

Presbytery of Los Ranchos
Council Meeting, October 27, 2020
Report of the Presbytery Co-Executive for Vision and Mission

For Information:

A Bit of History

In 2009, Los Ranchos doubled down on a new *Vision for Mission Design*. The central idea was to become a “**missional and learning community**” that focused on **constant learning, adaptive change, and smart experiments**, meaning that we would learn from our successes as well as our failures.

Another key element of the 2009 design was to **flatten our organizational structure**. The staff’s primary new function was “**to broker the presbytery’s resources**” (time, talents, treasures, and innovation) to **increase the missional effectiveness** of congregations and new worshipping communities.

Shorthand for Odyssey’s *Vision for Mission Design* was to link Los Ranchos congregations and their leaders with opportunities, resources, **and each other** to make the **adaptive changes necessary to thrive** in a rapidly changing society (our “mission field”). Early on, the SCT identified the following as **key strategies**:

- Identify the activities that our churches are **already doing well** and make them available to the larger community.
- **Increase the courage and capacity of leaders** to make adaptive changes.
- **Create space** for untapped and underutilized capacity **to emerge** through technologies like “**Open Space**” and **online discussion forums** so congregations could connect with each other and use their gifts and talents more synergistically.

This new structure **eschewed top-down, staff-directed programs** while at the same time **centralized the fiduciary functions** of the presbytery. Along the way, PLR revised our mission statement to read: “*God calls the Presbytery of Los Ranchos to cultivate vital congregations and partnerships that embody the love and justice of Jesus Christ*” (Revised Mission Statement, 2019).

A “Structural Reorganization”

Fast forward to today. On September 24th, the presbytery voted that Council “*appoint a Strategic Task Group [STG]...to review and to evaluate the presbytery's current Vision for Missional Design*” and “*develop recommendations for a revised strategy that would instruct a structural reorganization of the presbytery that would align with available resources and include benchmarks for evaluation.*”

Assuming the STG will be focused by our current mission of cultivating vital congregations and partnerships, then a large part its task will be understanding the presbytery's role—past and future—in supporting congregations and partnerships toward increased vitality. This effort, in turn, will require developing **metrics for congregational vitality**, broadly owned by the presbytery, so we can agree how best to support congregations which find themselves at different places in their life cycles.

The Work has Already Begun

Thankfully, we have already begun this work. The Healthy Congregations Network Team (a sub-team of the SCT) and the GCT have shared with us two resources: (1) Vital Congregations Initiative and (2) the writings of Gil Rendle, including *Doing the Math of Mission*. Indeed, the past two Decembers our Council's Generative Retreats have been devoted to interacting with these resources with a view to establishing benchmarks for evaluation.

Imagine a Presbytery...

But establishing benchmarks to measure the vitality of our congregations and NWCs, although difficult, is **not the most challenging work** that lies ahead. The **most challenging work** is the work of **congregational transformation**.

If “form follows function,” then any “instructions” from the STG regarding a “structural reorganization of the presbytery” should emerge from the strategies and resources PLR employs to move faith communities **toward greater vitality** *or*, when communities find themselves in steep decline, toward **leaving a legacy for others to build upon**.

In this regard, just imagine a presbytery that:

1. Has established congregational transformation **as a priority**.
2. Has a **clearly articulated vision** for congregational transformation/revitalization and understands that **transformation is a process** rather than a product, a journey rather than a destination.
3. **Communicates its understanding** of congregational transformation clearly and consistently to presbytery leaders and sessions.
4. Has a **representative team** to lead its transformation effort.
5. Realizes that vital presbyteries/congregations **birth new vital churches** and thus establish NWCs.

Assuming, therefore, that **congregational transformation and revitalization will be central to PLR's mission going forward**, then our new structure and processes, whatever form they assume, will support this work of transformation to the greatest extent possible.

Turning Point

I believe we can use this moment as a **turning point in our presbytery's history**. We have learned a lot these past ten years, spent thousands of leadership hours and millions of dollars on a **bubble-up, brokering model** of presbytery. While much fruit has been born, this moment provides an exhilarating opportunity to leverage what we have learned and to refashion ourselves for the next ten years if not thirty.

As I see it, the key questions for us to answer will be:

1. To what degree does our current *Vision for Mission Design* (2009) support what we want PLR and our congregations to be ten and even thirty years from now? And,
2. What must we change (think: “structurally reorganize”) to support our preferred vision of the future?

Where we Have Been and Where are Headed

In closing, I thought it would be helpful to share with you three documents that will help frame the journey ahead.

The first is a simple spreadsheet that shows which faith communities have been part of the PLR journey up to now and who will be with us as we begin this new chapter. I envision this spreadsheet being filtered/organized/expanded/contracted as needed along the way to support the STG's strategic planning. If you see any changes that need to be made, please let me know.

The second is a document you have seen before. It is “The Life Cycle of a Worshipping Community” from the Vital Congregations Initiative. Whenever leaders talk about congregational vitality, it helps to think in terms of vitality *and* sustainability. A long-established congregation, for example, can be “sustainable” because it is living on past resources and yet it can also be in steep decline. Or, another group can be brimming with vitality, but not yet “sustainable,” as is the case with all church starts. Which brings me to the third document.

As I mentioned above in the section “Imagine a Presbytery,” vital congregations and presbyteries start new congregations. Happily, we just received **the second installment of a \$50,000 grant** for our presbytery's NWC efforts led by SCT's NWC Network Team and supported by PLR's Consultant for NWC and Church Revitalization Alfredo Delgado.

The PC(USA)'s Office for Mission Program Grants **was encouraged by how PLR pivoted during COVID** to take the best of what we learned from Cyclical and apply it to the next stage of starting and supporting NWCs in Los Ranchos.

The document ("Missional and Pioneer Leader Training") illustrates what **we have planned for 2021** to identify and support entrepreneurial leaders as they follow their call to start new worshiping communities. As you will see from the "faculty," Alfredo has done a terrific job of recruiting presenters with vast expertise on each of their topics.

As I did last time, I have submitted a long report, but I wanted you as Council to see in one place my thoughts on this defining moment in our presbytery's history. It may feel to many of us like we are still deep in the "wilderness," as I described in September's report, but I believe God is preparing us during this time for years of vital ministry to come. Los Ranchos is blessed beyond measure with resources, but none more important than who are we are to each other.

Let's keep seeking constant improvement for the health of our presbytery and congregations, which in turn, is all for God's glory!

With you on the journey,

Tom Cramer
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