you connect with folk to go on a mission trip.

I don't see the Region performing ministry. I see the local church performing ministry. I don't see the Region putting on programs or ministry.

You can tell the faithfulness of the Region by the strength of the congregations in the Region. The Region isn't its own entity but rather how it strengthens congregations -- that is what tells us how the Region is doing.

I am most bothered by how little people in the pew buy into the value of the Region and that it's part of being a Disciple. The Region is a function of the wider church outreach. On a positive note, we here in the Northwest could be very good at reaching the masses. As a denomination our values are in line with the Northwest culture but nobody knows that because we are not doing a good job of shouting it from the mountaintops.

I am so convinced that clergy and congregations are called to be connected. I have a passion about this. I am real concerned for clergy that are lone rangers and who create congregations that are lone rangers.

I come back to assembly. According to design, the Region is a manifestation of the church, the gathered body. Financially and historically we have supported ecumenical and higher education ministries. Another dimension is the staff participated in public witness as representatives of our church.

Churches are independent but cooperative. The Region is dependent upon the cooperation of the congregations. The preference would be for the Region to be a vendor, but right now we have no goods to sell.

We don't have a unified understanding of the Gospel. I have gone to Regional Board meetings and not felt any sense of consideration of gospel. It's all maintenance. "Good news is that our budget is balanced" is what is proclaimed. Is there any place in the Region that people sit down and talk about the Gospel and the good news for culture? We are more bureaucratic and institutional.

I think the vision of who we are that is the unofficial reality resides just below the surface for us living a life that witnesses to the reality of God's presence in our

lives and our world. Struggling with how best and most effectively to do this. It takes different shapes at times and in different places.

Hypothesis # 4: Losing a Sense of Community.

While historically valuing collegiality and a rich connectional life, the sense and practice of community within the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) seems to be disappearing. We are losing the spirit of our Regional family. Churches and pastors are going their separate ways and are no longer a community of congregations who know each other and seek to be in fellowship with each other.

There is built into the structure of the Region a dichotomy between the notion of pastors, congregations and the Region being in a covenant relationship with each other, and the idea of individual or congregational autonomy. In the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) this dichotomy raises questions today about what it means to be the church, what it means to be church together, and what holds congregations in relationship with each other. This dichotomy plays itself out in confusion over what we are to expect of others and ourselves “as Region” while loyalty and stronger allegiance is given to the local church or other causes.

The vision and practice of community is suffering in the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Scarcer resources, busier lives, less sense of identity and purpose as a Region, holding meetings that are not life-giving, competing loyalties, all is symptomatic of lack of vision, purpose, and commitment to a compelling connectional life. While Me-ism – for each to go one’s own way – is a powerful force in wider cultural context and in our church, individualism and independence are overrated. People long for a life together. People in the Northwest Region know they will not survive in isolation.

We have opportunity to recover a fresh understanding and practice of being church together as a Region in a new day. We can clarify and strengthen our identity and the purpose of a connectional life to be the Body of Christ in the Northwest Region.

If we don’t claim this issue and address it our churches will become even more separated and isolated. We will look even more like the culture of individualism that surrounds us. We will miss opportunities for mission and ministry together, no longer celebrating oneness in Christ and Christ’s mission that transcends local congregations and personal loyalties.

The following quotes illustrate this hypothesis:

The getting people together is really important. But at the same time only on a regional level, we are not facilitating area get togethers.

How does the Region show Christian community? I don't see the Region doing that. I guess I said previously the regional church has been more business and organization than actual action, other than those few committees. I am sure there are suggestions for local churches, but I don't see community.

When we first came to the Region, the Region supported us very well. All the leaders were visible locally and in the region. Folks seemed tied together...as a church member I no longer see the ties as strong as in the past...in the past it felt like a close family. There is a definite need as a region...a need to keep us together as a family...fore than nurturing, but giving support.

The Region has consistently valued community. Congregations don't value the Region now because they are so engaged in life struggles. Region is an appendix not dear or near to their hearts. There are a lot of people in congregations who would say, "What is the Region?" That is different than it was when there was a bigger staff and an annual state convention.

Clergy in the Southwest area had very close connections at one time. While there were always differences when you get 15 or so clergy together, all these clergy loved and encouraged each other in spite of some very bad things that happened in the families, churches and lives. Other clergy supported each other—that was the Region.

