

Covenant Cluster Network Consultation 24-26 February 2011

The notes that follow are assembled from participant notes and small group reports. While these notes have no official status, they are intended to present highlights, themes and initiatives rising out of the consultation.

Thursday, February 24, 2011

Dwight DuBois gathered the Covenant Cluster for its fifth consultation.

Mark Wilhelm gave a historical perspective on change, particularly how change is affecting theological education:

- Denominational identity has changed in that there appears to be less identification by members with a denomination. Among Lutherans, however, there continues to be a shared internal identity that can be drawn upon. What can also be pointed to as the victory of the ecumenical movement is the fact that denominations have now almost entirely stopped condemning each other, claiming theirs is the only true church. The implications for mission, then, might be that we're encouraging people to return to their own church-of-origin (rather than just trying to get them to come to ours).
- Religious participation has changed. There are fewer in church regularly. But as the cultural barriers have fallen and "the nation has become the neighborhood," the kind of participation has changed.
- Religious pluralism is descriptive of almost every community in the United States. There is ethnic and cultural diversity where ever we look. Some of the diversity is the result of the most recent wave of immigrants from Africa, for example.
- The impact on theological education has included
 - presence of more women, both as learners and as teachers
 - inclusion of those who are not of northern European extraction
 - the professionalization of theological education that has maintained a strong commitment to the study of theology
 - figuring out how to extent the theological education "gold standard" to alternative forms of leadership and preparation

Comments:

- move toward more participation in theological education and theological education of all the baptized, fulfilling callings in daily life
- how to maintain the gold standard in a variety of ways of doing theological education, of doing educating in theology that prepares people for their vocations
- What is the peculiar, unique Lutheran witness to the Christian table and what requirements are essential for maintaining that?

Reports/updates

- Greg Villalon on the work of the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit
 - accompany missional congregations

- accompany synods in nurturing missional leadership schools
- root discipleship in the ministry of all the baptized
- include catechists and evangelists
- Latino missional schools

- Erik Ullestad on the work of the Living into the Future Together (LIFT) task force
 - LIFT has been focusing on internal and external factors affecting congregations
 - Lutheran identity
 - relationships across the ELCA
 - expectations of various partners in the ecology of the ELCA
 - What is God calling us to be and do in the future?
 - What changes are in order to help us respond most faithfully?
 - What they have learned:
 - theology and teaching is important to ELCA members
 - the ELCA lacks clear identity; Lutherans are not distinctive
 - member connections throughout the ELCA are valued
 - there is strong focus on theology of justification by grace through faith and on sharing the good news of the Gospel
 - providing a strong system of theological education for pastors is important
 - feeding the hungry and advocating for the poor is important
 - Factors impacting congregations positively
 - commitment to evangelism/outreach
 - quality pastors
 - Factors impacting congregations negatively
 - economy
 - sexuality decisions
 - Themes, Colleges/Universities
 - value networks and collaboration between the colleges and churchwide
 - Lutheran understanding of vocation is important
 - they can assist in developing lay mission schools
 - leaders are exploring new models of governance and relationship
 - Themes, Seminaries
 - emphasize theological education AND leadership development
 - synods/churchwide ready to support seminaries
 - catalysts with synods in opening congregational imaginations
 - incorporate what is being done in lay mission schools

- Seminary Deans
 - Craig Nesson (Wartburg)
 - TEEM
 - process in place
 - Covenant Cluster seminaries talking about a unified program
 - proposal ready to be presented to faculties
 - Theological education in the Southwest

- response to dramatically changed demographics in Southwest
- see www.pewhispanic.org
- what assets do seminaries bring to address changes and needs
- Theological education for mission
 - seminaries of the ELCA are committed to and have developed curricula that are mission-oriented
 - primary focus of seminaries is on MDiv degree
 - Now how can we draw on assets of seminaries to equip all the baptized for mission?
 - What do we mean when we say “mission?”
 - capacity for evangelizing
 - social justice
 - ecumenical
 - global
 - particular issues to be addressed
 - what are the specific outcomes, behaviors of missional education?
 - what are expectations of the quality of the education? what are the standards?
 - how are we to prepare teachers?
 - what is the shape of the curriculum?
 - length and intensity of educational program
 - what kinds of pedagogies will we use?
 - interface with other certificate and degree programs
- Jim Childs (Trinity)
 - strong partnership and broad ownership will be key to success of missional schools. Must be attended to at every step of the way of development
 - proposed a working session to which the stakeholders are invited, with the requirement of concrete outcomes
 - local cooperation: seminaries (and colleges) that are working in close relationships with geographically-proximate partners. these do NOT preclude partnerships with other ELCA seminaries
- Michael Shelley (LSTC)
 - focus of seminaries is on training of rostered leaders
 - share commitment to mission of the whole church
 - cooperation with others in interfaith community, even from our distinctive perspectives
 - *accompaniment* as the model for how we work with each other. We walk with each other. How can we in the Covenant Cluster Network walk with each other, particularly as we work with missional leadership schools?

