

Covenant Cluster Consultation March 15-17, 2007

No official minutes were taken of this gathering. What follows was assembled from individuals' notes. Though accurate to the best of our ability, the notes are intended as a sampling and highlights, and they have no official status.

More than 50 persons gathered at the Merillac Center in Leavenworth, KS, for the second Covenant Cluster Consultation.

Mark Ramseth began by challenging those who are present to address:

- Our shared responsibility for teaching and learning across many institutional lines. How can we develop a larger faculty, a cluster faculty?
- What it mean to have a distributed network of theological education.
- How we will do theological education in a setting that will be more decentralized *and* connected?

Stan Olson reminded participants of some of the history of the are included in the Covenant Cluster:

- **Cooperatives**/Farmers' Cooperatives are part of our shared, common history. Cooperatives were formed to support people in their purchasing and selling livelihoods.
- We have in our shared history the admonition to be **hospitable** to traveling Christians.
- Lutherans established **institutions** including congregations, hospitals, camps, campus ministries, bible societies, colleges, seminaries, evangelism festivals. The group did all of these things and the linkage was through the group that tied people and institutions together. The mission remains the same; the networking helps the institutions adapt to change.

The role of the Covenant Cluster is to be a net for the sake of work/common work. He made reference to a publication entitled: *The Nimble Collaboration*, published by the Wilder Foundation. In this book, distinction is made between these types of working arrangements: **Coordination**, simple exchange of information, some watching of what each other is doing for the sake of both ones own success and the success of the other.

Cooperation, more details exchange of information done earlier. More effort to understand each other's interests. Organizations make a commitment to support the work. Project-specific joint planning. But responsibility remains with each organization, and anyone can walk away if it doesn't meet their goals

Collaboration, "An act of bravery." The partners grapple first with the issue and then decide what each can bring to the issue; the collective, however, makes the decision. There may need to be institutional approval, but the institution agrees to be influenced by other institutions. These collaborations then make claims on the institutions. Relationships are established, not offices. The wisdom involved is determining what level of engagement we should have that is appropriate to the issue/work.

Preferential Option

The preferred option for the Covenant Cluster is a dynamic partnership of theological education providers for vocation discernment and leadership formation for the baptized.

The Book of Faith initiative is presenting an opportunity for the Covenant Cluster to demonstrate what a collaborative effort, a collaborative network can look like and do. This will involve a book of essays. Some are looking for something like *Word and Witness* or *Bethel*. It will have a study bible, it will be web-based, it will include theological education for rostered leaders, and it must focus on all ages.

The opportunity for the Covenant Cluster is to use the existing networks (rather than simply trying to create new delivery systems), to field test materials for Book of Faith, etc.

Nate Frambach:

His presentation focused on the fundamental question, “What does it mean to be the church today?” Emerging church is one of the approaches to addressing this question. Many churches have operated as if they were a local franchise of Starbucks. But he is proposing that they are more like the kiosk at a local farmers’ market.

The Emerging Church, postmodern worshipping communities, or emerging ecclesiologies. Worship is experiential, participatory, image-rich and connected. See the following website:

www.emergentvillage.com

www.emerginleadersnetwork.org

The groups are often living on the edges of the denomination. Maintain multiple ecclesial relationships. Have been birthed by people from Generation X and the Millennial Generation. Often have been nurtured by other manifestations of the church. Re-living Christianity against the back-drop of post-modernism. It is a transition like standing on the edge of moving tectonic plates. Attempting to live the question “What does it mean to be the church today.” Aren’t looking for more rules but telling more stories. Navigating the changing landscape while tethered to God’s story. “What does it mean for us to be *who* we are *where* we are?”

Observations, principals, and practices:

Worship=team design: Worship is planned and led by a team; This is not a group of people that fills in the blanks for worship; People with various roles, gifts and expertise engage in design and implementation; Open, fluid, ongoing and deliberate communication is called for. For a sample of this worship, look for the DVD of the 2007 Youth Ministry Extravaganza.

