

REPORT PROVIDED BY THE JUSTICE COMMISSION 8-3-13

CIRCLE OF INQUIRY: WHO ARE WE AS DISCIPLES OF CHRIST IN N. CA AND NV?
ANNUAL GATHERING, 2013

CIRCLES HARVEST (17 Circles)

SUMMARY:

Members of CCNC-N believe we are a diverse region, and that diversity defines us. Our core values of the Open Table, being open and inclusive and striving to stay in relationship in unity, not uniformity, meeting the challenge to find the acceptable dance between our theological, geographical, cultural and age differences. We have members who have four generations of Disciples in their family, and those who are brand new not only to the Disciples, but to Christianity. We have a strong combination of lay and clergy leadership. Most members of the circles have held some leadership role in church, including the youth that were present.

OUR GIFTS AND STRENGTHS

Our greatest gift is our diversity. We enjoy sharing stories and learning from one another. Many voices shared that being in a Disciples church was the first, or at least the best, time they felt they could truly just be themselves and be accepted. There is a strong sense of connection between the local congregation and the regional staff, with many opportunities to gather and many offerings of events, resources and trainings.

The large regional staff gives strong resourcing to the wide programming available from the region: New Church Ministry, NAPAD, Hispanic Ministries, Women's Ministries, Reconciliation, Missional and Congregational resourcing, Youth Ministries, Young Adult Ministries, Regional Annual Gathering, and ACTS trainings. This frees up the Regional Minister to concentrate on clergy and congregational support and relationship-building. The newly reorganized regional structure reduced the number of people in board meetings and streamlined the administry of the region.

One of the strongest and most highly esteemed regional programs is our camp ministry. CGC is truly held as "hallowed ground." We also value our various ministry partners: UCC, CCH, Serra Center, DSF, PSR and Chapman to name a few.

The regional members are proud of the social justice values supported by the region, and the community projects many of our churches provide, such as meals, community gardens, meeting space and ecumenical/interfaith partnerships.

There is a lived theology of abundance attested to by the generous and faithful giving of the regional members who have offered strong financial support and many hours of volunteer time.

OUR CHALLENGES AND ANXIETIES

By far, the strongest anxiety that came through the circle responses was about the decline of both local congregational membership and resources, and the place of the church in society as a whole. Many members expressed not being able to support a full or even part-time pastor, and fretted about how to reach young adults and children when they had no programs for them—but needed them to have the programs! It was a sense of "catch 22" and frustration without easy answers.

Part of that frustration is due to a lack of successful evangelism or sharing the Disciples identity with others. We know what we have, but we also wonder, "Who are the Disciples, really?" We are so diverse that for some we are too progressive, and others, we are too conservative. Still others

unchurched or dechurched may lump us in with certain stereotypes that we don't claim. How can we best get the word out and tell our story? It is also true that, while our members know that changes need to be made to attract new people, when it comes down to actually living into those changes, they resist. Often there is vision for new programs, but no energy to lead them.

The region needs to take the lead in using new technology for reaching people, such as webinars, teleconferencing, SKYPE, and appropriate use of social media, and to provide resources for our local congregations to do the same. We need to find ways to make our regional events and trainings more affordable and accessible. Currently only a small percentage can afford to attend the Annual Gathering or the weekend retreats.

We need to offer better clergy support and continued opportunities for our local congregations to gather both socially and in ministry. We need to support congregations that are struggling to meet budgets and have declining membership and large buildings. We need to find ways to help them assess possible paths forward, and provide resources and guidance on the journey.

There is a desire to have more regional conversations around theological and scriptural challenges, around areas of disagreement and controversy, and around practicing inclusivity and acceptance.

FOCUS OF REGIONAL MINISTRY IN THE NEXT YEAR

The focus for regional ministry mirrored many of the same concerns and anxieties expressed previously—address the challenges of changes in the church, telling our story and getting new members, resources for programs and assets, especially for youth and young adults, and improving communications. And running through it all is our continued commitment to increasing and celebrating our diversity.

