

Notes from Fall 2011 Pastors' Conference Stewardship Town Hall Meeting

Notes from Discussion

- Conferences are too lavish. Should go to a less expensive place, cheaper venues, less expensive hotels.
- Missionaries in the field need to raise their own funding. This switch has left congregations to wonder what mission/ministry they are supporting through their mission/ministry gifts. Make congregations aware Synod is about ministry and outreach (help congregations be able to define the mission/ministry their dollars are supporting).
- Two ordained district staff should get back in congregations (at least part time) and use other people around the district to assist in those areas.
- We need to come together as synod/district to do more than individual congregations can. Is direct giving really good stewardship? Have circuits function in some of the areas to reduce work/responsibilities of district staff.
- Thank God for the staff.
- Work of District staff is invisible to many, but we need to understand a reduction in staff would affect services.
- Accountability on return of statistical reports:
 - Simplify report
 - Accountability - district should consider pursuing those who don't fill it out
 - Publish by circuit or congregation the list of giving (mutual accountability)
- Asked about Synodical restructuring shuffled duties/responsibilities to district level. Russ responded that it is not clear at this time how that will look.
- We need to figure out what the problem is. Money for mission is direct, not for mission work through synod. This has cut off the main purpose for Synod. Money is probably there, but coordination is taken away and given to those who are asking for it. Walking together means coordination responsibilities for district and synod. Russ responded that direct giving has been a blessing. Congregations who are self governing do not have to carry out responsibilities like district does.
- Can the district be a clearinghouse of information? Begin to network together through the district.
- The way people think in today's culture has shifted. There is a fear of the institution and lack of understanding. Perhaps missions should be allowed to raise their own funds. Embrace and promote direct giving.
- Problem is mistrust/distrust. Address trust issue to resolve.
- Larger issues of evangelism and outreach mindset to go along with stewardship.
- A participant shared how he supported district/synod without question in the past. Now he doesn't feel the same "fire." Why? What happened? Not supportive to the same degree. Is this the case for others?
- Instead of expecting so much from congregations, ask what congregations are excited about spending for. Get direction from congregations. Inform congregations what money is being use to support. Let them know what is expected.
- LCMC model? Churches without a structure.
- 37 congregations doing direct giving. What would happen if more did? Direct giving goes against who we are as a Synod. How much is us teaching the congregations and how much do we go with the flow? Not walking together in direct giving.
- Attitude - congregations that are walking together can reach souls for Christ.

- Dr. Barry said we can do both. Leadership of the pastor is important. No reason why congregations can't take the both/and approach. Pastors need to lead and encourage doing this. There is much to be gained in this district. Heart and leadership are important.
- Training in this is needed. It is not given at the seminary. Training to help understand the model of giving. The first time this was heard of by this pastor was at this conference.

Ideas from the Tables

- Pastors should encourage trust in congregations to continue to give unrestricted dollars to district
- District rep visit congregations or a DVD to "tell the story" or council of presidents release a DVD with clear communication including infrastructure costs.
- Clear disclosure of where dollars go.
- Give Synod its primary purpose back.
- Synod is diseased with Huntington's chorea - system not allowing us to work/coordinate together
- Need to be unified for coordination
- Use resources within (i.e. Gary Thies) instead of going to/using outside source/program/organization (instead of additional "Fan into Flame" with its expenses)
- 4-year convention cycle for synod and districts
- Improved communication
 - What synod/district does
 - How they use contributions
- Koinonia Project improved synod culture (have patience)
- Function by ecclesiastical model rather than business model
- Moving from a unified approach to a direct approach has been a blessing and a curse
- "Shadow synod" exists - denominational ID, loyalty diminished
- We need to talk about issues that trouble us and from a brotherly point of view
 - "Spin-off Concordias"
 - Close a seminary
 - Cut district/synod staff
- Add 10% to registration fee for every pastor registration for unrestricted fund
- What's wrong with restricted giving? Can volunteers be used and coordinated at the district level, e.g. Gary Thies?
- What's the district doing for evangelism training?
- Could the district be simply a clearinghouse of ideas - a network of good ideas?
- Are we trying to preserve the institution or do the ministry of the church?
- Develop ideas for gathering feedback from congregations on a more regular/frequent basis.
- We ask district to "recommend" a congregational "tithe" to do the necessities (core needs).
- What "things" have been asked of the district to do by the congregations?
- Fiscal transparency of district finances
- Eliminate all district positions not legally required
- Send district Reporter via email only. Cease printing/mailing expense.
- Trust, trust, trust

