

Renewing Congregations Action Group  
Board of General Ministries  
June 23 & 24, 2015  
Hospitality Suite #1524 – Sheraton Overland Park  
Overland Park, Kansas

Directors: Wesley Roberts, Leader; Joyce Blandon, Cecelia Dachtler, Judy Fackenthal, Kay Farley, Manuel Luquin, Tom Roberts

Staff: Jeff Woods, Marilyn Tyson

Absent: Nancy O'Neill

Wesley Roberts, Leader, led in prayer. Members of the group introduced themselves.

Congregational Renewal Stories: There was discussion about creating a core of congregation renewal stories and then using those to generate additional stories. Jeff noted that the Transformed by the Spirit initiative resources one avenue of renewal and that an interview protocol has been developed. Kay reported that their church leadership team is having a retreat in July and they will be using 3 of the stories which have already been reported.

Manuel reported that his congregation has adopted a school in the area in which 80% of the students are Hispanic. The school has asked the congregation to provide basic hygiene kits for the kids. The church also plans to begin doing backpacks while the school is going to allow the church to use the gym after hours for clubs. Manuel also reported that one challenge has been getting the English and Spanish congregations to work together. He also reported that six pastors from other churches in the area have requested coaching help from Manuel.

Cecelia noted that she finds it really powerful to hear or to read the story of another congregation with challenges similar to the challenges faced by one's own congregation. Her congregation situation is small town and rural based. When she and her husband came to the church, the number of congregants was approximately 30 in number. Then a tragedy occurred in which 2 young persons died in an accident. It so impacted the community that they began to ask "What are we going to do for our young people?" The church started a center for young people who came from the local community as well as several surrounding communities. They have seen a growth in leadership skills among their young people. In addition to the FROG, "for young people", they have begun TADPOLE for elementary age children.

Judy observed that she is really struck by the idea of encouraging churches to "join God" in what God is doing in the community rather than the idea of ministry as what happens inside churches. Wesley suggested that people are not looking for more Bible studies; instead they are looking for places to be involved.

Kay spoke about moving a VBS program to a high school and having it happen in one day. Manuel spoke about not insisting that people ministered to stay within the church which is doing the ministering.

Tom told about how his church became involved in holding a Fourth of July picnic which a couple who came to his church began. So many people came to the picnic that it wasn't feasible for one couple to host and so the church has taken over the idea and the picnic has gotten larger and larger.

Tom's church has also begun to do a "Christmas Closet", an event which is by invitation only. Families from the community who need help are "invited" to come for new clothing, shoes, and toys.

Joyce noted that these kinds of activities have changed the structure of the churches involved. People on teams are those who have a passion for the work of the team. Tom said that the leaders of the teams have to be members of the church but others on the team do not.

June 24 Session: The second session of the Congregational Renewal Action Group began 30 minutes late because of an executive session of the BGM which ran longer than anticipated. This session was opened with prayer by Tom Roberts. Nancy O'Neill was present for this session; she missed yesterday's session due to travel difficulties. Judy Fackenthal was unable to be present today.

Jeff reviewed some information relative to life cycles for organizations. If one views the life cycle of a congregation as a bell curve, renewal happens on the down slope of the curve. The options for renewal depend on how far down the slope a congregation is. Transformed by the Spirit resources are for congregations which are quite far down the curve; they are about culture change. There are 4 aspects to congregational life: worship, mission, discipleship, needs, and evangelism. When these aspects are out of alignment they have to be "helped" back into alignment. A church can't focus on just one aspect.

The resources which this Action Group is discussing are for renewal higher up the curve. Existing leadership can handle the change needed.

Wesley wondered about a church like his which has a long history but which is still at the top of the curve. Jeff suggested that the congregation has probably been experiencing small shifts every several years—typically 7 years.

Jeff suggested that we need to have stories about congregations with different demographics; each story should have a line or two specifying the congregation type.

Manuel suggested that when a church gets to the top of the curve often they become comfortable. In his region pastors are required to read a book every month. This month the book is *Autopsy of a Dying Church*. Tom observed that sometimes what the members of a church see is not what the leadership sees; so in his church groups have been asked "what do you see?" Since his church has changed dramatically in seven years, they are about to do the assessment again.

It was noted that both Urgency and Hope are needed for transformation.

Wesley said that one concern he has relates to the need for seminaries to be responsible for training people to serve in renewal situations.

Tom further observed that along with all of these ideas, prayer is an integral part of renewal. His church has a prayer meeting every week.

Kay reported that she visited Wesley's church and "picked his brain" for ideas which she could use in her congregation. She thinks that "people" resources like other pastors are important.

Our next steps might include the following: having stories available on a website along with some discussion questions; invite Robin Crouch to share with the group regarding the Matthew 25 grant; and, having each committee member recommend a book—provide the name of the book and a line or two about the book.

Wesley closed with prayer.