Mark Ramseth: The Covenant Cluster Board has set aside time to respond to what the Network Consultation may bring to the board at the end of this consultation.

Kit Klienmans: What is the interest of the LIFT task force in inviting the colleges/universities to help shape missional leadership schools?

Harvard Stephens: Forms of public recognition for those who complete program. Gatherings like this need to include those who are participating in the theological education. In the interfaith conversation, we learn not only about the other but we also encounter anew the vitality of our own tradition.

Friday, February 25, 2011

What-if:

- Candidacy committees with expanded entrance process would approve candidate for immediate call, serve congregation immediately, with life-long schedule of six month service/one month learning throughout lifetime
- Cluster focused on two project: TEEM and Schools for Missional Leadership, and identified stakeholders and players
- Mission schools
 - worked out of congregations
 - didn't train to preach or preside
 - offered biblical literacy
 - formation
 - systematic theology
 - focus on ministry in world
- Churchwide Staff
 - sem/college accompany one synod pilot and the cluster network would serve as review place
 - DEMS were there
 - cluster sponsored consultation on Missional Leadership
- Seminaries were more intentional in training pastors as teachers of bible and teachers of evangelism
- TEEM were more fully to integrate resources of colleges of church
- communication was church-wide
- Wartburg Seminary
 - equipping the baptized for missions in the world/people for service in world
 - lifted up focus on intercultural competency
 - did this work regionally, ecumenically, and interfaith
- Iowans
 - didn't create more formal structures but were open
 - digital natives were in the conversation
 - pay attention to those who never church's threshold
- Fisher's Net Select
 - what if we valued networking
 - volunteered to be test cluster for pilot for First Call Theological Education
 - built on trusted relationships to resource Missional Leadership

- First Call Theological Education (FCTE) group
 - all understood what missional leader means
 - were to empower rostered leaders to be missional and congregations to be missional
 - developed a missional FCTE event that could be model for others
- Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
 - notion of mission schools were more clearly understood
 - represented shared vision with colleges and seminaries
- Lay schools
 - there were one seminary in many places, dispersed widely
 - would bring name with them, brand with them
 - lay schools were more intentional about helping people through process
 - there were a nationally-recognized label for those who complete programs

Comments/questions

- What if we developed networks of missional leadership?
- What if communities of color were more involved with missional leadership?
- Does relying on Directors of Evangelical Mission turn it into a churchwide initiative rather than a Covenant Cluster initiative?

Afternoon focus/topics

- Missional Leadership
- Lifting up focus on intercultural competencies
- Leadership skills/FCTE, building test pilot
- What assets does each of us bring to a focus on missional leadership? How do we best implement the mission of the baptized and their education for that mission?

Passions

- Designing a network that facilitates our common work
- How do we use the resources of the church to equip the rostered leaders we need
- Missional Leadership
- How do the various partners work together in candidacy? How do we do candidacy together?
- FCTE
- Mapping the assets
- equipping leaders for intercultural mission

Reports from afternoon small groups:

Seminaries:

- not enough students, too many pastors at present, inclination to help students achieve rostering

Designing the network

- Purpose: To facilitate equipping the baptized for their vocations in the world
- Structure: To help those engage in mission to share in mission, provide support, theological education, resources and resource persons,
- Are we an annual gathering or something that exists throughout the year?

- Make use of website to connect synods
- Annual event:
 - renew
 - educate
 - connect

FCTE

- model being developed by a number of partners in Minnesota and Wisconsin, to be piloted in Wisconsin/UP.

Candidacy

- Two functions: accompany candidates AND evaluate candidates
- “Can we unpack the MDiv degree?” Education/spiritual formation/contextual education. Do they all need to be done in the same place and at the same time?

