

Here's a bit more of my perspective to the issues raised in "Two Schools of Congregational Development" (TLC 4/8/18) and the response of Archbishop Melissa Skelton (TLC 6/3/18).

I founded the Church Development Institute in 1978 (it had a different name back then) and was primarily responsible for its development over the following 32 years. To say I was primarily responsible is true, but what is also true is that there were probably ten other trainers and dozens of participants that made significant contributions along the way. I was director of the CDI at the General Theological Seminary from 1985 – 2000. I handed off leadership and ownership of all CDI programs in 2010 to what became Diocesan CDI.

Kirk Peterson's article does seem to have set off something of a storm. I'm sorry for whatever I have done to contribute to the distress experienced by Melissa and others.

I hope they know that I didn't seek out the Living Church. It came to me. As I understand it Kirk Peterson was approached by Melissa Skelton to see if he'd write a piece on the College of Congregational Development. As he was putting that together he came across the Church Development Institute. I don't know how that happened. I do know that he spoke to leaders of DCDI. They suggested that he speak with me.

Kirk called with questions about the Church Development Institute. I sensed that he felt a bit put out that the leaders of the College hadn't even mentioned CDI as part of the background for the story he was doing. CDI existed for many years before the College as both a diocesan and national program. Most (all?) of the initial leaders of the College had been trained by CDI and it's then companion program LTI (Leadership Training Institute).

Kirk asked me a series of questions and I answered honestly.

I'll begin with two affirmations.

I think the College of Congregational Development is a wonderful, effective program. It has some very talented leadership and offers a solid grounding in congregational development knowledge and skills. My hunch is that the Church Development Institute is stronger in its integration of ascetical theology, and the experience and training of its staff. The College probably has a stronger marketing and institutional base and appears to offer more grounding in the field of organization development.

Archbishop Melissa is a charismatic and talented trainer and leader. In her letter she correctly notes that she played a significant role during the late '90s in CDI's national program at General Seminary. Her ability to assess the strength of that program, her encouragement, and her ability to effectively market it, was timely and effective. However, she didn't play much of a role in the educational design of the program.

About organizational culture

My take on the old argument between CDI and CCD, reopened a bit by the article, is that from the CDI standpoint the issue was about organizational culture, not the details of the models and theories used, or the emphasis on addressing the various needs of parishes at a given time. I and others in CDI believed that the reason for our success was largely because of the culture that had been created over the years.

Kirk Petersen's article noted that "Both organizations draw rave reviews from participants." That response has always been true for CDI. We learned how to shape and maintain the necessary learning culture in three primary places – the 1970s Organization Development program of MATC (the Mid Atlantic Training Committee), the Parish Development Course of the Diocese of Connecticut in the early '80s, and the first 10 years of the national CDI at General Seminary. What was learned has been the learning culture basis of CDIs, and I believe the CCD, since that time.

As an example, look at the national CDI at General between 1985 and 1994: 44 dioceses participated, and 214 people were trained. Evaluations were on a 6-point scale, with 6 being "exceeded expectations" and 5 being "very high satisfaction." It was rare for ratings to be outside 5 – 6. In 1993 and 1994 we added the question, "Would you recommend the program to others?" The response was 100% yes. I assume that the CCD receives similar ratings.

In the old argument from the time of CCD's founding, CDI's position was that CCD adopted the culture that had been shaped in CDI over 30 years without acknowledging it. But culture is like the air we breathe. It's just there. Most of us don't even notice it. The core elements of the CDI culture were what the founder and first trainers of CCD knew—it was like the air. So, it's understandable that CCD didn't initially notice that they were entering into a tradition that was shaped well before the College was imagined. However, the leadership is skilled enough in these matters, that with time to reflect, to realize that's exactly what they did.

Here are a few elements of the learning culture and, as best I can recall, where they came from.

1. The use of organization development knowledge and skills in the parish church
2. A significant amount of workshop time (CDIs norm was 110 hours over two years)
3. Application projects in the parish back home. Projects supported by "learning application teams" and structured opportunities to learn from the experience.
4. High standards for trainers

#1 was from the work of Loren Mead in Project Test Pattern and the MATC OD program.
#2 – 4 came from the MATC program.

5. Common worship
6. Taking seriously the ethos, spirituality and culture of the Episcopal Church as part of what shapes the training.

#5 and 6 just seemed obvious to me; though there were many programs with little or no worship and many that assumed "the answer" had to come from outside our tradition.

The diocesan programs included doing the Office as part of a three-hour evening or morning session. The national program said Morning and Evening Prayer and celebrated the Eucharist every day.

7. A significant course of reading
8. Learning agreements
9. Encouraging parish teams, high expectations regarding participation and work, an openness to personal feedback

Early CDIs had two tracks. Participants could receive a certificate if they completed all the elements of the program (workshop hours, projects, reports, readings, etc.). Participants could also just come to the workshops, in which case they didn't receive a certificate. Somewhere in the early '90s I decided to try a learning agreement approach in which everyone was doing the certificate work. That had a significant, positive impact on the learning climate.

10. The use of methods and models that valued congregations of all sizes and understood the parish as a microcosm of the Body of Christ.
11. The integration of pastoral and ascetical theology and practice. A blending of ascetical theology and organization development.

#10 and 11 were there from the beginning and grew over time. The two primary influencers were the work of Esther de Waal and Martin Thornton. It took a more tangible shape as I developed what we called "four core frameworks" as ways to understand the often-hidden dynamics of the spiritual life in parishes – Shape of the Parish, Benedictine Promise, Renewal-Apostolate Cycle, and the Christian Life Model. CDI offered to allow the College to use the models but at the time the College leadership was too angry to consider it. CCD created a few models to get at comparable dynamics.

It doesn't really matter all that much whether CCD ever acknowledges all this. It might do their soul good but as we all look forward to the future, there are two excellent programs serving the church and maybe it's time for them to do a bit of sharing with each other.

The divorce

I think that Kirk Petersen's connecting the emergence of CCD with our divorce was appropriate. Prior to the unraveling of our marriage, the Diocese of Olympia was working with me to offer a CDI for its parishes. If our marriage has not fallen apart, it's unlikely that CCD would have been created. That being said, in the longer term it's all something of a side note.

Serve the church we love

My hope is that all parties might set aside all the old arguments. We could come together for a couple of days in common prayer and common life to share what we have each learned about the revitalization of parish churches.

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Congregational Development: Means of Grace, Hope of Glory