Every time we have camp, assembly, and women's retreat—we develop friendships and support systems that may last a lifetime. That is filtered back to the churches. These are not small things. Think about kids affected by camp.

Churches are soooo independent of one another; this impacts the Region. Some of the churches don't like minorities or people of a different sexual orientation; some are too liberal. It is difficult to exhibit true Christian Community in the Pacific Northwest. It's way too liberal.

I think about assemblies as places where people came together for worship, information and inspiration. Camps and conferences focus on Christian community, which makes church camp different than regular camp.

Sense of community happens unevenly. Because of distances, the east west barrier it is hard to get a sense of being a part of something larger. In recent years because of the challenges of leadership in the Region we have not always felt supported. But in other areas, Turner Lectures or working together for a common goal we are the Body of Christ and doing that well.

The Region has a pastoral role speaking a word to congregations that can be important. We need a sense of "being region" before that can have much impact. This voice can be educational and prophetic.

People in our churches have no sense of who we are as the Christian Church Disciples of Christ; people don't want to get together. If the whole thing fell apart would we lose anything? Maybe connection to the camps.

I think there are churches that feel really connected to the region, maybe because they are in close relationship to the region itself. Some churches feel abandoned. Instead of having someone find out what is going on, we've just left churches to

drift. I can think of a handful of churches where the minister was left alone and now they aren't a part of the region.

We feel some community in regional assemblies. Community is seen at the Turner lectures. We struggle with diversity; our minority churches are not integrated into the Region.

As a minority congregation it has been very difficult to make connections with the Region.

Hypothesis # 5: History a blessing or a Burden?

There is a rich history and heritage in the Northwest Region upon which we can build. As we appreciate the best of our experience it can become a basis for discerning a new direction for the future. On the other hand, we are at times held back by past experiences and by those who only want to live in the past and are unable to enter creatively and openly into the work of discerning anew how we will participate in God's vision in a new day.

The following quotes illustrate this hypothesis:

Our experience way aback (30+ years ago) carried us through the last 10 years. Way back there was strong leadership. Earl Van Doren really did a good job...I think Bob Brock was under appreciated. He did a really good job of representing the Northwest in the General Church. He really understood how the General church financial system works. The caring leadership of Bob was part of what carried us through.

We value maintaining the status quo, independence, not wanting to rock the boat and doing safe stuff.

Our way past history of more than 10 years influences us with folk who look back to those days with rosy glasses and talk about the huge numbers and now we are less. It does impact us now. Longing for the past that is not helpful when we are looking to the future. We have an amazing number of retired ministers who are still involved.

People seem to be more interested in keeping the history than with building the future changes that will one day become a part of our history. We are afraid of change, keeping the traditions has become too important, more important than providing what is needed to be a spiritual church.

I think we are too impacted by our past and our experience is that we are so hurt that we keep putting band-aids on instead of trying to heal.

How do we do something that connects the newness and the past together?

Past autonomy has produced a lack of responsibility to hold shared values and responsibility is more than being in covenant. Lots of baggage in the Disciples of Christ heritage that worked long ago but needs to be left behind. An example is valuing education for clergy; the role of clergy is under supported. The congregations see themselves as an authority not in covenant with the clergy.

We really do get caught up in what's happened in the past. We don't always remember to allow a fresh outlook.

We are influenced by our history tremendously. We love to hang on to pain. As a Region we have "the Rock" and those issues (mistrust between congregations and the Region). We don't, as a body, rejoice in successes as well (camps, youth leadership). People have heard good things about those things but they wonder what is the Region doing lately. It is easier to remember the negative.

Most important experience of the past was when serious energy was spent on developing leadership and that was basically for congregations. Probably 10-15 years since this was done well. For so long the leadership of the Board was people who had been there 15-20 years so efforts were to rescue the past.

Hypothesis # 6: Developing and Allocating our Resources

Significant cultural forces at work combined with lack of a shared compelling vision for our regional life has an impact on resources development in the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). This is especially true in the areas of Leadership development and financial development. Without effective development and utilization of the Region's resources the future of a viable and effective Region organization is in question.

