

Religious Congregations and Collaborative Ministry:

Working Together at City South Cluster

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Introduction and Explanation

City South Cluster Ministries (CSCM) is a collaborative of Lutheran Congregations with the Mission: “Living our faith in Christ together through service in South Minneapolis.” On August 28, 2007, the organization celebrated its fifth anniversary with an outdoor worship service at Minnehaha Falls Park and a potluck picnic. At this five year mile-stone working together, we pause for a moment to consider what we have learned about collaboration that we can share with other groups, and we wonder what can we do to deepen our collaborative relationships and thus more effectively live out our mission.

City South Cluster Ministries formed five years ago with the cooperative belief that small urban churches could be more effective in their diverse communities through working together and sharing resources. Service through collaboration became the cornerstone of the organization. Through collaboration, CSCM has successfully launched the La Conexión community center for Latino immigrants. We have offered forums and support groups for individuals affected by depression. We have also shared congregational summer youth programs such as Vacation Bible Schools, mission opportunities, and camping trips. We have a lot to celebrate from five years working together. We also have an opportunity to learn from our successes and failures for our future. Furthermore, we have a responsibility to share what we have learned with the larger church, so that other groups can consider our innovative ministry

model for their communities.

One might be wondering at this point how this topic of congregational collaboration fits into a Master's Capstone Project in Nonprofit Management. This quandary has an interesting answer when one considers the impact of religious congregations on the larger nonprofit sector. Religious congregations are one of the oldest nonprofit institutions in American society, and the impact of religious institutions touches a majority of Americans with 60% or more attending a religious institution. This is according to Mark Chaves' chapter on religious congregations in Lester Salamon's anthology on, *The State of Nonprofit America* (Chaves, 2002). Furthermore, while all churches advance a religious cause in society a majority, 58%, also engage in some form of social service such as hosting soup kitchens or homeless shelters. In fact, within the emerging charitable choice movement, many believe that, "religious organizations may hold the answer to the country's most severe poverty and human social problems" (Chaves, 2002, p. 287). In short, the health of our religious congregations in America directly impacts the health of our nonprofit sector as a whole. Perhaps even greater than the health of the sector, the health of American society depends on healthy religious congregations.

However, there are many concerns about the current state of religious congregations in this country. According to Chaves, congregations struggle to maintain a membership base, secure adequate funding, recruit talented leaders, and find the right balance between member and

public-serving roles (Chaves, 2002). The innovative collaborative ministry model of CSCM seeks to address and eliminate many of these challenges, in an effort to revitalize the Lutheran presence in the South Minneapolis while at the same time serving its diverse community members. In order for congregations to remain the central societal institutions that they have been since the birth of our country, they must overcome these emerging challenges. In order to continue reaching members and serving the greater good, they must innovate and find new ways of operating. This is paramount to CSCM's collaborative ministry model.

Collaboration is also a popular topic throughout the nonprofit sector. Foundations often require organizations to describe how they will collaborate with others in order to secure funding. Corporate and nonprofit partnerships, a form of collaboration, are being leveraged as win-win relationships between the private and public sectors. The sector as a whole realizes the benefit, and often the necessity, of working together. Therefore, the lessons learned from this humble Capstone project on congregational collaboration could also have implications for other types of organizations and groups embarking on collaborative ventures.

Research Methods

When considering the issue of congregational collaboration, there are several key questions to answer: Why collaborate? What works and what doesn't when it comes to congregational collaboration? And, what are the benefits and challenges of collaborating?

Through answering these questions, it should become clear as to how the churches of City South Cluster Ministries can collaborate more optimally in order to achieve their mission.

To find out more about the unique issues facing congregations, I conducted an anonymous survey of CSCM stakeholders. I also interviewed several prominent leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) in the Twin Cities Metro Area and greater Minnesota. All of the leaders interviewed have experience working with congregational collaboration, merger, or consolidation. They also provide an outside perspective other than that gathered internally from CSCM constituents. While the survey and interviews are not comprehensive, they do attempt to capture a snapshot of the topic from an ELCA Lutheran perspective.