Many participants expressed a desire to keep the momentum going and not start something over from scratch. There was a desire for continued relationship-building, both with the region and local congregations, and among local congregations. They want training in technology and social media. They want to learn more about being “true community” and listening to each other with respect and openness. They want to expand the issues that are discussed at Annual Gathering, and to find ways to make it more affordable for all to participate. They definitely want the ACTS program to continue, as well as camps and resources for youth and young adults. They would like more resources and conversation around our Disciples identity and how to share our story with the larger community and quit being “the best-kept secret.” We need to help our congregations experiment with different worship styles, music styles, missional focus and ways to be a relevant presence in their communities.

They want a Regional Minister who will continue to build relationships with the congregations and clergy, being a pastor to the pastors and create support for both. They want someone who will “get all fired up”—be excited about this work and keep the momentum going that has built up over the last eight years, picking up where Ben left off. They want the person to know that this is a big region, the job involves a lot of driving and realistically 80 hours a week (high expectations)! But they want someone who also knows how to nurture and take care of him/herself! They would like the Regional Minister to be a spirit-filled leader, able to express her/his relationship with God and who is centered in the Word.

There was also a sense that the current structure and staffing of regional ministry needs to be evaluated, to see if it is sustainable or the best model to meet the needs of the region.

Through it all, we want the regional body to be in prayer for all aspects of our community and leadership during this time of transition.

THE PROCESS

Overall feedback from those who participated in the Circle process was very positive. Many expressed the joy of listening to and sharing stories with others in the circle and being together in this small-group way. There was a desire for more of this kind of conversation.

The Circles consisted of 5-10 people pre-assigned, with a pre-designated facilitator and a volunteer recorder from each group. Participants were attendees at the CCNC-N Annual Regional Gathering, which included congregational members and guests from the wider Disciples church and our ministry partners such as PSR, DSF, CCH and Serra Center. Given the number of members of CCNC-N and the number in attendance at Annual Gathering, it is estimated that 7% of the entire regional membership were present. In general, those members who attend Annual Gathering tend to be leaders within their local congregations, are often long-time members with a clear understanding of the Disciples of Christ. A very small percentage of Annual Gathering attendees are new Christians or new to the Disciples, or from new ethnic churches such as the Samoan churches. All of these various voices were represented in these Circles.

Thanks to the Facilitators: Hope Attenhofer, Renae Earl; Janet Chapman; Susan Parsley; Diane Wilson; Ellie McDougal; Nancy McKee-Jolda; Larry Love; Bill Garrett and Adelle Lemon; Nancy Garrett; Sandhya Jha; Tom Warren; Jordan Williams; Ann Willard; Reuben Negron; Del Zeiger; Dana Bainbridge

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(missing the recorder sheet for Tina Heck/Margaret Simmons circle)

Following is a "harvest report" of all the responses recorded from all of the circles. The Justice Commission has looked at the harvest as a whole and combined and categorized responses to organize the pages and pages of individual comments. Comments that were expressed more than once appear in larger font. The larger the font, the more that particular comment was expressed. A report detail of each response is available upon request.

WHO WE ARE: SHARING FROM CIRCLE MEMBERS (do not record names)

▲ Open Table; All inclusive

▲ Priesthood of All Believers

▲ Diverse

- ▲ 4th generation Disciples; 3rd generation Disciples Pastor; life-long Disciples, founding members; members for various decades, a few years, new to Disciples; raised in Disciples but left, and now back; new church planter; Serra Center clients; diverse group in age, ethnicity; clergy; lay; gay; lesbian; queer; straight; elders; deacons; Sunday School teachers; choir members; musicians; merged church; camp counselors, Junior High and High School youth from RYC and camp attenders; seminary students; second career ministers; social justice activists; member of regional board; bookkeeper; committee member; sound tech; do the technology for worship; Faith seeker; journey alone with others; employed; retired; PK; mission trip participant;
- ▲ African American; Samoan; Pilipino; Puerto Rican; Caucasian; Pacific Islander; Korean; Mexican

- ✧ Church is more than just a church building
- ✧ Regional staff has opened up so much—hearing the stories; storyteller—telling the stories of others.
- ✧ Ambivalent clergy—believes in priesthood of all believers
- ✧ We are love; a place of peace; a breath of Hope

QUESTION 1:

What would you tell a Regional Minister Candidate are our gifts, our strengths and our sources of joy as a Regional Church?