Leadership resources:

The following comments reflect the concerns that were expressed about leadership recruitment and leadership training and development:

There are some cultural forces at work in how we enlist and support leadership and expect it to function. For instance how well are we doing with our ethnic churches and calling leadership forward from them?

We have not developed leadership resources as well as we should. People's busy lives and not wanting to commit. What is the importance of the Region? We need to make the case.

I do not think we cultivate leaders well. We lack the ability to tap into unused people who are not involved. There have got to be people out there who fit the bill. We keep getting the same people to do different things.

We put people in positions we want them in, and then cut them off at the knees. Instead of embracing their gifts, we pat them on the shoulder and send them on their way. At times, I think we look not at the big picture, but at what it will do in the next few months. We need to make goals for the people serving in leadership roles.

Sometime when we put someone in a position of leadership we just put them there to do their thing, and don't provide any training.

We don't seek out new people and we really don't nurture the ones that are being used.

Unfortunately, I think the Region generally cultivates from what it already has. We're not necessarily good at making sure we go out to congregations and getting those people who haven't been involved yet. So, we have a tendency to keep people already involved in regional activity and some who are known at that level. This means that we have a tendency toward non-young white people. We have had a difficulty cultivating leadership in our ethnic communities and congregations.

Training of leaders has always been talked about. Instead we recruit people and let them get into it and just figure it out. Maybe people would be more willing if they knew what they were being asked to do.

I don't think we have done much to identify the gifts of the Spirit. Staff has identified most leaders. I can remember asking churches for leader recommendations and not getting much response. There is not any formal sense of training or support for being evaluated for leaders. The lack of training has impeded some leaders.

If people don't know what the Region is, it is hard to enlist them in the ministry of the Region.

My concern is that the active lay leadership in the Region is all over 55 years of age with the exception of the two youth on the Board. This reflects the demographics in the congregations. Younger clergy do not seem to feel the same need to be involved.

We have not done a very good job of finding clergy. We do some leadership training but inconsistently. We used to have leadership training in the opposite year from the Assembly.

Facilities Resources:

While there has been concern from the past there is a more positive feeling emerging about the care filled steps that have been taken to respond to the Region's need for facilities. The following comments were expressed about the Region's cultivation and use of facilities:

It was disappointing that the regional office was sold. I don't know how the money was managed. But I think the money from the sale could have been used better than it was. My limited knowledge, it was a good sum of money that I think covered most of the debts. Hoped to have seen some of that used for youth.

With our facilities and finances we are in a good place. We are in a much better place than we were in the past. By renting the office we have much more flexibility and can allow the facility to reflect who we are.

As for facilities, we always seem to find a place to be.

We have moved from owning to leasing space and have invested the funds to pay for the rent of the current space.

We have become more responsible with facilities. It was fiscally and stewardship-wise responsible to let go of the Regional office. But people perceive new space as hard to get to and not having much to offer.

I have distrust around how money and property has been used in the Region.

We did not pay much attention to the Regional office for a long time and it deteriorated. With the new configuration and renting space we have less and are managing it better. We have our campsites. The one on the Westside seems better managed than the one on the Eastside. The fact that they are not Regional facilities makes it confusing about who is in charge. I do not know that we have always managed these as well as we could.

Financial Resources:

While there has been great concern about the cultivation and use of financial resources, recent Board action has been positive in demonstrating a commitment to good stewardship of the Region's finances. Cultivating, prioritizing and using financial resources will continue to be a challenge/opportunity. The following comments were made about financial resources in the Region:

Lack of money is forcing change and we are trying to find our way in the wilderness.

We did a good job with the budget last year. We need to decide what we want to be about as a Region and then support that.

We do not cultivate finances. It's a taboo subject. When we start a financial request, it's almost as if we ask apologetically because we know there is no trust from the congregations and the relationship has been abused. It is time to stop apologizing and remind the congregations that they are the Region.

Financially I think no region ever has it easy, but I think resources in general have dwindled and are harder to gather. There is a perception we need to support more costs.

Debbie Starkey has made an unbelievable difference. We now know what we have and what we are spending. I feel really good about the last 18 months. We have come a long way to developing trust in the Region.

Our historical and more recent financial spending has been an issue. Until very recently we were spending more than we were bringing in. We were going into capital funds money that we really should not have been going into. In the last two years the very tough decisions were made to cut programming in order to balance the budget. That has impacted how we function as a region.

