

Covenant Cluster Consultation
“Weaving the Network”
February 21-23, 2008

SMALL GROUP REPORTS from THURSDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

Topic: Network Building

1. What makes you hopeful and what concerns you about “network building” as a key role of the Covenant Cluster?

Hopeful: Increased knowledge of available resources and gifts

- New opportunities and energy
- New relationships and bringing people together
- Opportunity for communities
- Saves time and energy
- Way to exercise agency

Concerns: Worried about no action, no decisions

- Who’s missing from the table, who needs to be at the table
- What about younger people?
- Is there a unifying purpose?
- Will someone be left out?
- Sense of accountability and commitment

2. What have you learned as a result of your experience with network(s)?

- Important Questions: Who is in charge? Where does the buck stop? At times this “buck-stop” question is ignored.
- Networks are social – the motivation is social.
- Despite all of the technological ability and assets, communication is still the most difficult challenge.
- Surprised at the differing answers (to the question). Question of continuity – it is important that there be continuity in the network.
- It takes a lot of work and a lot of time – relationships need to be built... networks need trust... Networks require time for relationship building.
- Networks need to be healthy -- not trying to do too much, or working too broadly.. Networks are either healthy or unhealthy --- reflecting the strength or wisdom of the facilitator.
- Everyone in network has self-interest, but it provides network for larger framework for purpose and meaning.
- Whose responsibility is it to share information?
- One still must define clearly what the network is about --- there needs to be a real need, but the network also has the ability to clarify need.

- Networks can be overwhelming! Networks can be anxiety producing.

3. What successful networks do you know? What makes them successful?

- Networks that arose out of a shared sense of need and challenge
- Networks that unite in common mission have been successful
- Trust and respect are key
- Passion for mission is crucial

4. Who do you know with good facilitation skills? What do they do that is effective?

- Good interpersonal skills
- Low ego needs – high self-confidence
- Able to be flexible
- Some do well facilitating people they don't know while others do well facilitating friends & others they know well
- Keeps conversation focused but knows when to let spontaneity happen
- Provides a safe environment by welcoming differing points of view
- Non-judgmental

5. What do you think your constituents think about the idea of networks?

General Issues

- Central theme of responses: Constituencies are diverse, and each constituency has a different perspective on networks.
- Also, individual personality differences influence how people react to networks: Extraverts generally have favorable attitudes toward networks and networking, while introverts are less comfortable with networks and see less value in networking.
- Related point -- networks are about relationships. They are most appealing to people who feel isolated and want to form relationships; they are less appealing to people who are focused on accomplishing tasks.
- Networks are fluid -- people move in and out, and change their level of involvement over time.

Positive Responses to Networks

- There is anxiety about hierarchical authority; networks are appealing because they level the playing field -- especially peer networks.
- Individuals or institutions who feel marginalized or isolated by the normal structures see greater opportunities for participation in networks.

- The generation of emerging adults is very comfortable with networks and will form networks spontaneously.
- In rural areas, resources are limited, so networking is essential for survival.
- Lutheran educators are already involved in many successful networks.
- Most people will affirm networks if they are called "partnerships" rather than "networks."

Negative Responses to Networks

- Networking can be exhausting. When people are under time pressure, they drop out of networks.
- There is a concern about the cost/benefit ratio of networking; will the network be worth the time, money, effort required?
- Networks are often less efficient than other structures, and sometimes less efficient than working individually.
- Latino constituencies feel overwhelmed within large networks, and feel that they have no voice.
- People don't like to feel that they are being pushed into a new structure when they are familiar with the old structure.
- Networks that try to connect urban and rural ministries are rarely successful. Networks must link individuals or teams that have a shared experience or a shared set of goals.

6. What would better equip you to nurture networks?

- Clear purpose and sense of value/importance of the network
- Ability to access information; use of technology and training to utilize it effectively
- Clear understanding of the needs the network is attempting to address
- Learning about the resources available to the network
- Trust; nurturing collaboration
- Authorization to implement
- Time
- More knowledge about effective/healthy networks
- Infrastructure support and resources

What could the Covenant Cluster do to nurture networks?

- Facilitator of conversations and strengthening the art of facilitation
- Greater involvement in helping to promote each programs—networks of an in the Covenant Cluster (our own inspirational stories?)

SMALL GROUP REPORTS from FRIDAY MORNING SESSION

Topic: The Critical Next Steps

1. What are the most important next steps for the Covenant Cluster Network?

- Get clear about membership/partnership
- Communication infrastructure/website updates
- Connect with synods – via training the Book of Faith people
- Learn from the example of how some of the Lutheran colleges and seminaries are connecting with each other and apply that to the rest of the cluster.
- The cluster needs a person to serve as the facilitator.
- The cluster needs a web minister.
- Define the purpose of the CCNetwork as distinct from the Cluster itself. This could range from a loose association based on sharing ideas to an active organization committed to actually doing specific things.
- Develop a cluster network website. Coordinate the resources and make them available in a very clear way – cross linked to synod sites, and resource center site. Actually we need two websites! One for the network and one for the cluster of seminaries.
- Make a list of members.
- Work on some form of Reformation Mall, but less ambitious than the one dreamed up at the Western Mission Cluster several years ago.
- Time for Truth Telling. Seminary faculties don't have the same place in the total system they used to. How to best engage them in the Book of Faith is yet up for grabs.
- We must keep meeting!
- Don't move too quickly to developing programs for the cluster. We need to spend more time building relationships.
- How can we find out what all the synods are doing in relationship to Life Long Learning?
- Develop website and have specific person/s given the task to keep it current. This might take some dollars. Worth it.
- Develop a network structure that honors uniqueness of the different players.

2. In addition to the CATS program and the possible Lilly Grant Proposal, what other projects should the Covenant Cluster Network be working on?

- Train the Book of Faith first wave of people. Work with Advocates to do this.
- Build a rational for mobilizing lay people as part of the Lilly Grant.
- Develop a clearinghouse for sharing resources – web based
- Does Fisher's Net Select already have the infrastructure in place for training the Book of Faith folks? If so, we need to know about it and promote it and if needed add to it.
- Can the CC be a strong voice in developing and sharing Missional Church information/resources?

- Figure out a way to bring together seminary/college/ and Lay School folks to converse about how they could relate to each other better.
- Additional ideas relating to CATs were shared. They include: Seminaries need to be the convener of these training weeks. They should be done by departments/specialty areas. Design it so that certificates can be issued to the lay school teachers.
- Develop the cluster website.
- Develop a Book of Faith training model that could be shared with the synod Advocates.
- A useable search engine that could keep abreast of resources and form a CC library.
- Covenant Theological Education Network (CTEN) – we need to build the structure and processes by which we will operate.
- What is happening in our culture that we need to track and plan future programs around?
- Commit to training the 5000 lay /clergy educators. Work with the 24 synod advocates in our cluster. Provide different levels of participation in that training.
- Concerning the Lilly grant – Pastoral excellence is enhanced when pastors are given the skills to train lay leaders. CATs seems to be aimed at this. Can they be connected?
- When/Where are the points of discernment in vocational development of leaders – both rostered and lay. Are the key folks at those places of discernment adequately represented? If not, how can we include them in the network. i.e. Camp directors and college chaplains.
- More effectively use technology to deliver more equitably the resources gathered.
- Book of Faith – we need to be the go-to group for the 24 synod advocates.
- Build a website that we could use to share what each offers so we can benefit from “inverse commons.”
- “Recognized Brand” can be promoted in our cluster. For example, Select resources need broader exposure.