COMMUNITY

- ✧ **Emerging diversity** (used to be all old, white people); youth, minority groups, GLBTQ; we are glad to see the diversity; multi-cultural and committed to anti-racism/pro-reconciling education and ministry.
- ✧ **It's OK to be different; very accepting; open and inclusive; unity not uniformity; it's OK to disagree**
- ✧ intergenerational
- ✧ **Sources of joy are the gathering and fellowship;** Joy is always present in the annual gathering and in fellowship with SO much diversity (which is also our strength) innovative and creative; celebrates the gift of the members
- ✧ We really care about each other here—for instance Miracle Day. We show up in a big way and joyful creativity to try new things and bring new people into the process.
- ✧ Together as a family; there for each other; everyone is important
- ✧ sense of connection, even at regional level; regular communications from region and support of congregations
- ✧ social justice; civil rights; help the needy; commitment to being like Christ; inspired by the spirit of love
- ✧ **community**
- ✧ Spirit; good morale in the region
- ✧ Region is way for local church to be about more than just themselves: GM, Mongolian,

Hispanic congregations...

- ✦ Abled and disabled are joined together; we need to be totally inclusive and sensitive to those difference
- ✦ History and traditions— regional history and stories are treasured; this is our 159th annual meeting; we've raised a lot of ministers
- ✦ The diversity of this region: so liberal in so many areas, so conservative in many other areas and so moderate with people trying to hold the middle ground in many areas.
- ✦ Smallness of congregations can help focus ministry efforts instead of trying to do all things. Congregation can move more quickly.

MINISTRY/OUTREACH (PROGRAMS/EVENTS)

✦ Community of the Great Commission and camps

- ✦ Miracle Day
- ✦ Mission trips and other mission projects; global missions oriented
- ✦ Partnerships: Serra Center; UCC; Support of seminary students—PSR, DSF
- ✦ Music, arts, laughter, all put to use within the region
- ✦ Regional ministry to NAPAD, Women's Ministries; ALPHA; Disciples Men; working with people in diverse ways; RYC; Young Adults
- ✦ WM/WOSA--sponsoring human trafficking awareness event; Our church was a recipient of Miracle Day. We now have a labyrinth, mediation garden.
- ✦ We let people share their talents—we don't tell them what to do, we let them decide how to share the gifts God has given to them.

LEADERSHIP

- ✦ Big Regional staff that covers many areas of the church's needs; good leadership—serve as a team; Collegiality among the staff; respect and cooperation, giving the

opportunity for the regional minister to do the job they are hired to do.

- ⤴ youth—involved in various aspects/levels of the region; not brushed aside or discounted
- ⤴ have both clergy and academic professionals leading the region; deeply devoted laity
- ⤴ Regional staff phones us to think outside the box and encourage us not to worry

GROWTH/DECLINE/EVANGELISM/WORSHIP/CHANGE

- ⤴ Music and worship—all are welcome; it's hard to start new, but trying to bring infusion of new music and worship styles to bring new meaning and life to worship. We've done praise bands, and sometimes just prayer services with no program.

STEWARDSHIP

- ⤴ Generous bequests from churches and church members, benefiting the region.
- ⤴ Financial support for the region
- ⤴ Local church budgets camp scholarships
- ⤴ Generous in regular giving—if life cycle comes to an end, support others to continue on

PRACTICES/PRINCIPLES

- ⤴ **We are not a dogmatic church; not judgmental** (Question raised: why do strict, judgmental churches have so many members?)
- ⤴ We treat people with respect
- ⤴ Not hypocritical; practicing what they believe; relevant
- ⤴ **Inclusiveness and diversity**
- ⤴ **Welcoming everyone, even if they aren't members of the CC(DOC); Open to anyone—what each brings is a blessing; Willing to listen; open to learning**
- ⤴ **Acceptance**
- ⤴ Teaching
- ⤴ Allowed to question—don't all have to come up with the same answer
- ⤴ **Communion is open to everyone**
- ⤴ each church is unique
- ⤴ Immersion baptism

QUESTION 2:

What would you tell a Regional Minister Candidate are our challenges or anxieties?