I would hope the Region would get a clearer picture of its mission—focus on fewer things but do them really well. We have resources to invest now, not poorness. We have better controls and that is really positive. I hope we will gradually learn to risk (funds) for new adventures.

Programming, from abundance to scarcity to ?

The Region has a history of vital programming for clergy, youth, women, congregations and social ministry. Currently there is a sense of loss with less staff, fewer resources and reduced programming. As we look to the future we are challenged to embrace a mindset of abundance rather than scarcity in discerning what God calls us to be and do as a community that is blessed with many gifts. The following comments indicate this sense of loss, need and hope for the future..

I am not sure the things the Region does have any impact on the churches at all.

What we have in place are in a sense the right things to help shape us, but I am not sure if that is happening well or not. Like social justice pieces. Outdoor ministries is shaping us and making a difference.

We are doing discernment currently. We minimized the programs to just the core things such as search and call and pastoral support. It appears that right now we are not doing a lot of programming.

Youth feel at risk anytime program changes. (Feel forgotten and not valued because they feel its not seen as a financial priority.) Their passion is not reflected outside themselves.

Women's ministry historically has a lot invested in the Region, perhaps not as much in the last five years. They have already lost a lot, spiritually more than financially because of some of the trust issues. We still value women's programs but not as much. The Board sees less involvement from women so it is easier to cut their budget.

The Region as a major source of support? Nada. Programs we offer and history reflects not a building up but maintaining. We are not beating the drum saying, "Come see one of our churches" and we should be.

We have been so focused on damage control and reaction as opposed to pro-action. In 20 years there's nothing new. It is only maintenance, no development: financial, spiritual or as the Body of Christ.

The struggles our congregations face are because we as a denomination and region are not a cohesive entity. General church is sick, Region is sick, and congregations are in survival mode but can't count on the Region for resources.

Hypothesis # 7: A Climate of Trust: lost and in the process of being found

The climate of openness and trust in the Region has been eroded over recent years. This climate is potentially destructive leading to conflicts and unhelpful divisions, winners and losers. It weakens the witness and mission of the Region because it demonstrates the ways of a

broken and conflicted world rather than the unifying ways of the Gospel.

Church climate" is the technical name given to the pattern of interpersonal and intergroup relationships, influence dynamics and trust dynamics that affect the quality of the ministry and mission of a church. When the climate of a congregation is highly supportive, people not only work harder but they also have a positive attitude toward the church, and they are more generous with their gifts of time and money. When the climate is more coercive and competitive, then work is of lower quality, it is more difficult to enlist competent volunteer leaders, and giving is reduced. In a competitive or coercive church climate, people's energies are inevitably directed toward self-defense and survival.

A history of collaboration and trust as well as a desire for cooperation in the Northwest Region is a strength upon which to reclaim an open, trusting and collaborative climate in the Region. Without consistent efforts, however, the Region, its staff, clergy, leaders and congregations could slip into more competitive or isolated behavior patterns.

The church in all its expressions (national, regional, local) is called to be an alternative social reality. A church as Christian community teaches people how to talk, how to act, how to fight, how to love, how to see the world in a peculiar--namely a Christian--way. The role of the church is to cultivate a people who "can risk being peaceful in a violent world, risk being kind in a competitive society, risk being faithful in an age of cynicism, risk being gentle among those who admire the truth, risk love when it may not be returned, because we have the confidence that in Christ we have been reborn into a new reality."⁴

As a sign, foretaste, and instrument of God's reconciling love and forgiveness, the church regional and local makes Jesus Christ visible in the world. The church is a social reality that offers the resources, the practices, and supports needed to cultivate a people of truth, peace, wholeness, and holiness. Christian community is both the lifestyle and the vocation of the church. The challenge to be the regional Church, a covenanted community of communities is central to our life together as the Northwest Region.

⁴ Stanley Hauerwas, *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1992) p. 118.

Comments illustrating how this dynamic of community, trust, openness and collaboration are experienced in the Region are listed below:

Trust is a hard word in a way. There has been a lack of trust... sometimes really a lack of emotional investment by members of the Board ...they just heard reports, agreed with everything and went home.