Feedback loops: Continuous feedback loops critique and inform planning for each worship experience; elements may be used repeatedly as an embedded *Ordo*; the worship experience is new each week, unique to each week.

A return to art: locally generated art is used extensively; it is happening in the midst of the community as the community gathers in worship; http://www.next-save.org/apr00/musings_on_art.htm; the arts provide non-discursive, non-linear opportunities.

Language matters: language is a key issue; narrative is primary with emphasis on “real” experiences and words; rote, wooden, “church” language seldom employed, and if used, evoke immediate suspicion and generally ignored; leaders listen to and use appropriately the stories of the community. Prophetic, apostolic and poetic role of the leaders.

Room for spontaneity: worship is not over-defined nor over-prescribed; making or leaving space for spontaneity is important; spontaneity is the domain of the Holy Spirit and makes many nervous; multiple interpretations are expected and sought, the “world in front of the text.” Meanings are found that were not anticipated by the designers and planners.

Music: Most use a “rock” idiom. Use also Celtic, Taize, techno; risk creating new musical styles that serve old texts, and employing old musical styles that serve new texts; music grows out of an authentic encounter with the Christian tradition in the community; music has and creates affect, it is deeply soulful and connects with people emotionally without lapsing into emotionalism;

Worship space and time: both space and time are typically not “traditional” in the sense of conventional; part of worship experience includes creating sacred time and space that fits the rhythm of the community’s life; often the community gathers in an intentionally “profane” setting; not concerned with religion or religious purposes;

Humor is...: expected; natural; naturally used; cf. *Keeping the Faith* (movie, 2000);

Attention to “text(s)”: rich understanding of “text” that includes full range of texts; use both sacred text and cultural text; pop culture, TV, film, music, video; whatever exposes the deep questions that people are asking. See writings of Wendell Barry and Mary Oliver;

Suffering is...: personal, social, environmental; acknowledged; something to be joined/befriended rather than conquered/fixated.

Experimentation, or...: practice of faithful innovation; awareness that new forms of worship are needed to function during epochal change; need no more rules but more stories; talk of second reformation; retrieving old things in a new way.

Statement of faith: use of Nicene Creed; statement of faith is prominent and figural in life of community; creeds serve as lodestar, not litmus test; serve as primary model/guide;

Genuine appreciation of diversity: age, gender, race, economic status, religious background; appearance, opinion; all human experience is valid; diversity not forced onto or into community; be open and reach out to the diversity that is present in your context, through hospitality, listening and service

Categories?...no thanks: regarded as wooden and useless, stifling, destructive; almost always ignored; value open, mutual, civil dialogue;

Robust doctrine of God: God is experienced as radical transcendence and radical immanence; Trinitarian understanding of God serves as basis for valuing of relationship and community;

Ancient-future orthodoxy:

Dialogue is valued: no felt need to judge or condemn other faith or religious expressions; rather, engage and be engaged by the “other”

Honoring the questions: power of question is valued; questions make leadership neither reactive nor defensive; community is open to, appreciates, invites genuine inquiry; in order to communicate effectively with others, one must know what the questions are;

Being in the neighborhood: one neighbor among many in a local setting; cultivate relationships with other neighbors for the sake of the well-being of the entire neighborhood; practice of neighbor love neighbor-as-servant disposition is leading edge of community involvement; not simply a “front” for evangelism.

(See also Jacob’s Well, www.jacobswellchurch.org)

Friday

Kristin Glass:

Changing practice of when one has reached young-adulthood. A higher number of youth and young adults is also naming someone close to them as someone they admire. They are looking

for models/mentors, and are looking for it in relationships with someone close to them. Emphasizes the importance of belonging. Also raises the issue of what kinds of relationships younger pastors will look at having with members of their congregations (cf. emerging church communities)

<http://people-press.lrg/reports/pdf/300.pdf>

Beth Lewis:

Young adults communicating in “sound bites.” Are the media clips replacing the biblical references that were once the “stock phrases” that provided the metaphors basic for our communication? Desire not so much to have resources delivered to them but desire to partner in the development of the resource.

