

## **St. Lydia's Governance Structures Community Conversation**

1/30/2012

Notes taken by Rachel Pollak

Present: Denise, Jeremy, Emily, Kathleen, Richard, Phil, Heather, Rachel

### ***Emily started us off with this note about using pros and cons lists to frame our conversation:***

No governance system is perfect, all have pros and cons, and when you're in the middle of an experience, you feel both at once. Good to notice them, and remember that whatever governance system we end up deciding on, it won't be perfect, and will have both pros and cons. Ideally, we will find a system that will help us to live into God's call, and not hold us back.

### ***Those present shared from their experiences with different types of governance systems they've been a part of in the past:***

#### Episcopal Church--Diocese

Pros:

- Democratic, everyone had a voice

Cons:

- Large diocese, hard to wrangle that many people, some voices louder than others, keeping folks reigned in and focused is really hard, minorities have smaller voices (smaller populations are unable to be as persuasive), some rule-bending went on to get around those problems

#### Quakers--Congregational Governance System and Regional Quarterly Meetings

Description:

Group members share their views on an issue out of the silence – there is no discussion or crosstalk. The clerk suggests a motion based on the “sense of the meeting.” (That’s the term Quakers use for it.)

Pros:

- Not concerned with how long things take, so there's a real sense that everyone has participated. No disgruntled minority--everyone has to own it.
- There can be a real sense of the presence of the spirit. The group can go from a place of fraught disunity to a feeling of real unity.

Cons:

- If you have one member who refuses, they can hold the process hostage.
- Much harder on the regional level; it was too big, very tedious.

*A question came up for later discussion:* What is the definition of consensus building vs. unanimity? Consensus building is a process, but once you have a decision where everyone agrees to move forward, it's unanimous. Discussing the merits of these two types of decisions was flagged as a topic for future meetings.

### Spiritual Community in Baltimore

Description: Did not have a governance structure. Vaguely associated with UCC, but there was no constitution. Arbitrary decision-making, like the way that a group of friends made decisions. Loudest person made the decision.

Pros:

- Decisions were made in a way that was based organically on people's relationships, and what they were willing to do.

Cons:

- Decisions were made in a way that was based organically on people's relationships, and what they were willing to do. So if relationships frayed, activity and mission would disintegrate.

### A Youth Group

Parliamentary procedure

Pros

- The formality made people more invested and more accountable to each other.

Cons

- The complexity prevented innovation.

### A Congregational Church

Large congregation, congregational polity, four committees: membership and parish life, worship, social justice, etc. Senior minister presided over everything in collaboration with the church council.

Pros:

- There was a process, and the process was clear, and if there was a problem you could go to the by-laws and know what to do.

Cons:

- Dysfunctional meetings, needed a strong chair for the meeting to run well.
- The system prevented innovation, moving things through committees watered things down and damped down bold ideas.

### Episcopal Student Ministry Vestry

Pros:

- Clear rules, clear selection process, voting works to make every day decisions
- Vestry is elected but also self-selecting, so its good because you end up having people who are committed and invested on the vestry
- Public minutes--everyone has access

Cons:

- The core group was on the vestry, so it was a clique and there was some exclusiveness
- There wasn't always a good consensus building process, because its easy for the vestry to make decisions that the larger group didn't like

### National College Committees-Presbyterian and Ecumenical

Description: Meetings five times a year. At the end of each meeting, the group chose the chairs for the next meeting, who would make the agenda and decide how much time to spend on each item. If a decision couldn't be made, they tabled it. One committee worked on majority, the other needed a unanimous decision.

Pros:

- Both worked well

Cons:

- Trying to make a unanimous decision sometimes created a lot of animosity

### Never Joined a Group

Don't like groups. Singing groups, sports teams, quit them all. Autonomous and independent. So this is interesting!