Trust and openness has not been very good in the last 10 years. No trust between leaders and the Regional office. The whole issue of trust is bottom line to what we have wrestled with. There was a level of passion but was stymied by leadership that would not give direction or support.

Members of our Board and Commissions are open to work together to do assigned tasks, but not open to learning. We don't seem to want to learn to make changes. We get stuck when new information requires change.

We don't deal with differences at all. If we have differences we submerge them and smile.

We need to come out with a way for churches and pastors to work together. The church board and pastor should be teammates.

When those that are in the know "know" and others do not, the trust diminishes. However when things are transparent and those that are on the outside can see what is going on, things work well

I think for the most part there's a fair amount of trust in letting people use their strengths. And trusting that they are doing the work that needs to be done and doing it the best they can. Even, if they come to a different answer, that is allowable and people respect that. Although that might be within groups. I don't know that there is always the trust between groups. I think this is mostly a communication issue. There is not always full trust in what other groups are doing in relation to each other.

Communication promotes trust. We are not good at this.

The Region is not in conflict; that would be a step up. We have not even recognized our dis-ease.

People did not trust the Board because there was no transparency. It will impact us for a while

The tenure of Jack Sullivan has negatively impacted on the life of the Region. It was a trying time and not handled well. Fallout has been a lack of trust and a lack of confidence that the Region is going to do anything helpful. Folks have sort of shut down with regard to the Region, remained uninvolved.

We still have a racist system of white privilege and power at the core of our decision-making. If left unchanged it will be seriously negative because of the anxiety along with the loss of power and control agenda.

There is a culture of mistrust and lack of accountability not just by staff but by the Board as well.

How do we deal with differences, we talk it to death. In the issue of ordaining gay and lesbian clergy for instance, we talked it to death but came to no official agreement (informal understanding is that we are ok with it).

Hypothesis # 8: Structure to facilitate ministry.

The partial collapse and varying effectiveness of the current Northwest Region organizational structure leads to frustration with how ministry gets done, dissatisfaction as people seek to participate in Regional life, and an unsettling sense that things are not working as they should.

The structural design of a church organization is a major area for analysis and development. The structure (roles & responsibilities, groupings, linkages, policies, procedures & rules, and information flow) of a church organization should, ideally, facilitate its purpose, its vision, mission and goals. “Form” (the structural design) should follow “function” (Vision, Role & Mission, Key Result Areas & Goals). All too often, however, church structures exist with little or no regard for organizational strategy. The impression is that structure exists for its own sake. In fact, some church bodies have probably redrawn the structural chart as a substitute for clarifying its vision and mission strategy.

The functionality – or dysfunctionality – of a church’s structural design is a difficult subject. Because the church is so old, because it has endured as a continuing organization (albeit with reformations and sharp, divisive conflicts) for so long, it inevitably carries elements in its design that are dysfunctional. Sometimes people attribute holy meaning to the dysfunctions and cover them over with religious trappings making them difficult to see. Yet, when there are problems with the organizational structure, they are usually manifest in these ways:

- The way lines are drawn to create various groupings that share a particular responsibility, task, or geographic ministry area.
- The way work roles and responsibilities are defined for persons and groups.
- The way groups are linked with each other to assure communication, pacing, and coordinated decision-making.
- The way information flows throughout the organization in a timely manner to those who need it for decision-making.
- The way policies, procedures, and rules are defined and carried out.
- The ways an organization learns from its experience

Ineffective Structure

General comments about the current structures effectiveness:

With structure we are in a wilderness period now. There was a season when all the committees and commissions worked, but the world moved on. Even in congregations it is an evolving thing. We were into United Ministries and that changed everything; then when we split we went back to previous models. We changed from that and now we are waiting for a new vision. I was concerned with the new bylaws. I tried to explain that form needs to follow function, but there is an anxiety about who is going to do stuff now.

I do not think the structure supports our ministry. There is a need to get people excited about wanting to hear and find out what is going on at the Region.

Structure pieces are there, but how much is working is a question.

Right now the structure is muddy. I am not sure I understand the structure now or how it is or is not functioning.

I do not think the structure has worked well recently. I do not know that it is a structure problem or we were just not using the structures well. Because when it is at its best, then ministry is supported and congregations are supported in crises and given resources to do their jobs. We do not live into the structure well.