The Constituent Survey

An anonymous email survey was sent to forty CSCM stakeholders. The individuals included members from CSCM congregations, staff, pastors and congregational leaders, and CSCM board members. Fourteen of the forty surveys were completed. This is a 35% response rate. Stakeholders were asked to answer six questions about collaboration, with an optional seventh question for additional comments. The survey was composed entirely of qualitative short-answer questions, and similar responses were grouped together for comparative purposes. When individuals included more than one response to a question, each response was collated

separately. Often, then, there are more different responses to a question than individuals participating. For example, there were twenty-four different responses to the first question coming from only fourteen respondents. See Appendix A for the complete survey summary. I have used the top responses to each question for further investigation.

The first question was, “in your opinion, what is the greatest benefit of collaborating as a part of City South Cluster Ministries?” Nearly half the respondents, six in total, answered, sharing resources. This included leadership, ideas, facilities, and responsibilities. A close second to sharing resources was increased ministry and programmatic capacity, with five responses. The two are logically linked, as greater resources through sharing naturally also leads to increased programmatic capacity. The third top response to this question is very closely linked to the second and is, accomplishing things impossible to do alone. Four individuals gave this response. The ability to accomplish things impossible to accomplish alone is directly related to increased capacity.

Rounding out the responses to question one include: avoiding duplication of programs in our community, growth, expanding network and sphere of influence, and building Christian community. Each of these responses were mentioned twice. Increasing the ELCA presence in the community received one response.

The second question in the survey was, “in your opinion, what is the greatest barrier or

challenge to collaborating as a part of City South Cluster Ministries?” The top response in this category, mentioned by six individuals was, investment, ownership, and commitment from congregation members. This challenge has already been identified by key leaders and is even addressed in CSCM's strategic plan. Members are already overextended serving their individual congregations. Working on CSCM collaborative projects becomes one more commitment on individuals' already full plates. The second highest response echoes the first, that is, lack of time, energy, and coordination needed to be effective. This earned three responses. The third top response gives some insight into why the top two challenges are so difficult to address. It is turf-issues and fear of sharing resources. Surprisingly, this response was only mentioned twice. Until individual congregations give up some control, their collaborative involvement in CSCM will take a back seat to their congregations' individual programs, and the top two challenges identified here, will remain barriers for CSCM.

Some of the other responses to this question include, misunderstanding of the Cluster's purpose, difficulty knowing how to plug-in (specifically for newcomers), and collaboration seeming to be the goal, rather than a tool for accomplishing other things. Each of these responses were mentioned once. Many are very insightful, however, and will be further explored in later research.

The third question in the survey was, “in your opinion, what would most enhance or

improve CSCM's collaboration?" There were only two responses to this question mentioned by all fourteen respondents. Eight individuals mentioned, more opportunities to build church-to-church relationships in order to increase ownership, participation, and involvement. The second highest response, mentioned by six individuals, also aims to address this ownership challenge. It is greater communication and personalization of the Cluster message. Both of these will be addressed as with recommendations for CSCM.

Question four was, "what has been most rewarding about your involvement in CSCM?" The responses to this question were varied. Half, or seven, said building new relationships and helping and supporting one another. Four said, seeing growth and accomplishment over the years. Two said seeing the response of the community to our programs, while two others mentioned personal involvement in specific CSCM programs such as La Conexión or the Depression Awareness Forums.

The final qualitative question in the survey was, "what has been most disappointing about your involvement in CSCM?" Many of the responses to this question mirror challenges mentioned in question two. The ownership and commitment challenge was the number one response to question number two. The number one disappointment mirrors this challenge. It is a disappointment that that more people are not involved, volunteer, and/or support the Cluster. Four individuals gave this response. The number two challenge mentioned in question two was a

lack of time, energy and coordination. Mirroring this response is the number two disappointment, about the slow pace of implementation, lack of progress, and patience needed. This was mentioned by three respondents.

There were a broad array of other responses to this question. They include disappointments, “that I personally am not able to do more.” Two individuals gave this response. Other disappointments included that there is not better communication, that there is not more outreach being done, that we are not recognized by the Minneapolis Area Synod of the ELCA, and that “I have felt excluded.”

