

Strategic Planning Task Force Final Report
Eastern Ohio Association – Western Reserve Association
May, 2010

Summary

The Strategic Planning Task Force, an ad hoc gathering of leadership appointed by EOA and WRA Councils, convened by Ohio Conference Minister, Bob Molsberry, met six times between December 2009 and May 2010. During that time the members studied background materials, engaged in prayerful conversation, and have developed recommendations for each of the Associations involved.

The first recommendation, which was acted upon, was to “buy out” the contract of WRA Association Minister Curt Ackley in order to have rough parity in the two associations moving forward, following the resignation of EOA Association Minister, David Cleaver Bartholomew.

The final set of recommendations, in brief, calls for the calling of **the equivalent of three full-time association staff to be shared equally by the two associations**. Staffing will consist of an executive who will be administratively responsible for the two associations, will further define staffing, and will promote a vision for the post-modern mission of the association, and two other full-time equivalents who will cover tasks consisting of 1) search and call, placement, and authorization for ministry, and 2) engagement with congregations in vitality, renewal, and leadership development. The SPTF makes no recommendations as to how those second and third full-time equivalent positions will be staffed. It could be through two individuals or through multiple configurations of lay or clergy staff. These positions should be defined by the visionary executive.

These recommendations meet the two basic requirements that the SPTF wrestled with: Fiscal responsibility and visionary staffing. It is believed that reducing staff to the equivalent of three full-time positions will save the two associations a combined \$124 thousand (see attached budget panels). The task force also felt very strongly that association staffing should not seek to perpetuate old models and paradigms, but should address current and future roles for the middle judicatory. The proposed model does that.

Background

The SPTF consulted the following documents and resources:

- *Redefinition of the Ohio Conference, 2007**
- *Recreating the Church*, Richard Hamm
- *Hitting the Bullseye*, Paul Borden
- *Report to Executive Council October 2009*, Stephen Sterner*
- *Leading Congregational Change*, Herrington, Bonem, Fur
- *New Ecclesiology*, Clyde Steckel
- *The Coming Death of National Denominations*, George Bullard*

The Task Force agreed that OCWM funding was not a growth industry, that current declines reveal long-term trends that will not be easily reversed, because they are based on cultural shifts that are largely out of our control. The strategy of simply cutting staff while attempting to do the same things at the middle judicatory level is a short-term solution. What is needed is a new paradigm for the work of

association staff, and either saying “no” to certain traditional functions of associations, or finding other ways to accomplish these things (or both!).

The resources of the two associations combined are impressive. It was felt that sharing of staff across association boundaries could result in synergies that would provide more service on behalf of local congregations than either association could provide on its own. There is already sharing of CE/youth/stewardship staff and support staff. This proposal just takes the sharing of staff one step further.

It is not our suggestion to merge associations at this time. The opinion of task force members was that this would result in much wasted conflict and controversy that would only deplete resources, diverting the attention of the associations from the forward-looking model that is being proposed.

The basic functions of the Association were prioritized in the form of a pyramid, with the foundational pieces at the base (see attached illustration). It was agreed that the role or mission of the middle judicatory is to “add value” to congregational ministries at the local level. Of primary importance is to empower or enhance the ability of local congregations to proclaim the gospel. In descending priority follow search and call, church and ministry, standing, authorization and fitness issues granted to the Association by the UCC Constitution and Bylaws, as well as leadership development for the local congregation. Then, in descending order of importance, come providing the “face” and structural possibilities for covenantal relationships in the UCC, church development and vitality, collaborative programming (which does not mean hiring a programming “expert” for every area of ministry, but rather engaging a person or persons qualified to help connect, network, and resource various constituencies), conflict management, financial conduit, and providing order for the body. We believe that the creation of this pyramid of priorities for the association is our most foundational and far-reaching piece of work. The proposal for staffing is generated from this model.

The Proposal

The Task Force proposes providing leadership for all these functions through the equivalent of three full-time staff (see EOA.WRA.SPTF positions, attached), the cost of which would be shared equally between the two associations. The Associations’ General Minister would be the keeper and promoter of the vision for the two associations and would be responsible for their administrative operation. That would include arranging the remaining staff to carry out the vision within budgetary restraints.

A second full-time position EQUIVALENT would provide traditional support to congregations from both associations for search and call and church and ministry obligations. It is not presumed whether this would be one individual or a team of staff and volunteers.

A third full-time EQUIVALENT would help congregations work together collaboratively to develop leadership, build healthy stewardship, pursue renewal and new church development, and develop programming that resources vital congregations. This staffing need could be met by one or more individuals in creative combinations that the new Executive might help implement. This model is being implemented successfully in the Illinois South Conference.

It is not envisioned that current staff in the two associations would be asked to resign. It is hoped that they might find roles in the new configuration. Our proposal entails a reduction in $\frac{3}{4}$ time of one position from current staffing levels (not counting the two executives). There shall be a reevaluation of this

staffing pattern and the role played by continuing staff within 12 months of the arrival of the new executive.

Nuts and Bolts

- For the sake of continuity, both the Canton support center and the Lakewood offices should be retained, splitting the costs equally between EOA and WRA. In the future, the new executive may want to retain a more centrally-located common support center.
- Gerry's House remains a ministry of WRA.
- Since there will still be two associations going forward, there will need to be a continuation of the two councils. However, we would suggest that they meet at the same time and place in order to have plenary time together. New common committees will need to be developed, such as personnel and property.

Issues of Continuing Concern

- Constitutional considerations: Both association constitutions are being examined to determine if changes will need to be recommended.
- Unequal sharing rates (retention rates) of OCWM funds: The Task Force did not feel that this was a significant issue. As long as the two association budgets were roughly equivalent, and that sufficient support was provided for the common staff and program, it was felt that the associations could continue the sharing ratios of OCWM contributions however they wanted to.
- Legal issues related to the management of historical funds: WRA will retain control of historical legacies.
- How to promote this proposal as "value added" rather than "decreasing staff:" It is suggested that the two association councils take this issue very seriously.
- Details of voting by councils and associations, timing, and search process: A search committee consisting of three appointees from each association, plus the Conference Minister, should be named as soon as possible after both associations take action on this proposal.

Task Force Members

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