

‘Two Schools’ Needed More

After THE LIVING CHURCH published “Two Schools of Congregational Development” [April 8] by Kirk Petersen, a choir of unhappy voices rose among those involved with the College of Congregational Development. Unfortunately, I must add my voice to the choir.

As the creator of the college, I am concerned about the article’s approach — beginning it with the dissolution of a marriage — and information in the article that I regard as incomplete or misleading.

When TLC first reached out to me, I had hoped to increase interest in CCD and other congregational development opportunities in the Church. I still hold this hope — and the hope that, with some additional facts, readers may better understand the efforts of those dedicated to increasing the vitality of congregations throughout the Church.

Here are some areas I would like to describe more fully and/or to correct:

CDI and its history at General Seminary — Dean Jim Fenhagen brought what was then PDI to General Seminary during his tenure. After a happy period with a number of General graduates participating in the program, the program entered a de-energized and unhappy time. By the time I became the vice president for administration at General, the program was disorganized and had very few people attending. My role was to learn about it (by becoming a participant) and, should the seminary want to continue its relationship with the program, to assist its director in focusing, improving, and marketing the program. This I did. My relationship to the director was never supervisory, but instead was to provide the energy and know-how to improve and market the program. I continued my involvement with CDI for 12 years and contributed to its renewal while the program was housed at General and after it left General.

The Development of CCD in the Diocese of Olympia — After Bishop Greg Rickel was elected in the Diocese of Olympia, he wanted to initiate a comprehensive training program for congregational development. Given my background, he sought my help in putting this together. Together we explored CDI becoming that program. Accordingly, we received from its director a proposal to launch the program in Olympia. Ultimately, Bishop Rickel and I found this proposal unacceptable due to two things: (a) the fee specified for the director was

unaffordable and, we believed, excessive and (b) the director specified that I have no involvement whatsoever in the initiative, something with which Bishop Rickel could not agree.

It was then, with many misgivings, that I accepted Bishop Rickel’s invitation to create our own diocesan training program. At the time I was the rector of a growing Anglo-Catholic parish and had very little spare time. Despite this and with only six months before launching the program, I agreed to take on the project, drawing on my experience as a rector, my experience in working within and contributing to CDI, my experience as vice president for system (organization) development at Tom’s of Maine, my experience as a graduate of National Training Lab’s Certificate Program in Organization Development, and my experience as a congregational and organization development consultant.

Differences Between CDI and CCD — The differences are many. I’ll focus on what I know about CCD in the context of my 12 years of having worked within the CDI system.

First, the primary model that CCD uses (Gather-Transform-Send), a model that expresses the primary purpose of a congregation, is a model unique to CCD. This highlights one of the major philosophical differences in the two programs. CDI was created by someone whose experience was primarily as a consultant and trainer. CCD was created by someone in the thick of leading and energizing a growing parish. What this means is that the two programs are oriented very differently.

Second (but connected to the first point), CCD has a much greater emphasis on teaching its participants to facilitate the engagement of people in the parish as a way to create momentum for growth and change. This difference was intentional given my own learning about how important facilitation skills were to the changes I had experienced and was experiencing in the congregations within which I had served. Throughout the CCD program we not only learn basic facilitation skills, we learn and practice creative facilitation techniques and facilitation techniques related to participative decision-making.

Third, CCD spends more time on and is more oriented toward congregational growth. This manifests itself in more material about and more time spent on Anglican

and congregational identity and more training designs about decoding insider language and helping us all speak in compelling ways about our congregations and the Anglican heritage which we all steward.

Fourth, the extensive case work in CCD was generated from real-life congregational situations (changed to protect the identity of those congregations) so that participants could analyze and strategize what they as congregational leaders might do in a similar real-life situations. Again, the emphasis is on congregational leadership in the program.

Fifth, CCD makes intentional use of biblical material in the models that participants learn and in the reflections and exercises that participants engage in. Connecting what we do in CCD to the story of the early Church in the Book of Acts, to Paul's letters, and to the life and witness of Jesus is an important dimension of the program.

Sixth, the CCD trainers, who are overwhelmingly congregational leaders, have each contributed in their own ways to the specific methods by which participants actually engage and apply the materials. In a very real way, then, CCD trainers have continued to co-create the program. This is a unique feature of the kind of trainer community that CCD has fostered and means that the

program continues to evolve and grow in a dynamic way over time.

Seventh, CCD now includes a new intercultural unit that assists participants in learning a developmental model for intercultural interaction, examining conflict from an intercultural perspective, gaining insight into ways cultures may fundamentally differ and develop a personal goal for improving intercultural competency. We feel that the addition of this unit is crucial given the increasing cultural diversity in our world and in our congregations.

Eighth, CCD (also known at the School for Parish Development in the Canada) was created to be a gift for the Church as a whole. Accordingly, while CCD and CDI both charge participants a tuition fee to cover trainer honoraria, accommodations and meals and materials, CCD does not charge any fees to sponsoring dioceses in the United States or in Canada and would not charge any fees to any other potential sponsoring dioceses in the Anglican Communion which might want to initiate the program.

*The Rt. Rev. Melissa M. Skelton
Bishop of New Westminster
Archbishop and Metropolitan of the Ecclesiastical Province
of British Columbia and Yukon
The Anglican Church of Canada*



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