The sixth question was about individuals' affiliation with CSCM. Respondents could choose one or more affiliation from a list of choices. They also could opt not to answer this question. Two individuals did not give their affiliations. The survey was heavily influenced by members from Bethel Lutheran Church, five respondents, and board members, four respondents. Three individuals were members from Our Redeemer Lutheran Church and three were also CSCM pastors and staff. Two individuals were from Minnehaha Communion. No individuals affiliated themselves with Epiphany or El Milagro, but care was given to include a similar number of individuals from each congregation when distributing the survey. No survey is perfect, but I believe that in this case there was enough diversity of affiliation to apply the findings of the survey as part my research for this project.

The seventh question included in the survey allowed individuals to make additional comments about collaboration. These may be included as food for thought in other sections of this paper, but, because the question was so open ended, it is difficult extract comparative responses.

There are several survey conclusions that can be made when looking at the stakeholder survey results. First, there are several benefits of collaborating such as sharing resources which increases capacity and enables CSCM to accomplish things impossible to accomplish alone. These benefits also contribute to many rewarding aspects of collaboration. For example, seeing what is accomplished through the increased capacity of collaborating and building new relationships through working together.

Collaboration also has its challenges. At CSCM, these include challenges creating a sense of ownership and commitment. These challenges could stem from misunderstanding of the Cluster and turf issues. The lack of investment contributes to disappointments that few people are involved, volunteer, and support the cluster as well as the disappointment over the amount of time, energy, and coordination needed accomplish collaborative initiatives.

Finally, the survey presents many positive opportunities that built upon the benefits and rewards of collaboration and help to address many of the challenges identified. These include creating more opportunities for congregation members to get to know one another and increased

communication and personalization of the CSCM message. These opportunities will be further explored in the recommendations section.

Expert Interviews

I interviewed five experts from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) in and around the Twin Cities area with one interview from greater Minnesota. Included in the interview were Pastor David Wangarrd, Minneapolis Area Synod Bishop's Assistant working with urban congregations. David Raymond, founder of “Church Future” a consulting group which works with congregations, such as CSCM, that are in transition and considering collaboration, consolidation, or merger. Pastor Steve Peterson who is the Ministry Developer for the Northstar Cluster, a Cluster similar to CSCM in the Brainard area of Northern Minnesota. Pastor Bruce Westphal, pastor at Westwood Lutheran Church in Saint Louis Park. Westwood is a member of the newly formed SPARK cluster of churches. And, Craig Pederson, pastor at Northeast Community Lutheran Church, which is a newly formed congregation resulting from the consolidation of three Lutheran congregations in Northeast Minneapolis.

These individuals were all asked several questions about collaboration. In addition to their background and experience with congregational collaboration, they were all asked about the benefits and challenges of collaboration from their experiences, what works for groups collaborating, and their thoughts on collaborative models for the sustainability of congregations

in the ELCA.

Benefits and rewards of collaborating

Many of the same benefits mentioned in the CSCM survey were also mentioned by the experts interviewed. Sharing resources was the top response to the CSCM survey question about benefits of collaboration. Steve Peterson from Northstar also identified the benefit of drawing from more ideas, gifts, and resources (personal communication, Sept. 2, 2007). He also mentions increased programmatic capacity saying, “there are things you can do cooperatively better than you could or would do on your own” (personal communication, Sept. 2, 2007). This was the number two response in the CSCM survey.

The cooperative programs made possible through collaboration have been some of the most rewarding aspects for congregations collaborating. Steve Peterson mentioned that annual cooperative programming has worked well for them (personal communication, Sept. 2, 2007). Craig Pederson also mentioned the increased programmatic capacity as a result of collaborating. A hope and goal of consolidating the three congregations that now form Northeast Community Lutheran was increased worship attendance on Sunday morning. He has seen this happen (personal communication, Sept. 11, 2007). Participants in the CSCM survey also mentioned their involvement in CSCM programs as being most rewarding. One individual mentioned their personal involvement with CSCM's depression initiative and another mentioned their

involvement with the La Conexión program. Others responded more generally to how rewarding it has been to see the response of the larger community to CSCM's programs. The second most mentioned benefit of collaborating mentioned in the CSCM survey was increased programmatic capacity as a result of working together.

