CIRCLES OF INQUIRY: ANNUAL GATHERING, 2014

MISSIONAL COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

CIRCLE OF INQUIRY ONE: STORY

1) Share a personal story, experience or feeling (or a story of a person you know) of working with another faith-based, community non-profit, or government organization, to address an issue you identify as an injustice in your community.

2) What values have shaped your thinking and feeling around engaging in community collaboration for doing the work of the church?

3) What do you celebrate, or grieve, as you consider what it would mean to organize many entities into common missional community collaboration?

CIRCLE OF INQUIRY TWO: UNDERSTANDING MORE ABOUT THE ISSUE

1) As a community of faith, what are the justice, equality and relationship values and concerns we might wrestle with in our larger communities which are too big for one group to serve or influence?

2) What might be the benefits or barriers for a community of faith to collaborate with other organizations and strive for a more collective influence for justice issues?

3) What values might diverse organizations have in common that would aid in collaboration?

SESSION THREE: COLLECTIVE WISDOM CONVERSATION AND HARVEST

1) What did you hear or say that surprised you?
2) How are you feeling as a result of these conversations in this moment?
3) What would you like to hear more about?
4) Suggestions from the group about how the regional body might move forward with continuing the conversation and forming additional circles? What would you like to see happen next?
5) What word(s) of compassion, support or grace you would offer about this issue?
Harvest—Missional Community Collaboration

Most of the people in the circle for which we have notes had some experience in this area. They identified several things that make community collaboration difficult.

1. Fear of speaking up
2. Fear that if you identify an opportunity to collaborate, you will have the whole burden of the work yourself
3. This work requires energy and passion, and once the first excitement wears off,
4. Its hard to keep things going
5. We think we can’t do things by ourselves and don’t see the collaboration opportunities
6. Within the church, people are often focused on the needs of the building.
7. Language and cultural barriers

They identified two things that propel them toward community collaboration:

1. The call of Christ to help others, although this was stated in a variety of ways: (“giving back to the church”, “being a Christian means going out in the community”, “who’s left out?—who hasn’t experienced the hospitality?”)
2. Working together: (“satisfaction in the whole village helping”, “kindred spirits”, “variety of skills”)

The group listed these areas where they thought community collaboration is especially useful: food/hunger, homelessness/shelter, transportation, mental health services, end-of-life/last 3rd of life, youth, veterans, elderly, human trafficking, simple living (using fewer resources), sexual assault on college campuses and in the military. These are interesting because there are several which are either wholly different or more specific than those the Justice Commission has been considering. Notice that LGBT issues, immigration, and racism, the topics being discussed by other circles, were not mentioned by this group.

They thought of several benefits of being a community of faith when involved in community collaboration.

1. The church becomes a place the share information.
2. There are a multitude of (Bible) stories to help us see things differently.
3. Conversation “at the Table” is a different kind of conversation

When the last question for Session Two came up (What values might diverse organizations have in common that would aid in collaboration?), the discussion began to stray as the group considered what collaborating with other non-church groups might look like. They mentioned wanting to understand each other and supporting and collaborating, but not fixing. They wondered about how valuable it might be to invite (other) agencies into our churches. The group began to especially focus on end-of-life issues. They mentioned “Five Wishes”, conversation with family, making sure people knew how one would like to be cared for at the end of
life, and making sure the family and church family know specifics about a memorial service. It was clear to me at this point that the group was ready for Session Three, where “next steps” would be addressed.

However, this didn’t happen exactly as planned. We put together the Missional Community Collaboration circles with the Congregational Change and Transition circles for Session Three, which seemed like a good idea at the time. In hindsight, it would appear that these two groups were at very different places in the process due to the nature of their topics. In my opinion, the Congregational Change and Transition group had a lot more talking and discussion to do, and were at a much more emotional place. After all, they were trying to understand and think about OUR future as a church. The Missional Community Collaboration circles were nearly ready for action.

I tried here to pick out the comments I thought were made by the Missional Community Collaboration circle members and address those, fleshing them out a little with my sense of what was intended.

The members of the Community Collaboration circle in which I participated were surprised and pleased by the immediate bond we had and the extent to which we were able to share the challenges of this work. I think we were all used to urging, prodding and encouraging church members to missional collaboration. But others in this group were also already focused on this work. They felt energized by the discussion and expressed a desire to carry things forward. They wanted to know more about missional ministry models and were hoping for additional connections with other congregations.

For the Next Steps questions, they were talking about advocacy for end-of-life issues, but they also recognized that there were a lot of other issues on the table, so there never really had a meeting of minds about that. “How do we work with the community to collaborate?” was asked. There was discussion of how to stay in touch with each other: e-mail list? websites? newsletters? As this circle never met with the other Community Collaboration circle, and the recorder sheets for that group have not been located, we don’t know what their ideas might have been about “next steps”.

They expressed appreciation to the Justice Commission for the opportunity, and especially appreciated the intimacy of the circles and the chance to be “listened to”.