COMMUNITY

- ⤴ DIVERSITY: a “double-edged sword” both the good news and the challenge; 1) Need to give all voices an opportunity to speak; 2) The diversity of values: liberal, conservative, moderate; this diversity is the most difficult, yet it must be maintained; 3) Geographic distances; 4) Multi-cultural differences; 5) theological differences 6) Dealing with congregations who want to leave the region over theological/practices differences
- ⤴ COMMUNICATIONS: 1) greater use of new technology—webinars, SKYPE, Conference calls for meetings, events, trainings; 2) Regular communications from the region to local congregations; 3) Sharing communications from congregations with each other—stories of successes, mission, ministries, needs
- ⤴ COLLECTIVE WISDOM: 1) Ways to be a vibrant, open, dynamic conference/region-- Get our creative juices flowing—use annual gatherings as opportunity for breakout sessions and creativity people can take back to their congregations; 2) Ways the regional office can provide resources both program and technology
- ⤴ SUPPORT: 1) Focus on what we CAN do. Small churches visit each other--“buckle down together”; 2) More “hands-on” from the Regional Minister supporting local congregations and less administration; More opportunities to gather in areas and connect
- ⤴ AGING MEMBERSHIP/DECLINING CONGREGATIONS: 1) Challenge of changing; taking risks; 2) Region has intergenerational presence, but many local congregations do not have youth/younger adults; Those who do have youth, how to keep them from going to a larger church with more activities; 3) Survival anxiety—churches closing; will we be next? What to do with struggling churches who are down to a few members?
- ⤴ IDENTITY: 1) Concern that Disciples will become something other than Disciples—will compromise to become something else—we need to stay the course and remain who we are; 2) Who are the Disciples really, at a deep level?; 3) Invite everyone; 4) People who struggle to find the truth with one another— diversity of beliefs—ethnic congregations and individuals--it is challenging and creates anxiety. 5) Local vs. regional power—edges of the region driving to Bay area for events/meetings; “clouding the deed” gives the region control.

MINISTRY/OUTREACH (PROGRAMS/EVENTS)

- ⤴ CHILDREN/YOUTH/YOUNG ADULTS: 1) How to inspire youth or offer a program with no youth present (but youth won’t come without a program—a “conundrum”); 2) Teaching Scripture and good values/social justice issues to youth How to inspire youth; 3) Resources for young families; 4) Volunteers to work with children/youth
- ⤴ MEN/WOMEN’S MINISTRIES: 1) How to be relevant to younger population; 2) declining attendance at meetings and retreats
- ⤴ BUILDINGS: 1) making buildings more user-friendly for others to use when you have a big church building but a small congregation; 2) Theft and other security or maintenance issues; 3) Accessibility issues—mobility and other, many of our buildings do not address this—need to educate congregations on what is needed.
- ⤴ SMALL MEMBERSHIP/NO ENERGY: 1) Need to seek out ecumenical partnerships; 2) work with other congregations in the region;
- ⤴ DIVERSITY: 1) Challenge of multi-cultural sensitivity; need more help and resources from the region for education and awareness. 2) Working with declining congregations with funds to give seed money to start new congregations; 3) Promoting our regional stand of open and inclusive within the region, represent a new vision for the larger church and other regions that are not open and affirming

GROWTH/DECLINE/EVANGELISM/WORSHIP/CHANGE

- ⤴ DISCIPLES IDENTITY: 1) Getting the good news out: How not to be “the best kept secret in town;” 2) Challenge: to convey what our church really is (not judgmental, love, acceptance,

open table, etc.); How do we get people to understand what our church offers?; 3) Overcoming preconceived notions of “traditional church” or “closed-minded”; 4) How to be prepared if people discover who we really are; 5) How to reach the un-churched and de-churched.

- ⤴ DECLINE: 1) Aging congregations with shrinking membership and big buildings; 2) Can't afford to hire a full-time pastor—hard to build up ministry; 3) No funds or good ideas for marketing; 4) Being too progressive or too conservative—turns people off; Need balance based on love, not hatred; 5) Doing Church in the midst of The “None-isms” -- Learn to respect the experiences of people who are skeptical of religious institutions; 6) Need to overcome the age gap—make the message compelling and meaningful for everyone to experience God; 7) Get rid of anxiety of being small—can still do mighty missional work.
- ⤴ WORSHIP AND CHANGE: 1) We need to make ourselves relevant in the 21st century; 2) church needs to set up different activities for different needs of the church; 3) need to recognize different forms of “church”; 4) Gender-inclusive resources should be used more widely in worship (inclusive Bible, liturgical resources); 5) Need to overcome rigid gender roles; 6) Address the sadness of those who grieve the changes—the love the church they had, grieve the loss for them—that it might be around for their kids/grandkids; 7) need to rejuvenate worship; 8) Churches want to grow—but don't want to change. Can't have it both ways today.
- ⤴ EVANGELISM: 1) Ways for telling the community about church; 2) Need doable evangelism; 3) How to become a “missional” model; 4) Need a growth task force; 4) Money, energy and clear message for marketing. We need a denominational marketing program.