Another benefit that Steve Peterson mentions is the support, encouragement, and energy that comes from working together (personal communication, Sept. 2, 2007). Similarly, one of the greatest rewards mentioned in the CSCM survey was building relationships and helping and supporting one another. Craig Pederson from Northeast Community Lutheran also mentions the energy resulting from collaboration saying, "it is fun to be part of something new." This gives people energy to keep working toward the collaborative vision even when they are tired (personal communication, Sept. 11, 2007). From a pastoral perspective, he also mentioned the encouraging relationships that emerge through working together with other staff and pastors (personal communication, Sept. 11, 2007).

Challenges of collaborating

While collaboration can be incredibly rewarding and have many benefits for congregations, it is not always easy and there are many challenges and barriers which often hinder the collaborative process. Several individuals mentioned the challenges facing pastors and leader in the collaborative process. David Wangaard from the Minneapolis Area synod says

collaboration may be, “great for individual churches but not for staff” (personal communication, Aug. 24, 2007). He says it is difficult for pastors to, “be fully present” when they are trying to keep the interests of all the constituents in mind (personal communication, Aug. 24, 2007).

Pastor Craig Pederson mentioned the challenge of “leading change” without alienating those grieving the loss resulting from the change (personal communication, Sept. 11, 2007).

Sometimes change requires a change in leadership, which can often be hard for pastors to accept.

Pastor Bruce Westphal from SPARK mentions this challenge. He talked about his involvement with a collaborative effort on the north side of Minneapolis. He said one major obstacle contributing to their failure was an underestimation of the, “resistance of pastors and their unwillingness to let go” (personal communication, Sept. 19, 2007). He believes that local synods can help facilitate collaborations by better managing personnel. When a pastoral change is needed in order for collaboration to happen, new opportunities for exiting pastors should be lined up by the synod so that these pastors feel that they have new and exciting mission opportunities awaiting them (Westphal, personal communication, Sept. 19, 2007).

Investment and ownership was the number one challenge cited in the CSCM survey.

Pastor Steve Peterson also faces this challenge with the Northstar Cluster. He says, “it is very difficult to build ownership for new ideas and programs or ways of approaching congregational life or mission or cooperative efforts unless there is very strong buy in from local leaders”

(personal communication, Sept. 2, 2007). He also said, “Cooperation has been limited, constantly up for negotiation, and often down right fickle” (personal communication, Sept. 2, 2007).

Ownership and investment can also be hindered by a possessiveness individuals feel for their church buildings and/ or a fear of change. In the CSCM survey this was referred to as “turf issues” or “fear of sharing resources.” Steve Peterson said, “While there has been some support by visionaries and even early adopters, ideas that involve significant change are not easily welcomed” (personal communication, Sept. 2, 2007). Wangaard suggests that as congregations create a new identities that they continue to celebrate their old traditions and culture. Congregations should ask the question, “what about our traditions are good that we should bring forward” into our new identity (personal communication, Aug. 24, 2007).

Fear of working together and sharing resources can be exacerbated when there is a perceived scarcity of resources. Wangaard emphasizes the importance of congregations moving away from this perception and move toward partnering out of abundance (personal communication, Aug. 24, 2007). Our mantra at CSCM is, “We can do more together than we could ever hope to do alone.” This contrasts the idea that we are dying and therefor must partner in order to survive. Wangaard suggests replacing this self-preservation mentality with a vision for mission and outreach (personal communication, Aug. 24, 2007). Partnership should not be

about what is in it for “me” or even for “us,” but about what is in it for the community-- for those that are not currently part of us (D. Wangaard, personal communication, Aug. 24, 2007). This is, after all, the Biblical call to serve not ourselves but others (D, Wangaard, personal communication, Aug. 24, 2007).