Missional Leadership

- What do we mean by “missional?”

Intercultural mission

- How do we serve a changing demographic
 - help congregations strategize about partnering
 - to help identify candidates for TEEM program
 - train leaders for multicultural leadership
- Lutheran Seminary Program of the Southwest, seminaries, lay schools, colleges as partners
- week-long immersion model, hosted at LSPS

Assets in place:

- Experiment in Central States of four retreats in one year, Partnership for Missional Church
- What are the assets available for Congregationally-based organizing? Indiana-Kentucky Synod, Milwaukee, Chicago
- Northeast Iowa works with Luther College, Wartburg Seminary and Wartburg College plus Lutheran Social Services of Iowa, hospital, campus ministry and synod non-degree program
- Grandview University has created the Center for Renewal as a think-tank on leadership. Has started the Sacred Practices Leadership Series. Working on pastoral habits and skills that equip people for ministry in daily life
- Augsburg Fortress creates resources for adult learning and to support those in the academy.
- LSTC offers the Leadership Conference, will offer online book discussion.
- Southern Ohio has a lay theological education program. Have begun a Leadership Institute and are working with 12 congregations
- LSPS provides continuing education, Thursday noon-Saturday noon.
- Trinity Lutheran Seminary, with Wittenberg and Capital Universities, are exploring cooperative relationships in offering continuing education. Work with program in Northwest Lower Michigan Synod. Had an academy in Cleveland which has stopped—but because it has happened means that it could happen again.
- ELCA colleges who have had Lilly Vocations Grants are piloting a program on vocation

for their alumnae. First two pilots in Rockford, IL, and Rochester, MN.

- College and seminary faculty members are regularly out and about doing their teaching including in congregations and with synod-based theological education programs.

How can we accompany each other in working toward the goals of Missional Leadership?

- Connect by listening to what each other is doing
- Make use of what is already in place

Saturday, February 26, 2011

Proposals:

- **#1 2012 Consultation**
 - That the Covenant Cluster Network consultation be held in February 2012 (exact date to be determined by the planning team).
 - That the Covenant Cluster Network consultation focus on the deepening of intercultural involvement in programming provided by the Cluster constituency
- **#2 That the agenda for the next Covenant Cluster Network consultation include**
 - a focus on equipping the institutions in the Covenant Cluster to engage missional leadership particularly on developing intercultural competencies
 - updates from seminaries on further collaborative efforts
 - update on the FCTE model pilot project
 - update on the Vocation for Life Project
 - updates on other projects that are emerging
- **#3 That a representative from the CCN be appointed as a member of the Covenant Cluster board**
- **#4 That each participant in this CCN consultation provide a report to her/his constituency**
- **#5 That link to the CCN website be posted on the synod, seminary, college and other organizational websites**
- **#6 That we make use of the Lifelong Learning Network of the ELCA Facebook page** (You will need an identity in Facebook to participate in this group. If you already have a Facebook identity, go to the group called “Lifelong Learning Network of the ELCA” and request to join the group.)

Proposed revision to the purpose statement of the Covenant Cluster Network:

To facilitate the ELCA theological education network in equipping the baptized for their vocation to serve God’s mission for the life of the world

Debrief

- speed networking was helpful. Do it earlier in the schedule
- worship was a highlight
- laughing at the last line of the gospel during Eucharist was a wonderful gift
- liked the focused groups on Friday afternoon. Do it sooner so that we might have been able to do multiple sessions of focused groups

- Want grape juice for Eucharist
- suggestion of a pre-session for first-time participants
- try not to pack so much into the days
- build in more time for informal networking
- do we have ways to do this work that would require less time and less money
- thanks to Laura Wilhelm for her work as facilitator and to the members of the planning team
- reminder that notes from previous gatherings are posted on the Covenant Cluster Network, www.covenantcluster.net
- tell stories of the ways in which the relationships nurtured by and at Covenant Cluster Network Consultation have continued to blossom into teaching and learning opportunities. The stories are important and it would be helpful to tell the stories as often as possible
- There was affirmation of a learning component (presenter, speaker, Bible study leader, immersion experience, etc.) of the consultation

It was proposed that the next gathering of Covenant Cluster Network would take place February 23-25, 2012 with the strong recommendation that it be held in Austin, Texas.