This is an issue that we are working on right now that we did not do well in the past. With the Board structure and the ministry teams, with the congregations and geographic areas along with the focus that the committees have to work on ministry areas, we have improved.

The Region is sparsely structured so that we can focus on congregational transformation knowing that is our future along with anti-racism.

We have had four ministry centers as a foundation for programs and teams, but there was a lack of volunteers to carry out this work. Work of a few became overwhelming. Adequate number of volunteers never materialized. Now work groups include the Board, Women's ministry, outdoor ministry, Turner Lectures and anti-racism.

Cohesiveness and effectiveness of the Board/ Commissions/Committees:

The Board, Commissions and Committees vary in their functioning with the effect that there is little continuity. Appreciation was expressed for the good will and dedication of the members of the Board, Commissions and Committees. However concern also was expressed for the lack of a clear purpose and the effectiveness to accomplish meaningful ministry. The following comments illustrate these observations:

We put a lot of significance on our Board, but our Board doesn't speak for everyone in the Region. I do not know how we go beyond that, since we do not have people tying into the Region as much as they used to.

I think the major factor we have when we function well as groups is we have open dialogue; no one is afraid to express their opinion. When it is not functioning well we put our personalities before the goal or our faith.

There is a level of trust that the Regional Board will go back to the areas they represent to pass on information, but this is not effective.

There is a pretty high level of trust and openness with those that are participating on the Board. But people looking in from the outside might differ with that.

The Commission on Ministry as a group is very strong and working hard to right a bunch of wrongs that have happened in recent years. They don't get a lot of support but they need it. They are doing a good job and a lion's share of the work.

Policies:

The Region has had policies written or expressed over the years. Some are written, some are missing and many are not followed. Some policies need to be updated and some new ones are needed to respond to the issues of today. This leads to confusion and unevenness in enforcing them.

Comments regarding the need for policies follow:

There are personnel policies, financial policies, but I am not sure they cover all areas. I believe there are gaps where we need to develop written policy. We try to follow the policies that are in place.

We have no manual. We have no record of key policy decisions. Now we have a policy on who gets to sign checks. We really need to have a policy manual somewhere.

We are trying to find the policies. Under Bob Brock we had some pretty clear policies. We do not have them all in one place.

There are probably more policies than we realize...it's a mixed bag. Generally we would benefit from standard procedures and simple bylaws.

Policies don't exist. The personnel policy is from 1992. Revisions are being explored. There are no Board member guidelines; this could be very important for potential Board members to know the details of their position. We are working on financial policies, child safety policies. After they are written they will have to be accepted.

For Gwinwood, the Board does well in setting rules and the directors follow the rules well, like smoking bans, etc.

We now have to have new ones for things like abuse. This is a good function for the Region to keep the antennae up and let the churches know what they need to be aware of for our own health. The Region can serve as a resource for model policies.

Feedback mechanisms/research.

There is a gap in the presence of regular feedback processes with the effect that the Region fails at times to learn from its experiences. Comments about how the Region learns from its experience follow:

Ministry teams used to do self-evaluations at the end of terms in the past. I am not sure where that went or was kept. I don't recall any board review of itself or anyone else. I am pretty sure there is no formal process.

We don't story tell and without that evaluation we do not learn from experience. We cover up a lot...and avoid showing vulnerability.

Maybe no one is evaluating. In the last 10 years there has been such a transition and turmoil that we were dealing with survival and not in a position to evaluate or analyze and are we even doing what we should be?

A lot of how we evaluate is accidental. At times we have done self-studies, but it is usually because we stumble and fall. There used to be a policy that event participants should fill out an evaluation form and they should be looked over seriously.

We learn from our experience very poorly. Lack of documentation handicaps our institutional memory so we are constantly recreating ourselves in crisis and in being reactive instead of proactive.

I think we do feedback relatively slowly. We let problems group without being dealt with until they can't be dealt with in a healthy manner.

At camp the directors and counselors are supposed to be evaluated. They seem to have questionnaires for the campers but it seems all the questions were about food and camp. We should be evaluating the counselors instead of the cooks.

Linkages:

Few structures and processes currently facilitate the linking functions necessary for the effective collaboration in the Northwest Region.