SPARK faces this possessiveness of buildings with at least two of its congregations. Westwood Lutheran, the largest church of SPARK, is funding a major portion of the SPARK collaborative with \$60,000 annually for salaries alone. Westphal believes that if the congregations can reinvent themselves and use their buildings for mission and outreach, this possessiveness can be turned into something more positive, but he also admits that there may just be too many Lutheran churches in Saint Louis Park (personal communication, Sept. 19, 2007). Westphal sees Westwood's participation in SPARK as “ecclesiastical entrepreneurship” (personal communication, Sept. 19, 2007). While the intention of Westwood's participation with SPARK has often been questioned by outsiders, he contends that his congregation's intentions are purely altruistic and that they just care about ministry in Saint Louis Park (personal communication, Sept. 19, 2007).

Northeast Community Lutheran Church formed out of crisis. At least two of the congregations realized that they faced imminent death if they did not do something radical immediately. However, members also had a general vision for “inspiring worship” and “service

to the community” (C. Pederson, personal communication, Sept. 11, 2007). For Northstar, however, a greater perception of the need to collaborate would aid their efforts. Steve Peterson says, “without a deep sense of interdependence, the Cluster has been seen by many as a luxury to pair down rather than as a resource for transformation and expanding ministry and mission” (personal communication, Sept. 2, 2007). Perhaps the need for collaboration along with the abundance resulting from collaborating must be held in paradox for congregations engaged in partnership. Partnership, then, may emerge out of a perceived crisis, but to be effective, there also must be a clear vision about what can be accomplished through collaborating. This clarity of vision, however, is difficult to establish.

Several responses in the CSCM survey indicate that we have not had a clear vision or that vision has not been communicated well enough. One person surveyed said that there was a misunderstanding of the Cluster's purpose and another said that, “Collaboration seems to be the goal rather than a tool for other things.” City South Cluster Ministries did emerge out of a desire of congregations to work together. It wasn't until CSCM went through its strategic planning process, which was completed a little over a year ago, that a clear mission emerged, “Living our faith in Christ together through service in South Minneapolis.” Those participating as part of the planning team attempted to put into words the original vision, which they believed was Christian service to the community through partnership. Now that the vision has been clearly established,

communicating the vision is the new challenge facing CSCM.

Most of the experts interviewed cited clarity of vision as a challenge in collaborative endeavors. Part of Dave Raymond's Town Hall style gatherings among congregational constituents is to establish the shared vision before planning for the future (D. Raymond, personal communication, Sept. 5, 2007). Steve Peterson from Northstar talks about lack of clarity impacting funding for their Cluster, "a lack of clarity, in the beginning, about the mission and focus and organization of the cluster... has often begged the question for many, 'What are we getting for our money?'" (personal communication, Sept. 2, 2007).

Craig Pederson from Northeast Community Lutheran said he felt outside pressure to clarify their vision prior to consolidation, but that a general vision for worship and outreach has been enough of a vision to get them where they are today (personal communication, Sept. 11, 2007). The churches knew they wanted to consolidate to better serve their community and their members. There were too many other details to attend to with the consolidation process that talking about larger vision was not the top priority (C. Pederson, personal communication, Sept. 11, 2007). He hopes that Northeast Community will work toward a clearer mission and purpose as they get settled into being a new congregation (personal communication, Sept. 11, 2007). They are temporarily occupying their building. Where they eventually end up settling permanently may reflect a larger vision for ministry that they discover. For example, there is a

vacant school nearby that they could buy and turn into a community center or they could reside in one of the church buildings remaining after the consolidation. The location they choose will be related to the type of ministry for which they hope to use their building.

Pastor Bruce Westphal says that SPARK has, “put the cart before the horse” (personal communication, Sept. 19, 2007). Pastors were immediately hired to work with young adults and the elderly, before consensus was established among the participating congregations about their purpose for working together (personal communication, Sept. 19, 2007). He said that people were, “invited onto the bus before anyone knew where it was going.” He feels that SPARK is “stuck” because of their lack of vision (personal communication, Sept. 19, 2007). No one is effectively able to work toward anything. SPARK recently hired consultants to help the congregations work through a process to identify a clearer vision and hopefully jump start their collaborative ministry.