The Long Tail, Chris Anderson; the products that at one point didn't sell (because there was limited shelf space), now can sell on the internet because shelf space isn't the primary issue.

Nate Frambach: Move from Starbucks franchise to farmers' market kiosk. *Soul Searching: the Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*.

'Community is the curriculum'; The curriculum for the community's life together is the community's life together. Discernment and accountability without it becoming central control.

Sharon Dalos Parks and Rollie Martinson (*Coming of Age*) books about young adults, young men. Check also “Second Life” websites that are now replacing You Tube and My Space.

Dear Church: Letters from a Disillusioned Generation, Sarah Cunningham (Zondervan)

Jim Echols:

Seminary role as hub in network of theological education. Strategic plan gave focus on lay and continuing education noted. And self-study related to accreditation noted for its conservative approach to non-traditional theological. Puts the three seminaries collectively in a place of being hub in the following roles:

Vehicles for coordination and communication of a network of theological education

Theological and pedagogical advice and council can be sought

Can be resources for equipping and energizing Missional leaders.

The LSTC Board has proposed a Lay Academy. Pres. Echols has proposed emphasis on Missional calling as it relates to lay and continuing theological education. Proposes also:

Non-degree programming will be 'niche-centered' based on existing strengths of LSTC

Wondering about a DMin program in specific areas. One that he is very interested in is to train

DMin students to become teachers in the synods.

Partnering with Cluster seminaries in offering programming.

Duane Larson:

He is glad to be back for the second year. He feels that the seminaries are mentored by those of us who have gathered. They are In-Formed by us.

Exhortation to a concrete strategic plan for the Covenant Cluster. He supports Mark Ramseth's challenge in his opening remarks.

Think 'niche' and 'holistic' at the same time.

Strategic plan calls for strengthening 'niches'

Duane then wondered about the role of MDiv grads in synods that have many TEEMs and SAMs. Might we want to start emphasizing the teaching vocation of some of these MDivs?

Should that impact the way they are taught at the seminary? How can the cluster network help sort this out?

Lift of faculty as public theologians, youth/young adult ministry program, rural ministry, theology and development/public health,

How can these niche efforts be informed by others in the network in order to create a coherent strategic plan. Asking specifically how we can get to our desired ends? Duane commented that this is his exegesis of Mark's challenge on Thursday. (*What are the ends?*)

Questions and Answer time followed. Here are several that have implications for future work of this cluster network.

1. What do you think might be some of the "ends?" Duane Larson replied: "Larger Seamless Lay Education program for the cluster." "Equipping new young missional leaders."
2. How can we leverage the assets of our many colleges? Duane Larson's reply: "Structurally we first talked about clusters based on seminaries. Now these past two cluster gatherings have pushed us to use new language to fit this new understanding." Jim Echols added examples of partnerships between faculties of seminaries and colleges already in place.

Web sites of all participants

[ALDE > ALDE Home](#)

Phyllis Wiederhoeft

[Augsburg Fortress](#)

Beth Lewis

[Augustana College](#)

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[Eastern Cluster of Lutheran Seminaries \(ELCS easterncluster.com\)](#)

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[ECSW](#)

Tobi Johannsen

[Faith and Wisdom: Life Long Learning Opportunities for People of Faith](#)

Faith and Wisdom: A Searchable Database of Life Long Learning Opportunities for People of Faith

[Grand View College: liberal arts college, colleges, Des Moines, Iowa](#)

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[LSM Homepage](#)

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[Luther College, Decorah, Iowa, U.S.A. Residential, undergraduate liberal arts college emphasizing learning, faith, leadership, and service.](#)

Luther College, Amy Zack Larson

[Lutheran Campus Ministry-ELCA](#)

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[Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago: Home Page](#)