Linkages refer to the structures and processes that facilitate collaboration and cooperation across levels and between areas in the Region's organization: The essential linking functions referred to above include:

Information-flow. The linking person functions as a channel between two groups so that they both have before them the following important information:

Coordinated problem-solving Linking is responsible for helping the two groups work in a coordinated way and at the same rate of speed. Linking is responsible for pacing the process of inter-group problem solving and decision-making.

Reciprocal influence. The linking is responsible for enabling each linked group to influence the other group(s) with which it is linked.

Clarify essential conditions. Linking persons are responsible for helping both linked teams understand the conditions (situational requirements, criteria, non-negotiable considerations) that each team has identified as important but which the other team may be ignoring.

Mobilize motivational forces. Linking persons are responsible for reminding both linked teams of the strong motivational forces that hold the church organization together, such as: Loyalty to Christ, Commitments to the overall goals of the church.

While appreciation is expressed for the complexity and efforts put forth for collaboration, this is an area where additional effort is needed.

Groups link with one another on a wing and a prayer. Most just work within their own groups. Teams are not really connected to one another; they should be more coordinated. They don't always tell the Regional Office when meetings are happening or report what happened at meetings. Groups are pretty independent.

We have linkage only when a member serves on more than one commission area.

Coordination is extremely important. We have an East/West divide which makes it difficult to coordinate due to the geographic area. It hard to find people for training. The fact that Disciples are so unique and independent is hurting us.

I assume linkage happens through the Board, I don't know. I believe it is through Rebecca right now. This is a serious issue to be addressed.

We have good connections from the Board to the four districts in the Region. But we do not have any link with the Justice and Ecumenical ministry team. We have decided not to fill slots, so some roles and links are sitting empty. We have no link to leadership development now.

We tried joint meetings of all teams; the time together was not used well; it was top down and not bottom up. We need input from the congregational level so that they believe what the Region is doing has some relevance.

We can't even get our calendars straight. We have three groups willing to meet on one weekend. No one tells anyone when they are meeting until after the fact. Every committee is very stand-alone. We did not even know on the Board that we had new church starts. Putting together the Regional Assembly was a challenge as folk came up at the last minute to find time on the agenda.

As far as information flow and linkage outside our group I don't know. In RYC we are pretty much self-contained. As our group we are fully functional in communication. We have our own Board and communicate fairly well.

Hypothesis # 9: Communication as Central to Our Life Together

Good, effective, timely and transparent communication is essential to the life of the Region. Concern for good communication was the most widely expressed concern and hope. Given the size, diversity and complexity of the Region, communication is a key to faithful and fruitful mission and ministry as we look to the future.

While communication is a function of organizational structure, it is dealt with separately here because of the emphasis it was given by those interviewed. Information flow is the currency of organizations enabling them to function

cohesively like the parts of the Body of Christ. Communication serves to empower and enable ministry and mission across the spectrum of a church body. It is central to trust and enabling collaboration. Comments about the need and hope for better communication in the Region follow:

Communication promotes trust. We are not good at this

One key area of concern is communication and that is improving. The Regional Office seems more approachable now.

My reaction is that there needs to be a more intensive flow of information with no one left out... both more and different communication. In the past the Region provided more news about the General Church but it is a challenge to get it to the people in the pews.

It would really help if Gwinwood information was in regional communications. It is a matter of lack of communication

We have not done a good job of maintaining quality communication channels. If I am not on the Board, decisions come to me full blown and I wonder how that happened or that it was even going on. We need to do a seriously better job of maintaining good open and transparent communication.

Communication has increased markedly after the last seven weeks with Rebecca here and getting it to be reliable. We are making steps in this direction

Information does not flow well and it is not looked at if it is received. For example a Women's event is scheduled on the same day as the Regional Board meeting. Each group is nuclear and doing its own thing. Somebody makes a decision and eventually it filters down the line (great be game of telephone tag). Technically the Office Coordinator keeps the Regional calendar, but only when information is given and there is not support to make sure information gets out.

When there is a block to Christian community the number one reason is lack of communication, lack of open and honest communication. Incomplete stories and the rumor mill with folks telling what they know or don't. People get discouraged and uninterested and step away.