Another perceived challenge for congregations working together is the dynamics that emerge between smaller and larger churches trying to work together. Wangaard says that bigger churches often may have difficulty seeing smaller churches as equal (personal communication, Aug. 24, 2007). CSCM has one congregation that is larger than the others, Bethel Lutheran Church, however, CSCM has been intentional about building a partnership that is equal. For example, each congregation has only one representative on the Board of Directors, irregardless

of the size of their congregation. Though many of our cooperative youth programs simply would not happen without the full-time youth and family pastor at Bethel, all congregations are invited to have a say in what programming will be offered, and events are always sponsored by City South Cluster Ministries, not exclusively Bethel. CSCM has realized that each congregation brings something a little different to the table and we try to celebrate that. Bethel has a bit more programmatic capacity than our other congregations because they draw off of more resources, but I do not think that members in any of our congregations feel that Bethel is driving CSCM simply because they are larger.

It remains to be seen whether or not the size differential among the SPARK congregations will adversely impact their collaborative endeavors. While Bethel may be two or three times as large as some of our other CSCM congregations, Westwood is ten or twelve times bigger than the other congregations participating in SPARK. They have around 700 attending worship each week, while the other congregations have an average of 40 to 65 people worshipping on Sunday morning. When Westphal was asked whether or not he believed that Westwood's size would be a barrier to collaboration he said, "It is too early to tell" (personal communication, Sept. 19, 2007).

While a larger church may be a barrier to collaboration, if they are mission minded and have the desire to work together with smaller congregations, they can also be a great resource.

For example, Westwood funds \$60,000 of SPARK's pastoral salaries (B. Westphal, personal communication, Sept. 19, 2007). Without their contribution, those pastoral positions would likely lack funding. They also bring an energy that can be contagious for smaller struggling congregations. The pastor at First Lutheran, another SPARK congregation, has moved his office into Westwood's building. He likes having colleagues in the building and finds support from other staff at Westwood that he wouldn't have in the office at First Lutheran (B. Westphal, personal communication, Sept. 19, 2007).

Finally, “people power” can be a challenge for congregations collaborating. Craig Pederson says that there was a misconception that with three congregations coming together that there would be three times the number of volunteer lay leaders doing the work and that the burden would be lessened for existing leaders (personal communication, Sept. 11, 2007). They have dealt with lay burnout, and, “20% of the people still do 80% of the work,” according to Pederson (personal communication, Sept. 11, 2007). To make matters worse, new collaborative ministry models also take more time, persistence, and patience than ministry as usual. This takes an additional toll on volunteer leaders. Participants in the CSCM survey also mentioned this challenge. Several individuals said there was a lack of “time, energy, and coordination in order to be effective.” The number one disappointment mentioned was that, “More people are not involved as volunteer supporters of the Cluster.”

What works for collaborating congregations

Pastor Wangaard shared some keys to building effective collaboration. His thoughts on the topic come from decades working with collaborative congregational ventures. He started as a parish pastor in rural Alaska working in collaboration with other rural congregations. Now, through the Bishops office in the Minneapolis Area Synod, he has been working with various groups through consolidation and merger as well as groups simply collaborating in mission and outreach, as in the case of City South Cluster Ministries. The most important key to effective collaboration, in Wangaard's opinion, is building trust among congregations through intentional relationship building (personal communication, Aug. 24, 2007).

The top responses to three of the questions in the CSCM survey speak to this relationship building key that Wangaard mentions. The greatest reward for CSCM constituents is building relationships, but the greatest challenge is related to varying degrees of investment. The solution to this challenge, perceived by CSCM members, is more opportunities to build church-to-church relationships in order to increase ownership, participation, and involvement.

Other experts interviews also see the importance of relationship building among participating collaborative partners as a key to effectively working together. Pastor Craig Pederson from Northeast Community Lutheran Church attributes much of their success with consolidation to the numerous intentional opportunities to bring people together and build

relationships among the congregations participating in the consolidation. This included joint worship services and meals together during the Lenten season prior to consolidation as well as special Sunday services at other times of the year (personal communication, Sept. 11, 2007).

Northeast Community Lutheran Church moved through the consolidation process very quickly.

Within one year of exploring the opportunity, all three churches had legally dissolved and formed the new congregation.