President Jim Echols, Michael Shelley

[Nebraska Lutheran Outdoor Ministries - Home](#)

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[Northeastern Iowa Synod - Evangelical Lutheran Church In America -](#)

[lutheran,bible,sacraments,mission driven,mobility,call process,job opportunities](#)

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[Southeastern Iowa Synod - Main Page](#)

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[Synod Resource Center](#)

Greg Kaufmann

[The Fisher's Net](#)

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[The Southwestern Texas Synod Office: Home](#)

Bishop Ray Tiemann

[The TELLING Synod - TX-LA Gulf Coast, ELCA](#)

Paul Blom

[Trinity Lutheran Seminary](#)

Don Huber, Jim Caldwell, President Mark Ramseth, Diane Hymans

[Vocation and Education Unit](#)

Stan Olson, Mark Wilhelm, Dick Bruesehoff

[Wartburg College - Waverly, Iowa, USA](#)

Ramona Bouzard

[Wartburg Theological Seminary Website](#)

President Duane Larson Craig Nesson Ken Gibson Lynn Smith Lynn Smith

[Western Iowa Synod ELCA](#)

Danette Johns

[Western Mission Cluster](#)

Jodi Hanson

[Wittenberg University](#)

Bob White

Affinity Session # 1

Group 1

Integrating the emerging church - remember that hospitality & discipleship cross all boundaries take lay ministry to college campus & missionary training of the church members to connect w/ emerging church in authentic ways.

Challenges - expecting one model; order vs. control; provide trust & options for self-shaping; a way to re-imagine existing opportunities to make model exportable, sustainable & more accessible

Group 2

What it means to be people of faith, how we do church – not just questions for young adults. How will church, colleges, camp and campus ministries be part of this conversation? Need to be more open to questions people are facing, need to be in touch w/ context, help people in congregations, etc. reflect on & learn to “tell their own stories”, bless what goes around “dinner tables”,

Covenant Cluster-how can we help each other in conversation w/ real life/work?

Hospitality-problem for those who get in door, what about those who don't?

Send out students to give to congregations & help them get in touch w/ real world.

Need to help congregations enter w/, grapple w/ questions & help them find strong sense of mission.

Group 3

How to be more open & attuned to “under 30 culture”: next generation not homogenous, “new monasticism”, mission-evangelizing in non-traditional ways.

Trusting in them is important; is nurtured in an environment made safe by rules; must re-assess (edit) candidacy process-for many it appears unsafe environment; discernment/formation toward rostering needs to be conversationally-reciprocally based, not unilateral. TEEM very viable.

Emerging church is still congregational, entrepreneurial, wants Lutheran theology w/o institutional structural oppression. Humanizing candidacy process will not hurt.

Group 4

How ELCA can find it's essence among all generations-especially two youngest generations?

The language, structures, connectors, etc. need to relate to the faith. Technology doesn't “fix” issues-podcasts aren't likely to be focused attention (IE. Sermon), needs to be a person who points toward the gospel/reflection.

How we envision congregations as community: One of many who gather around Jesus-moved by persuasive power of the gospel as opposed to community rules.

Group 5

Purpose of this event year to year? Cooperate/collaborate/coordinate in all areas.

Accountability may be position for this event; keep relating into synergy through common practices & communication; can't do our job in vacuum when connected.

Questions of “what we do/how we do it” really different than we had? Technology not a barrier to community for learning, but questions about use-it connects, but possible differences in definitions of community. Some students don't perceive accountability as necessary-perception needs to be addressed & acknowledged. Educating for hospitality to the stranger to build community = evangelism.

Must agree upon practices so the way of collaboration is possible; identify, define and support teachers; must standardize accreditation.

Cluster faculty Group

TEEM Consultation Group

Book of Faith Group

Distance Learning Group

Saturday

Reflections from the bishops who have been present for the consultation:

Ray Tiemann: Amazement at the wide variety of things happening in the cluster as a whole. His synod has come to depend on locally trained and authorized persons and these people have become a real blessing to the synod and the congregations.