### Project Building a Rocket for NASA

Description: There were constraints that were deliberately imposed, from the top down. The team had to have certain dynamics. Led by engineering professors who had very structured ideas of how things should work. Part of the agreement that formed the group proscribed that there had to be an outreach component, going to secondary schools to educate in the community. There were a lot of pre-concieved notions and a priori managing styles on the engineering side. Not as much on the education side, so there was more freedom and flexibility and room for innovation.

Cons

- The constraints sapped the will of everyone who wasn't able to thrive within them. No flexibility, the structures themselves weren't learning since they were fixed. No experimenting and adapting.

Pros

- The parts where the people closest to the problem were allowed to adapt and come up with their own rules and structures went really well. Allowed to experiment and learn from that. Clear sense of what was working and what wasn't

***Congregants had read some books and pamphlets about different governance systems, and they shared their reports on those resources with the group.***

### Alcoholics Anonymous

Description: AA has an idea that there are traditions that guide all its behavior:

- The only requirements for membership are: acknowledging you have a problem with alcohol, and having the desire to stop drinking.
- Autonomy and Self-Support: very decentralized, almost anarchic organizations. Most of the rules are suggestions. Only limited donations are allowed. And while all work to do with helping others and putting on meetings is volunteered, any work outside of that -- such as office support, janitorial work — and any purchasing of supplies, is always

compensated. The group is not beholden to a sense of indebtedness to its members.

- Sole purpose of the group is clearly defined--helping alcoholics
- Anonymity
- "Our leaders are the trusted servants"--they don't govern. Humility of leadership, trust of members in the leaders.

Structure of decision making: a chair and a secretary, treasurer. Either the full membership or a steering committee meets once a month. Abbreviated Roberts' Rules structure. Decision making is not top-down.  $\frac{2}{3}$  vote for things that change the structure of the group. Model of "Informed group conscience:" striving for unanimity.

- Minority opinion--after the vote, someone on the losing side of the vote gets to make their case again, and if anyone changes their mind, the vote is scrapped and then they debate again.

Pros:

- A lot of local adaptability, flexibility and freedom. Broad sense that its self-defined.

Cons:

- Lots of groups are really disorganized. Anarchy does allow the most powerful to dominate.

#### "Discerning the Will of God: an Ignatian Guide to Christian Decision Making"

Description: About Ignatius of Loyola. Not about governing as much as making specific decisions. When you are deciding between options that are both valid, you have to get yourself into a mind-set where you know that whatever you decide, its going to be God's choice, so it frees you. Prescription for how to decide: pray daily, keep a journal about what you thought and felt, note contrasts of when you feel at rest or in turmoil (consolation and desolation), have a spiritual director and talk it out, go to mass regularly, spend a lot of time in silence ("in silence God's will can be made known to me"). Then you make your decision in one of three modes:

Mode 1: Revelation of God's will--Aha! moment

Mode 2: Consolation/Desolation--meditating and then noticing a pattern

Mode 3: "Preponderance of Reasons"--pros and cons list

Pros:

- Good to remember that in order to make decisions you have to open your heart to God. Having an active spirituality in our decision-making process.

Cons:

- waiting for a divine hand to help you make a decision could take a really long time
- not concrete: "I just knew" is hard

#### Founding Document of St. Gregory's, 1977

Description: Commitments to team ministry and the notion that the entire church needed to be fully engaged in all of the ministry of the church. Everybody is invested in all areas of the church's life. Pastoral care done by all. Distinction between "friends of the community" and

members of the community. A lot of anxiety around it, but once you invest members with authority, and they make a commitment, it frees people to do the work. Members are asked to make a time commitment and a financial commitment. Big emphasis on teams: no one did anything alone.

Pros:

- Full investment, deep engagement

Cons

- There was a focus on getting away from the professionalism of ministry--but not everyone is good at everything, so sometimes its good to have professionals and specialization of responsibility.

