

District Planning & Strategy Committee Report 2010-11

This year the work of the DPAS was made much easier by all the churches which sent in their reports and gave some time and thought to the paradigm model we initiated in 2010. A majority of you sent in reports which were very helpful to us in our annual evaluations.

After thorough evaluation we find that we have 13 cats and 18 Collies = 31 Churches or 58% of our total of 53 who have less than 100 people on Sunday morning. Of those 31, 19 are in trouble; seriously struggling to pay bills and keep the doors open. Any significant setback might push them to closure. Only 12 of the 31 are doing what we would call average or excellently.

We have 8 garden size churches (attendance of 100->175), 15% of the District, and not surprisingly none of these are in trouble, all are doing well or excelling.

We also have 9 house sized churches (attendance of 175->225) and three of those are really in trouble, the other five are average or above. So of the 16 gardens and houses only 3 are truly in trouble.

There are only 5 churches constituting all our mansions (225->450) and ranches (450->700) and all are doing well enough.

But looking at it another way, 22 of our 53 churches in all categories, are in trouble, 41%. This is not a good report. On the other hand 59% seem to be thriving or even excelling and it is nice to see that is still a majority.

When we evaluate churches we look at several key criteria: Growth in membership, growth in income, growth in missional giving, growth in children and youth, growth in the number of new members received. Several churches have received significant financial windfalls which allow them to pay all their bills, but are still declining in membership, in member giving, in missional giving, and new members received, we consider these churches to be in serious trouble.

Which leads me to the committee's response to troubled churches:

¶213 Task Forces

Some churches have or will receive notification this year that we have appointed a Task Force, under the authority of The Discipline ¶213 to examine their mission. The purpose of a ¶213 Task Force is to help the local church develop plans for ministry within their community. What we are looking for is an indication that the local church is aware of its broader mission to the people within its community and is working on plans to effectively reach out to that community. When we don't receive your reports we must do our own evaluation. Sometimes we have sufficient knowledge through our common connectional communications to make an adequate estimate of a churches missional strength. But sometimes we look at the statistical abstract, recall what we can from our common knowledge, and still feel we do not have enough information to make a fair estimate of a churches missional strength. In those instances we have the authority under ¶213 to create a Task Force to make that assessment.

We do not begin these procedures with any preconceived notion of what we will find. We begin them with the understanding that we are ignorant and seeking knowledge. If you are notified that you will have a ¶213 Task Force come and visit your church, we hope you will see this as an exciting opportunity to have some people with a fair amount of expertise come and look at your church and its community and make recommendations about your future plans. You will be invited to designate several people to join the Task Force and provide information about

your church and any additional documentation the Task Force may need. Everyone involved in a ¶213 Task Force is a volunteer, but they are chosen because of the particular skills that they can bring to the table in a specific situation. Were you to pay for such a consultation it might cost you thousands of dollars. We offer it free in the hope that the work of the ¶213 Task Force will encourage churches to move in new directions that might prove more beneficial to the church and the whole community.

Our work in 2011

Mission Areas

One of the changes we will all be working through in the coming year is the implementation of Mission Areas. This is a new connectional plan designed and imposed by the cabinet that hopefully will encourage churches within a clustered geographical area to work cooperatively. DPAS will be involved in helping these plans move forward effectively.

San Fernando Valley Connecting Point

DPAS feels strongly that the time has come to do something new with a church start. Times have changed! What people used to do as a “community” is not what people do now in “community!” We think there are new opportunities to preach the good news to new generations of people. When John Wesley stepped up to a tree stump outside the mines at closing time he was going where the people were, not waiting for the miners to wander into church. When the Wesley’s took popular songs and wed them to Christian lyrics, they were taking a timeless message to their people in a timely way.

Today people meet in social media, flash mobs, lunch bunches, at the gym and in the parking lots afterschool. The communities people build in this age do not have walls or pipe organs. What is today’s tree stump? Where do the miners change shifts in this new age? How do we “proclaim the Good News” in these new times?

We aren’t totally sure we have all the answers, or even fully understand the questions, but we intend to design new paradigms until one works. To this end, we will likely fail gloriously for awhile. But when we find the right tree stump, we intend to succeed in the best Wesleyan Tradition – with fervor and grace.

We may ask you for something as we pull all of our assets together to make this happen. Be prepared to say “Yes!” with enthusiasm, even if it seems a terrible idea.

We are tired of being Chicken Little. We intend to be the Little Red Hen, and we hope you aren’t like her friends, come join in the fun of the creation and the joy of completion.

In Christ’s service,

Steve Petty
Chair of DPAS