Kevin Knouse: He comes away from this event more convinced than ever that we need to focus on how we make the Lutheran tradition relevant to the generation of people we've been talking about.

Gerald Mansholt: The missional church focus must continue to drive us. That gives us direction, it helps us be free to experiment and even to fail. We can't go back, re-capture a church of the past. We need to stay in touch with what it has meant to be Lutheran and make it happen in local congregations. We need to renew the spiritual life of who we are; rekindle the passion to be a Lutheran follower of Jesus Christ – a church in mission. To do this we need more and deeper theology. That can be the job of this cluster, particularly in the light of the Book of Faith Initiative.

Paul Blom: We are people who are gifted, who share our gifts with others. And we are also people who receive the gifts of others, particularly when we engage in lifelong learning. Paul shared his bias. Those who are called to be in leadership, must be equipped to use the skills and gifts of teaching. He regularly looks at the annual reports of pastors to see how many are doing significant continuing education. He is saddened that very few are. Can the Covenant Cluster address that matter? Can the Covenant Cluster work at encouraging leaders to engage in giving and receiving the gifts we have to offer to each other? We also need enhancement of ethnic-specific leadership formation. Might this cluster also make this a priority? He will also carry with him the encouragement to look for opportunities to coordinate, cooperate and collaborate.

Summary of key challenges from the four bishops:

1. Book of Faith – we need deep Biblical and theological roots in order to equip our people to be passionate about mission.
2. We need ethnic specific ministry – how can we do a better job of that?
3. We need to rekindle a desire for continuing education for all of our leaders, as well as all the baptized. Can the cluster address at least a piece of that huge challenge?

4. How can we help equip congregations to connect with youth?

Emerging questions:

What constitutes a course?

Micheal Rehak will collect the names of people who should be available as a Cluster Faculty.

One group asked for focus also to be given to the variety of pedagogies useful for doing theological education for all the baptized.

Marianne Wilkinson tested the assumption that this consultation should meet again next year. Some of the alternatives are the Swanson Center in Nebraska and Briarwood in Texas. Also places in St. Louis and Ohio. Potential dates for the 2008 consultation: February 21-23 or February 28-March 1

Affinity Session 2

Group 1 Cluster Faculty

What would Cluster faculty look like: Style-top down vs. collaborative, two categories-degreed faculty w/ good teachers & Parish Pastors, Cluster Authorized Teachers (CAT) for SAM; Select-visual connection to seminary-not eliminate, but enhance; what's the need? – coordination & collaboration; standardization-How much/what control?

Need to gather faculty of Lay Schools (resources/curriculum sharing & best practices) & build Cluster faculty identification/affiliated faculty.

CATS-Cluster event-off "home turf"

Start w/ Synodical "good teachers", Seminary faculty gathers w/ teachers to assess, offer assistance& help develop curriculum. Identify core coursed-ELCA expectations & identify key people-Outcomes language. Need a voluntary group wiling to work a strategic planning process. Go for planning grant from Lily.

Group 2 Distance Learning

Church people at large want access to Lutheran Faculty, but time limitations; eighteen-30 yr-olds gravitate to DL, but looking for more; identify "hot areas" in synods for potential offerings; ability of satellite dishes to pull many churches at same time, but costly & hard to coordinate; short video clips off internet to use then discussion group (IE. Sermon Spice).; people need to learn to use DL; Covenant Cluster needs to "teach" how to use it, need to possibly partner w/ Aug. Fortress & Ken, to find what people need; possibly partner w/ Aug. Fortress, Select & Seraphim to produce together; something for IPod?, Book of Faith-maybe short video for all ages?; need to hold Covenant Cluster gathering for Lay school teachers/directors, etc. to "Train the Trainers" to use DL.