### "Leadership Ensemble"

About the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra--only orchestra in the world without a conductor. Wanted to give the members of the orchestra, who are highly trained and have great ideas about interpreting the music, authority in making music. They make good music, and they do it by working in groups. Four stages: choose a leadership team for each piece of music. Then they talk about how they want to play it, and they take their ideas to the whole orchestra. And then they take suggestions from everyone, and then they have people whose job it is to go out to the audience to listen and then come back and get feedback.

Pros:

- Seek consensus and have mechanisms in place to resolve deadlock.

Cons:

- In the orchestra, everyone is auditioned, both for their music skills and their leadership skills. In a church, there are no auditions -- everyone is a part of the church.

### Sol Lewinsky's Rules for Radicals

Mostly concerned with how to affect social change. Compared to how a church operates, Lewinsky is pretty ruthless. The means justify the ends--all about achieving the larger goal, results-based. Letting whoever is most committed to the goal running the show. Tactics for getting your way in the world.

Pro:

- By getting everyone moving in one direction, you can achieve great things. Establishing communication and setting goals effectively. End-driven, but not personality driven. "One on ones" relationship building--a group is only a group once everyone has had a one on one with each other.

### House for all Saints and Sinners

Emergent Lutheran church in Denver started by Nadia Weber. Traditional in some ways and in some ways not. Organized under the synod. Up until a few years ago it was an "entrepreneurial" model. Grown a lot in the last year, from 40 to 110. Leadership team of 6 or 7 people, who pastor picks. Not a democracy. Each leader is in charge of a different area: Voluntary, Contemplative, Money, Welcoming and Events. They get together every six weeks or so. Lots of discussion. Very communitarian vibe, open conversation, but the pastor makes the

final call. The leaders have authority over their own pieces, pastor doesn't micromanage, and seeks a lot of input. Pastor feels she wouldn't be doing her job as pastor if she didn't lead in that way. Various weekly tasks are handled by sign-up sheet. No deacon--they have a bunch of scripts and all the roles are filled randomly and through self-selection. Members who get pumped can lead things--"Enneagram Potluck," morning prayer, but they don't worry about it when those things fall away -- example: there's no bible study currently.

#### "Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Buggers"

Strongly recommends orienting towards teams, allowing people to self-nominate and also to dissolve as their natural life cycle ends. Executive team of no more than seven people whose job is to empower the other teams. Teams will naturally share information, don't need to manage them all from the top down. Dichotomy between permission-giving and control-seeking. Hierarchy of goals--large scale, more detailed etc. Everyone should be intimately aware of the goals, and in rare cases where people transgress the principles, its up to the leadership team to let them know.

#### "Tools for Leadership Teams from the Episcopal Church"

The most effective groups are the ones where the individuals are growing and being challenged as they work. The capacity of the group to work together changes over time.

***We ended our conversation by asking ourselves: what do we need to talk about at future meetings as a part of this process?***

- *Mission*--what are we trying to end up with as a church
- Membership
- Consensus building versus unanimity vs. other vs. dictatorship
- Structure, categories of leadership
- Selection of leaders
- Frequency of meeting and accountability to the congregation
- Spirit by which business is conducted
- The possibility of an active spirituality of structure and leadership--making explicit how the Spirit is foundational to decision making
- What does the governance system do and not do: role of the Pastor, of staff and of congregants
- Budget: Staff vs. Congregant Roles
- Setting a vision for finances
- Timeline
- Gifts of the spirit--how leadership can help individuals to grow
- A governance system that learns and adapts, a system that feeds the body of Christ
- Biblical models for structure
- ELCA--structures and constraints
- Outside expertise?--Donald Schell, other guests

***Last, we talked about what we wanted to cover at the next meeting:***

Consensus was reached! At our next meeting want to talk about mission. The governance system should serve to support us in carrying out our mission. Phil will start us off by talking about the book Purpose Driven Church, and congregants will be invited to read it, or parts of it, before the meeting.