LEADERSHIP

- ⤴ training clergy in social media, and how do we use media better (video clips)
- ⤴ focusing on and meeting the broad communication needs across generations (social internet media vs. snail mail)
- ⤴ Professional/business-type leadership to take the collective vision and move it forward (strong individual leadership of trained vs. congregational “leadership of many.”)
- ⤴ Change in top leadership—tough to keep others committed to God vs. the specific person (we worship God not man)
- ⤴ We need a minister
- ⤴ Practical training: wedding funerals, baptisms
- ⤴ administrative/organizational personnel
- ⤴ can't do everything—set priorities
- ⤴ need to first establish local congregation before spreading to regional level
- ⤴ we need to expand the staff to meet the real needs of church growth; the culture is not seeking to be more diverse; agnostics are growing
- ⤴ we don't tell others what we need (members, \$\$,)
- ⤴ Clergy support—seem to wait until regional events to connect deeply
- ⤴ Ben B was a dynamic and exciting leader—how to find more like that
- ⤴ The region needs to continue to be stretched, but some leaders are exhausted
- ⤴ strengthening the relationship among clergy; some have not participated in clergy support—why?

STEWARDSHIP/FINANCES

- ⤴ The cost of regional and general church events prohibit most people from attending. Need more scholarships

and financial resources and/or alternative to make it more affordable.

- ✧ Many churches unable to support even a half-time pastor; better use of PSR seminary students to help these churches?
- ✧ Getting more people to volunteer and serve—locally and regionally
- ✧ Budget issues--Declining resources, memberships and economic challenges—we wind up living in a sense of scarcity vs. abundance
- ✧ Funding programs and making the Church building available

PRACTICES/PRINCIPLES

- ✧ we need to lift up the Bible learning and spiritual-depth learning
- ✧ Theological challenges—regional issues that we all see; have theological discussions
- ✧ be intentionally inclusive; practicing acceptance
- ✧ to promote a view of Jesus and our faith as social activists, anti-fundamental

QUESTION 3:

What would be a good focus for regional ministry in this next year?

COMMUNITY

- ✧ **Celebrate diversity and continue to be open** (piercings, tattoos, disabilities, music, those that fall through the cracks)
- ✧ Better communications and information-sharing; building relationships with the people in the region
- ✧ At the annual meeting—expand what issues are being discussed; think about how to give voice to the dissenting voices; Learn compromise
- ✧ Helping people who have different values to speak together and work together without anger or fear.
- ✧ make each church feel like their voices are being heard and considered—listening and hearing with respect; small church is just as important as a big one.
- ✧ be pastoral to the clergy—be there for them when needed
- ✧ More intentionality about building bridges between straight and GLBT Disciples
- ✧ Training in effective use of social media
- ✧ Pastoring congregations on a regional level; stay visible to local churches
- ✧ praying for true community
- ✧ Good direction for region to talk about the difficult issues.

MINISTRY/OUTREACH (PROGRAMS/EVENTS)

- ✧ Looking for ways to get resources to those who need it (especially tech resources)
- ✧ more joint ventures with MCC and UCC; other ministry partners

✧ ACTS—focus on that program

- ✧ transformation of existing programs
- ✧ continued support of seminary students
- ✧ connecting (and discerning) gifts with jobs
- ✧ passionate preaching and ministry
- ✧ support of IMPAC—social justice voice
- ✧ continue to encourage biblical education and helping people to understand scripture

✧ Connect/Engage young adults (20/30 yr olds). Single, married, etc.