To be the Body of Christ, we have to be working together as one with different functions. To do that you have to have people involved and people knowing what is going on. So having as many people as is feasible making decisions and trying to make sure that anyone who wants to know what is going on at the regional level and knows who to contact if they want to is important to becoming the Body of Christ. For the most part, the Region does facilitate this communication. There are things the Board is doing to try to facilitate communication. That is something really lacking in the Region.

Summary

These are the major hypotheses to be tested. They are not the only significant challenges that are facing the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) today and that will continue to face it tomorrow, but they are certainly among the most significant.

Each of these challenges requires prayerful thought, careful examination, and creative planning. Each will require important changes in the ways the leaders and members of Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) think and act.

Summary of Hypotheses to be discussed and tested.

Hypothesis #1: Changing Circumstances – Destabilizing Effects.

The social, cultural, denominational, and religious environment for the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and its congregations is changing dramatically. To be faithful in ministry given its context requires that the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and its congregations be adventurous and open to rethinking assumptions it has held about its context, and what it will mean to be the church with a minority witness in this context.

Hypothesis #2: Confusion about vision, purpose, and goals

Most persons do not know what vision is guiding the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). There is lack of clarity about the purpose, or reason for being, of the Region (what work it should do and why). This leads to unrealistic and competing expectations and haphazard participation in its life.

Hypothesis #3: Region: An Office, A Set of Programs, or An Expression of Church?

One of the central questions before the Region is to become clear about its own identity. There are different understandings and expectations operating about who or what the Region is. Is the Region the office and staff, a set of programs, an expression of church, a covenanted community of communities? Prayerful discernment of this fundamental question is at the heart of helping the Region look faithfully to the future.

Hypothesis # 4: Losing a Sense of Community.

While historically valuing collegiality and a rich connectional life, the sense and practice of community within the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) seems to be disappearing. We are losing the spirit of our Regional family. Churches and pastors are going their separate ways and are no longer a community of

congregations who know each other and seek to be in fellowship with each other.

There is built into the structure of the Region a dichotomy between the notion of pastors, congregations and the Region being in a covenant relationship with each other, and the idea of individual or congregational autonomy. In the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) this dichotomy raises questions today about what it means to be the church, what it means to be church together, and what holds congregations in relationship with each other. This dichotomy plays itself out in confusion over what we are to expect of others and ourselves “as Region” while loyalty and stronger allegiance is given to the local church or other causes.

Hypothesis # 5: History a blessing or a Burden?

There is a rich history and heritage in the Northwest Region upon which we can build. As we appreciate the best of our experience it can become a basis for discerning a new direction for the future. On the other hand, we are at times held back by past experiences and by those who only want to live in the past and are unable to enter creatively and openly into the work of discerning anew how we will participate in God’s vision in a new day.

Hypothesis # 6: Developing and Allocating our Resources

Significant cultural forces at work combined with lack of a shared compelling vision for our regional life has an impact on resources development in the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). This is especially true in the areas of Leadership development and financial development. Without effective development and utilization of the Region’s resources the future of a viable and effective Region organization is in question.

Hypothesis # 7: A Climate of Trust: lost and in the process of being found

The climate of openness and trust in the Region has been eroded over recent years. This climate is potentially destructive leading to conflicts and unhelpful divisions, winners and losers. It weakens the witness and mission of the Region because it demonstrates the ways of a broken and conflicted world rather than the unifying ways of the Gospel.

Hypothesis # 8: Structure to facilitate ministry.

The partial collapse and varying effectiveness of the current Northwest Region organizational structure leads to frustration with how ministry gets done, dissatisfaction as people seek to participate in Regional life, and an unsettling sense that things are not working as they should.

Hypothesis # 9: Communication as Central to Our Life Together

Good, effective, timely and transparent communication is essential to the life of the Region. Concern for good communication was the most widely expressed concern and hope. Given the size, diversity and complexity of the Region, communication is a key to faithful and fruitful mission and ministry as we look to the future.

Next Steps

The Diagnostic Analysis Report will be shared with the Regional Board and the Region. The hypotheses statements along with other observations about factors and forces impacting on the Region will be discussed at four separate Discover Conferences scheduled around the Region to maximize participation. The hoped for result of this phase of the RISE process is to help the Region, its clergy, its members and its leaders to develop a common view of its reality in preparation for discerning God's vision for the Region and planning for the future.