Steve Peterson from the Northstar Cluster talks to the importance of relationship building and trust issues primarily among pastors and leaders of congregations (personal communication, Sept. 2, 2007). The examples he shares include regular meetings of Cluster staff and pastors, text study groups, and faith formation retreats. He speaks to the effectiveness of these relationships in helping to ease, “feelings of isolation,” which pastors in rural settings often experience (personal communication, Sept. 2, 2007). Many of the cooperative programs that the Northstar Cluster has facilitated are also aimed at relationship building among congregation members such as summer outdoor worship services, picnics, and variety shows (S. Peterson, personal communication, Sept. 2, 2007). City South Cluster Ministries has facilitated many similar opportunities such as the weekly text study for pastors as well as monthly planning meetings for pastors and leaders. We have also begun a tradition of an annual worship service in the park at Minnehaha Falls as well as sponsoring an ecumenical worship service on

Thanksgiving Eve.

In addition the importance of relationship building, Pastor Wangaard also emphasized how important it is that collaboration be “grassroots” and include all members in the decision making process, including consensus building whenever possible (personal communication, Aug. 24, 2007). He also thinks that all members from participating congregations need opportunities to be heard and to share their ideas, even if their will is not ultimately done (personal communication, Aug. 24, 2007). Finally, it is crucial that the endeavor be owned by the individual congregations rather than dictated of them from the bishop's office (D. Wangaard, personal communication, Aug. 24, 2007). Creating this ownership and involving more people is the number one challenge facing CSCM according to constituents surveyed. The survey also reveals that getting everybody on the same pages makes implementation more time consuming and creates frustration.

David Raymond facilitates this ownership process through conducting town hall meetings which involve all members in decision making about their congregation's future and gives individuals the opportunity to be heard and to share their ideas. He says that, “consolidations work better than you might think” (personal communication, Sept. 5, 2007). He has worked with many congregations considering consolidation or merger within the Minneapolis area synod and was part of the Synod's Urban Planning Consultants group. The group has now disbanded, but

Raymond continues working with congregations considering partnership, consolidation, or merger. He has become an expert in the ELCA and has worked with congregations around the country. His current project is with a group of churches in Florida.

Pastor Craig Pederson attributes the successful consolidation and formation of Northeast Community Lutheran to the grassroots nature of the planning and discernment process (personal communication, Sept. 11, 2007). When considering consolidation the three congregations formed a Joint Exploration Team or JET. This group was entirely lay led. In fact the first meeting to consider some form of partnership happened among lay leaders in a coffee shop-- no pastors present. The JET group facilitated a joint meeting open to all congregation members to share opinions and ideas. It was just under one year from the time of the first JET meeting to the first worship service of the newly formed Northeast Community Lutheran Church (C. Pederson, personal communication, Sept. 11, 2007). Northeast Community Lutheran Church also facilitated grief and loss sessions for members of their congregations. A neutral outside pastor was brought in to lead the sessions so that members could feel free to be open and honest with their feelings about the consolidation process (C. Pederson, personal communication, Sept. 11, 2007). This was just one additional opportunity for members to be heard.

Collaborative vision for the church at large

In the additional comments section of the CSCM survey participants had the opportunity

to say something more about congregational collaboration. Several individuals took this opportunity to say more. One person said, “CSCM is a good model/ illustration for urban social ministry.” Another individual said, “CSCM is the necessary change for urban churches,” and another person surveyed thinks, “CSCM has a promising future.” Finally one person wonders if, CSCM can, “be the bridge builder between our faith and our diverse communities.” These comments attempt to apply CSCM's collaborative ministry model to a vision for the larger church.

Many individuals surveyed and interviewed believe that collaborative ministry models are a possible solution to many of the challenges facing ELCA Lutheran congregations. Many of the challenges mentioned by Chaves that were referenced earlier in this paper are echoed by the experts interviewed. Steve Peterson says, “We are in a major period of transition in the church. It has been well documented how the church has been moving from the center to the periphery of our culture” (personal communication, Sept. 2, 2007). He attributes this to, “the effects of modernism and post-modernism, the unsustainability of the continued Lutheran cultural inwardness and the privatization of faith, the decline in membership, etc” (personal communication, Sept. 2, 2007). Furthermore, Peterson believes, “Collaboration and cooperation will help to provide support, encouragement, vision, positive challenge, and hope to congregations seeking out new ways to faithfully be the church in changing times” (personal

communication, Sept. 2, 2007).