- ✧ keep momentum of new churches—diversified
- ✧ Diverse, but separate—intergenerational events
- ✧ Different styles of song-sharing; variety of music ministries
- ✧ support for/focus those in 30-40s—naturally looking for spiritual home—done with school, already into careers, having families
- ✧ Young Families
- ✧ **Youth:** have a “youth page” in the e-news; have a youth art t-shirt contest in regional ministry

GROWTH/DECLINE/EVANGELISM/WORSHIP/CHANGE

✧ Invest money and time into a marketing program. We don't know who we are, and how to say it

- ✧ Help the Disciples deal with an identity crisis—who are we, what do we stand for, what do we do?
- ✧ Congregations are getting old—dwindling--have a model coming from a church that is growing to help ones struggling; share what is working
- ✧ Find what we CAN do as small church. Can still take mission offering; can gather to hear sermon streamed from a DOC church elsewhere; New church membership; focus on outreach! Sharing new ideas with churches—fairs, being present in the communities; adopt a block; can we do something for you programs
- ✧ Add more churches of different ethnicities
- ✧ Try a variety of different worship services—different time; how do you identify those in your community that would benefit from another service; move from being a spectator church
- ✧ Electronic media—use more
- ✧ Deep spiritual growth; we need to know more about “true community”
- ✧ We need our regional focus to welcome and encourage teaching biblical wisdom and faith modeling to reach families of all kinds.
- ✧ it is time to shake it up and change things by designing a church that teaches how to invite,
- ✧ build new traditions and blend with the value of some of the older traditions so that we are “appealing” to younger generations.
- ✧ visit churches with readiness to tell the church hard news. Stop trying to transform very old churches by “putting lipstick on a pig” --need a type of intervention.
- ✧ Can we learn from, or merge with, other denominations?

LEADERSHIP

- ✧ Help RM candidate to know what problems of region are; what anxieties
- ✧ Help us lament the loss of Ben as our RM; Ben is a hard act to follow and new RM will not be

Ben.

- ⤴ continue to empower people
- ⤴ **Get all fired up—can't keep it going and it gets dropped—figure out a way to keep things going; anticipation and excitement**
- ⤴ focus on leadership training—how to be a minister of this age to ethnicities, youth, etc.
- ⤴ Put all of the regional ministry on the table for review and select what we need even if it changes staff and emphasis; Not sure the current model is sustainable.
- ⤴ ways to get lay people who want to get involved
- ⤴ support for clergy, circles of support?

STEWARDSHIP/FINANCES

- ⤴ ways to increase financial resources (fundraising)
- ⤴ Teach tithing—what does it mean? What is offering?
- ⤴ Capital Campaign

PRACTICES/PRINCIPLES

- ⤴ Prayer—especially during transitional times: prayer at community level; prayer at personal level
- ⤴ Focus on our faith as priority
- ⤴ A love of kids and youth

WHAT DO YOU WANT IN A RM: (extracted out from the responses)

- ⤴ Want a person who looks at whole people and total picture
- ⤴ someone who builds up relationships and able to accept diversity
- ⤴ Need the RM to recognize their spiritual power to influence people—all ages
- ⤴ Be spiritual—straight connection to God; Spirit-filled leader; someone centered in the word; Express own relationship with God
- ⤴ Feed people but make time for own feeding and nourishment; be patient with yourself and not be hurried by comparing yourself to the previous persons
- ⤴ We've made tremendous strides over the past years; someone who won't start a different path; see the place to build from
- ⤴ Use communication skills and has passion for what they do
- ⤴ be a pastor to pastors
- ⤴ New person will have to be very high energy and dynamic and organized
- ⤴ Can we distinguish whether we want an administrator, preacher, visionary, educator?
- ⤴ Regional Minister will spend a large portion of time on the road; will have little family time; 80 hour work week with very little time alone except while driving
- ⤴ need someone who is committed to transformation and hope; have lots of patients with congregations and needs to help people keep faith while facing death as a congregation.
- ⤴ **TO THE SEARCH COMMITTEE:** Poll local congregations about what they want. Look for someone who's moderate, not strongly liberal or conservative. There are people who will help with regional work.

CLOSING REMARKS:

- ⤴ Pooling our ideas in a team—part of growth
- ⤴ Don't go to church—I am the church/we are the church—temple of Holy Spirit—all the church together (don't confuse church building with the people of God)

- ⤴ Use of church building by community as whole (expand our witness/resources)
- ⤴ Focus on older adult ministries; intentional; grandparents raising grandkids; multi-generational issues
- ⤴ The group believes this was a great opportunity to share.