

Prior: brief video of the cabinet giving a light-hearted spin on partnerships

LEADERSHIP TEAM REPORT: TRANSFORMATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Some of you have always wondered what we do at cabinet meetings, haven't you? Well now you know.

Why do we want to talk about partnerships?

From our view the United Methodist people can at times sense they are alone in ministry, isolated from the larger church community, carrying the mission of Christ on their own shoulders, relying on their local resources, alone.

This is not the plan but sometimes we feel like it is. Our competitive culture pushes us to go it alone and we never do our best when alone.

This past year the Leadership Team of the West Ohio Conference, which includes both cabinet members and conference leaders, focused upon "One Breakthrough Goal." We wanted a goal that would help us build trust and team work. It had to be a goal that would lift everything. It had to significantly help in fulfilling the mission,

"To Make Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World."

The One Breakthrough Goal we set was to focus upon "Transformational Partnerships".

We read in Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 *"Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to the one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help"*

From this passage, to go it alone brings woe and to partner with another brings a good reward. Woe, to the congregation that only draws from the limited strength of its own people. This brings nothing but exhaustion. But we are also reminded that to combine resources with another brings a good reward.

Jesus said in Matthew 18, *"If two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven."*

From this we might go so far as to say that in God's economy, one plus one equals three. There is a divine transformation when God's Spirit can flow through the agreement of partners. We are called to work far beyond our own human capacity. We are to live as those who draw from a divine resource that is limitless and that is available to all. We are to give over control to the designs of God.

When we live out of this divine economy consistently, we find ourselves part of a movement, not a program. Eternal things happen regularly.

So how can we better position ourselves for this eternal dynamic? We believe Transformational partnerships can assist us here.

When a pebble drops into the still water of a pond the "Ripple Effect" is what permeates the waters. We chose to start the pebbles' splash with an emphasis upon church to church partnerships. As the ever-widening ripple moves from this center, we see partnership conversations increasing between the Church and business, the Church and the community, the church and our own connectional systems.

Our beginning "splash" definition for Transformational Partnerships in the West Ohio Conference states that it is "A mission driven attempt to radically raise the level of the disciple making culture throughout two church communities".

For example, when a suburban church partners with an urban the purpose cannot be to simply have those with money assist those without. Instead, this kind of partnership emphasizes the relationship. Perhaps they provide periodic worship together in both settings; they may do an outreach ministry shoulder to shoulder or they might study and pray about the “Bridges out of Poverty”. The urban congregation brings something as does the suburban. Each is impacted by the other and the level of disciple making is radically raised.

From this church to church “splash” definition we will see an ever-widening ripple effect where partnerships occur beyond church to church.

As you know the WOC already has multiple Mission Partners--The Oriental Conference in Mexico--The North Katango Conference in Africa--The Russia Volga District--and Southeast Asia, including Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. In each of these we give and we receive so much.

Likewise, we already have internships and our residency programs that partner local churches with the conference to develop tomorrow’s leaders. We already have partnerships of many kinds.

We do not want to stop anything that is presently in place. We just want to fully release the power of partnerships. We want to lose control, that’s right I did say, lose control, to the point that whatever God gives us to do, the first question is going to be, “Who can we partner with to make this happen?” If one plus one equals three then let’s get together.

Now let’s face it. Our tendency does not lean toward losing control, quite the opposite. This is far beyond our comfort zone. So this is an ongoing exercise in transformation, a veritable change in our cultural ethos.

To illustrate, we normally have the answers and provide the training. But with this organic approach, instead of telling you how to do partnerships we have chosen to learn by positioning ourselves to listen. We can take note of the models we see. We can list the common values we discover from one model to another. We can document the questions that arise as partners develop. In these ways we can assist.

But our best work is when we invite you to join us in listening to these same stories. To allow those who are doing it to be the ones that inform.

The Leadership Team has spent the last year listening to as many stories as time would allow. We heard successful and not so successful stories of churches trying to partner together for transformation.

A large suburban church that partners with surrounding congregations, led by a key lay person—in this story we heard of how they are trying to now move to the next level of partnering together. This story was not complete. To listen again a year from now would permit an update on the continuing experience.

A church in a rural town that partnered with the district to re-establish itself as a multi-point presence in the community—here we heard of the excitement of a reframed vision and the events that led to significant growth.

Let me say it again, our role is not to tell you how to do it but to platform the living stories that are already happening. After hearing or reading these stories the common response will be, “Maybe we can do that!” And if that story is not the one for you, we know you will keep seeking until you find another because these stories are contagious.

At this time I want you to hear specific illustrations from each of our Superintendents. You will see that some of these organic partnerships are as simple as asking two churches to work together. The organic analogy could be like the simplicity of growing wild flowers.

You will also hear of more complex systems. These required much more planning and organization. To continue our metaphor they might be more like a garden vs. the wild flowers. What you are about to hear is not comprehensive but only one story from each district. Let's take a look.

[Video of Superintendents giving brief stories of partnerships here](#)

We have had multiple discussions at the Leadership Team, that this is the New Connectionalism. There was a time when connectionalism seemed to be expressed by the local church's existence for the larger system. Recently it seems a shift has occurred where the larger system is striving to exist for the local church.

But we believe this New Connectionalism calls us all to partner together not as silos but as teams, not as hierarchy but as horizontal ministry, working together.

No one is alone in ministry unless they insist upon it. And those who insist upon it will soon be left behind. We want to blur the lines of turf. We want to see the Holy Spirit working beyond anything we could ever think.

We want to encourage risk. We want to keep it simple. We want to release a permission-giving culture that loves to experiment. Anyone can participate. Anyone can try.

Does this make sense? Are we on the right track? If what you are hearing stimulates something in your soul, I would like to offer you an opportunity to respond today.

First, would you pray? No one can see all the possibilities but God. We need to request an open door that we can walk through. We need to seek the divine economy of one plus one equaling three. We need to imbed a divine love for one another. So would you pray, both privately and with others?

Second, would you repeatedly ask the question, "Who can we partner with to make this happen?" Whether it is your Superintendent or you, someone starts a partnership with this question, "Who can we partner with to make this happen?" Will you keep asking this question?

Third, would you initiate conversation with those that are presently experimenting with a partnership or with those who could become a partner? By definition we need others for this to work. This third point is crucial to include because prayers and questions must ultimately result in action or we just took another spiritual walk around the block and nothing really happened.

We hope to offer settings this upcoming year where these platforms for storytelling can be easily accessed. But do not be limited by waiting on the systems that be. You are able to act today. You are empowered to pray. You are empowered to ask the questions that need to be asked. You are empowered to initiate these conversations.

Are there any here who sense a need to respond in this way? If you will join this conversation by offering your prayers, your questions and your willingness to experiment and converse with others about Transformational Partnerships, would you say, Amen?

Perhaps over the next year we can double the number of church to church partnerships but even better would be to lose count as the ripple effect spreads throughout our entire system creating a transformation of biblical proportion.

May it be so—Amen!