- How many congregations in the district give little or nothing and still expect district services?
- How can district and synod help us educate congregation members without us as pastor being the spokesman or standard bearer?
- Are there mandates/responsibilities that circuits or congregations could help district with?
- What are the mandates for synod and state to remain a viable entity? (breakdown of mandatory vs. optional)
 - What are the costs attached w/those?
 - If we reduce the mandates/costs, what are the tangible impacts on congregations?
- Different levels of service based on support?
- Utilizing technology to reduce administrative costs
- Promote current and future personal responsibilities for local mission
- Encourage "grass roots" action
- Is direct giving good stewardship?
- Educate clergy and laity on how monies are used and restrictions on monies donated to congregations, districts, and synod
- Educate what district and synod do.
- Learn how what synod and district do impacts the pastor and the individual congregation
- Ask the hard questions:
 - What is or should be the purpose of synod?
 - What do we need from the national synod?
 - What do we need from the district offices?
 - For what do we need synod? District?
- Individualism - loss of team spirit
- Giving reflects culture - consumer
- Accountability
- Education - HUGE
- Designated/restricted giving - control, give but still own or mandate
- Apathy
- Trust of leadership, authority
- Servicing debt
 - Synod
 - District
 - Congregation
 - Personal
- Attachment - building, structure, organizational structure, my interest.
- Consolidation at all levels - including congregations
- Harmony
- Competition - outside forces, internal
- Paid vs. spirit of volunteerism
- Need to be high tech/cutting edge as culture - can we afford it?
- Have synod prepare a 10-15 minute DVD focusing on "fiscal realities" that all circuit counselors are required to show to their circuit congregations.
- Pastors are responsible to teach members what it means to be responsible disciples and stewards.
- Synod missions to be funded by volunteer efforts at Mission Central

- Charge a “minimum” direct assessment for district/synod to all member congregations of synod.
- Implement a “paperless” administration at all levels of district/synod
- Any congregation that chooses not to support district or synod should not expect to have a voice or vote at district or synodical conferences/conventions.
- Pay off Concordia Debt Appeal
- Advocate ministries to be self-funding. District and synod to be only administration
- Eliminate or reduce staff
- Tighten our belt as a district. Live within our means.
- Visible change - do not use lavish facilities when local congregation has capacity
- Unity - continue to strive for. Funding seems to follow unity.
- Communication in a winsome, regular way these are the benefits we receive from being in the Nebraska District and synod.
- Help us to remember how God has used district and synod to bless our lives
- Repent - where sin has entered in
- What is the Spirit of God saying to us? Are we going in the way He is directing?
- Debt issues - prioritize getting out from under and not go into again.
- District to publish congregation giving to district/synod
- Congregational stewardship growth
- All congregations tithe to district/synod above offerings to RSO/direct missions
- Efficiency
 - Combine seminaries
 - Consolidate/merge districts
- Improve trust
- By-law changes
 - Decrease mandated functions
 - Have functions that are funded
- Use technology and information efficiently and creatively

Summary of Concepts

- The pastors want help in helping their congregations see what is “mission” about supporting District and Synod.
- Direct giving seems to go against the idea of “walking together.”
- Improved trust and better relationships are important parts of this process.
- The congregations would like to receive more information about congregational giving and how the money is spent at the District and Synodical levels.
- Use technology to help cut expenses and to communicate into the congregations.