

Two Schools of Congregational Development

By Kirk Petersen

Marital discord can have effects far beyond the married couple. The Church of England resulted in part from Henry VIII's desire for an annulment. Less momentarily, a marital breakup is part of the reason there are two large Episcopal programs — similar in many ways, yet separate — focused on congregational development.

Both programs are entirely independent of the Episcopal Church Center. More about that later.

Congregational development is the practice of helping churches grow, both numerically and spiritually. It draws on the well-established business discipline of organizational development, which studies how organizations perform and change.

The College for Congregational Development (CCD) was started in 2009 in the Seattle-based Diocese of Olympia by the Rev. Melissa Skelton.

The Diocesan Church Development Institute (DCDI) is the successor to organizations of various names that have been led or influenced by the Rev. Bob Gallagher since the 1970s.

Skelton and Gallagher used to be married. Neither currently leads these programs. In 2014, Skelton was elected Bishop of New Westminster in the Anglican Church of Canada. Gallagher

is “mostly retired” and no longer participates in DCDI, but takes on smaller projects for dioceses and churches.

Both organizations draw rave reviews from participants. It is difficult to pin down how the programs differ, even after talking to nearly a dozen people. Some leaders and former leaders of the programs declined to talk about differences, saying they are less familiar with the other program.

Similarities, on the other hand, are easy to find.

- Each program involves formal instruction in two successive years, with the expectation that participants will apply what they have learned to a major project in their home parishes in the year between training sessions.

- Each has been offered in two formats, with formal instruction each year either in a weeklong intensive or on four consecutive weekends.

- Each is offered by multiple dioceses, with some variations between dioceses.

- Each encourages participation by teams of clergy and lay leaders from the same church, because the teams develop common language and toolkits.

- Each makes extensive use of terms and concepts from the secular field of organizational development, such as cultural dynamics, conflict resolution, facilitation skills, leadership in a team context,

and understanding the congregation as a system.

- Each has two former instructors

who have become bishops. In addition to Skelton, former CCD instructor Gretchen Rehberg last year became Bishop of Spokane, the diocese that shares the state of Washington with the Diocese of Olympia. Former instructors of DCDI and its predecessors include the Rt. Rev. Steven Miller, Bishop of Milwaukee, and the Rt. Rev. Scott Benhase, Bishop of Georgia.

Gallagher and Skelton met when she became vice president of administration at General Theological Seminary. “She was my boss,” Gallagher said. He was running what was then called the Parish Development Institute, which was based at General for a few years. An ad in a 1996 edition of TLC names them as co-instructors of “innovative workshops in congregational development.”

Skelton has an extensive business background. After two years at Virginia Theological Seminary, she finished her divinity degree at the University of Chicago while also completing an MBA. She was ordained while she was a brand manager at Procter & Gamble in the early 1990s. “I’ve got marketing in my veins,” she said. She later earned a certificate in organizational development from NTL Institutes, a pioneer in the field since the 1940s.

Gallagher has a master’s degree in organizational development from Goddard College, and started doing congregational development con-



Gallagher



Skelton



Rickel

sulting in Pennsylvania in the 1970s. In the early 1980s he joined the staff of the Diocese of Connecticut to create a similar program that program was a precursor to DCDI.

The Rt. Rev. Greg Rickel provided the catalyst for CCD after he was consecrated Bishop of Olympia in 2007. He declared that congregational development was one of the top priorities for his episcopacy. To lead that effort he turned to Skelton, who was rector of St. Paul's, near the Space Needle in downtown Seattle.

Rickel and Skelton both graduated from DCDI when it was called CDI Trainers. "There was discussion about doing CDI in the Diocese of Olympia. At the time Melissa and I were having trouble in the marriage," Gallagher said. "She didn't really want to be part of the CDI system that I was still part of, and so she created the College for Congregational Development — which in format is basically the same thing."

"The Diocese of Olympia has recognized the extent of its debt to CDI in an agreement to pay a licensing fee to CDI Trainers for a five-year period," Gallagher has written on congregationaldevelopment.com.

Rickel said via email that "though all our attorneys were clear that we did not have to do this, acknowledging our debt to them, we did agree to a five-year fee for that. We are no longer paying that." He added, "Over these years we have both evolved very differently. I took CDI and I am very grateful for its vision and what it taught me."

Skelton said via email that CCD has "drawn on Bishop Greg Rickel's and my experience of versions of PDI/CDI over the years, on my own work with NTL in Organization Development, on my own parish experience, and now, more than ever, on the experience, training, and contributions of the many directors and trainers in the program."

Consciously or otherwise, DCDI has also borrowed a page from the CCD

playbook by evolving into a diocese-based organization. It previously had been a national program, first at seminaries and

then as a standalone organization. *Diocesan* was added to Congregational Development Institute in 2011 to create DCDI.

Both programs appear in multiple dioceses across the continent.

CCD spread from Olympia to the dioceses of Chicago, Northern California, Rochester, and Spokane in the United States. In Canada, in addition to Vancouver-based New Westminster, the Diocese of Ottawa is preparing for its first class.

DCDI programs are in the dioceses of Colorado, Georgia, Long Island, Michigan, Milwaukee, and Northern Indiana.

CCD in Olympia is now run by the Rev. Alyssa Newton, who was a member of Skelton's parish before being ordained. She worked with Skelton in establishing the college before Skelton became a bishop. As canon for congregational development for the Diocese of Olympia, she oversees the network of consultants who deliver the program in other dioceses. It's a quarter-time position; for the other three-quarters, she serves as vicar of St. Columba's in Kent, a Seattle suburb.



Newton

DCDI is led by the congregational development officers for each diocese, "and we kind of run it as a team," said Peggy Bean, canon for congregations in the Diocese of Milwaukee.

Both organizations want to maintain their independence from the Episcopal Church Center. Leaders of the groups expressed no hostility for broader church leadership, but instead stressed the importance of basing the programs in dioceses.

Church headquarters is fine with that.

"I think they're doing brilliant work and they're teaching the whole church, and that's as it should be," said the Rev. Stephanie Spellers, one of three canons to the presiding bishop, referring to both CCD and DCDI.

"I've been pointing people and dioceses toward them. I'm saying, 'Do you know about the College for Congregational Development? Do you know about CDI?'" she said.

She said there has not been a church-wide congregational development officer or department since 2009, when General Convention slashed the budget in the wake of the financial crisis, resulting in 40 layoffs. Some of the church planting work done by the Rev. Tom Brackett [TLC, Oct. 8, 2017] overlaps with congregational development, she said, but he focuses on starting new churches.

"Our entire churchwide system is saying, we can handle congregational development really well at the diocesan and trans-diocesan level," Spellers said. "We would love to partner with them, given the resources."

Two weeks after Spellers expressed that wish, Executive Council added a \$500,000 line item for congregational redevelopment to the budget for the coming triennium, earmarked for "redeveloping declining congregations." The budget is subject to approval at General Convention in July.

There also is some prospect for partnership between the two congregational development organizations, which for years have had no contact.

In separate interviews with Bean and another DCDI leader, the Rev. Walter Hobgood from the Diocese of Georgia, each independently broached the idea of connecting with CCD.

Newton seemed surprised and interested: "I have never been approached by anybody in the CDI organization, but I'll talk to anybody." □