Group 3 TEEM

TEEM track is for the needs of ministry; some training done best ecumenically, especially w/ focusing on mission; question of decentralizing yet staying connected and being consistent; possible for synods to identify gifted pastors/teachers-synod's teaching faculty-rec. training/coaching & offer core Lutheran courses? Need to include spiritual formation; how to translate life learning/experience into "credit" at seminary-variable credit. Need a consultation on TEEM w/ various partners to address: consistency of theological training, communication w/

candidates who are scattered, how to prepare those w/ less formal education to function well in grad. courses, how to use gifts of both SAMS and TEEMS in different ways and relationship b/t them, missional implications-outreach discussion likely needed, who becomes a TEEM candidate-how far to depart from what is core. "This is messy stuff." Need to remember "Community is a by product of mission."

Group 4 Book of Faith

Book of Faith is somewhat analogous to Renewing Worship process; some of outcome likely to be print & electronic resources; after going through "book of faith process" compare w/ possible models of how the church engaged the scripture previously then determine which might be effective today; encountering scripture is not about "authority", but telling the story & needing to get concept into people's lives; theology of the cross is important and "unique" and needs to be shared; definite difference w/in group b/t a "yearning" for *Search* and *Word & Witness* Bible study vs. "engagement" w/ people who are afraid to admit unfamiliarity/un-comfortableness w/ scripture; how to invite "disenfranchised" to the story-telling and share w/ all why the story is told & retold, Book of Faith initiative not "one size fits all" concept.

Ideas shared: Stories over decades told differently, but still effective, need adequate teachers, use humor (IE. The Lutheran Handbook series), use children's questions...no "only one right answer", don't leave out "the hard stuff" even w/ the children...they need to know to re-engage throughout their lives.

Thoughts on engaging members: "conversation time" after sermon, weekend retreat-"God & Golf", "Sermon Talk Back" adult forum, "Community-building" conversations.

How Covenant Cluster can help: possibly by "class-testing" resources as they are developed?, try the "midrash" (Jewish tradition) w/in Cluster to see how it works, give questions to CC leaders to be asked in their own venues to share back info. w/ the team(s) working on the Book of Faith resources.

Reflections from Seminary Presidents:

Jim Echols: Spring is coming and spring has come. It is now time in the Covenant Cluster to focus on planting, cultivating, weeding, pruning. There is now enough continuity in the three seminaries that the presidents are ready to go. There is trust and confidence. The Cluster is ready to engage in the development of the network within the cluster. He referenced the mission statement of the cluster board. We are on the verge of being a network. He also clarified what he had said earlier about not speaking next year. He plans on coming, but he'd like the planning team to ask the deans to speak.

Duane Larson: We are an emergent network. The seminaries are not so much hubs in a network, a partnership; they are nodes in a network. Each node makes the whole network smarter, better, more effective. We don't need to define structures just yet. We need to stick with the task of working together as a network.

Planning committee: Don Just will represent the regional coordinators. Ramona Bouzard will represent the colleges. The hope is to recruit someone from Ohio, someone from Texas, someone related to lifelong learning, someone conversant with the grant proposal; recruit Michael Shelly for the planning committee. The communication regarding the proposed planning grant should go through the seminary presidents (Mark Ramseth in particular) and the Covenant Cluster Board. Someone needs to sketch out the portion of the proposal related to cluster faculty.

Augustana Center for Vocation wants to sponsor one of the nights of hospitality.

Theme and emphasis: Multi-cultural; what is a network and how does it work?; BEES (best emerging educational style) vs. CAT (cluster authorized teachers); planning for the next consultation in synch with the proposed Lilly Planning Grant;

Copy Lynn Smith on notes/information. Marcus Pera will check on the center in St. Louis. We'll also pencil in the dates with Merrillac Center.

Dick will contact Bob Bacher about making his presentation on networks in 2008.

Leave more time in the schedule that is free/unscheduled. Could there be an option for breakfast that lasts later than 7:30?

Invitation to ecumenical partners; youth/young adult ministers; ethnic variety;

February 21-23, 2008, will be the date! We have it booked at the Marillac Center again.