Findings

Many of the challenges mentioned by the experts and constituents can be minimized by applying some of the suggestions for 'what works' in congregational collaboration and by focusing on the benefits also mentioned. The following chart attempts to summarize these findings.

Challenges	Collaborative Benefits and “What Works” <i>Addressing Collaborative Challenges</i>
<i>Leadership</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● leading change 	Benefit: supportive relationship building among leaders (e.g. text study, working together, etc.)
<i>Investment/ Ownership</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● fear of change ● possessiveness of buildings ● power dynamics (e.g. smaller/larger congregations) 	What works: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● intentional relationship building among constituents creates trust ● involving constituents in decision making/ implementing opportunities for all to be heard
<i>Resources</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● overly focused on resource scarcity ● limited people power 	Benefit: sharing resources creates increased programmatic capacity and allows groups to accomplish more together than would be possible separately
<i>Vision</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● lack of clear vision 	What works: town hall style meetings which involve constituents in a grassroots forum to clarify the vision before embarking on collaborative ventures

Literature Review

There is quite a lot of literature written on the general topic of organizational

collaboration, but not much written specifically on the topic of congregational collaboration. However, many of the concepts of organizational collaboration can easily be transferred to congregations. The culture within which the concepts are applied are certainly different for congregations, but all organizations have a unique identity within which they apply collaborative concepts, and religious congregations are just a type of organization like any other. I scanned nearly two dozen resources for this review. Many of the perspectives represented in literature believe collaboration can be successful, but others wonder if the costs of collaborating exceed the benefits. Some of these costs include loss of organizational identity (Whelan, 2002), the strain on staff who spend too much time and energy making collaborative relationships work at the cost of their programs and services (Whelan, 2002), the differences in perceived goals which create tensions or conflict among collaborating organizations (Lesky, O'Sullivan, & Goodman, 2007), the financial burden required to implement collaborative work (Lesky, O'Sullivan, & Goodman, 2007), and the possible negative impact on clients/ constituents (e.g. data privacy issues, etc.) (Lesky, O'Sullivan, & Goodman, 2007).

I have included an in depth review of two resources which I believe will be most useful to CSCM as they attempt to implement recommendations aimed to enhance their ability to collaborate more optimally. Throughout this project, I have analyzed the benefits and rewards of collaborating along with the challenges and disappointments in an attempt to discover what

works for groups collaborating. For the two resources I chose for this review, I will look specifically at the best practices summary. This will begin to inform recommendations aimed at enhancing the collaborative capacity of CSCM.

The first resource is entitled, *Nonprofit Collaboration & Mergers: Finding the Right Fit a Resource Guide for Nonprofits*. In the early 2000s, the United Way of Greater Milwaukee conducted a, “Collaboration Learning Project,” following the collaborative efforts of five groups over a three year period. Their report serves as a useful field guide for collaborating organizations. The second resource is a book by Russell M. Linden entitled, *Working Across Boundaries: Making Collaboration Work in Government and Nonprofit Organizations*. This book includes insights for leaders in collaborative ventures, suggestions for avoiding collaborative pitfalls, and proven collaboration strategies.

The United Way Collaboration Learning Project discovered six characteristics of effective partnerships. Linden has created a Framework for Collaboration. Many of the characteristics identified in the *Learning Project* and elements in *The Framework* address the challenges revealed in the survey and interviews for this project. The first characteristic discovered by the *Learning Project* was committed leadership. Leadership was one of the four challenges which emerged from the CSCM survey and expert interviews. The *Learning Project* discovered, “Groups that experienced the greatest success had leaders that did not view the work

of the partnership as external to their everyday activities. A need was identified and their level of commitment led them to find a way to make the partnership a part of their regular efforts” (“Nonprofit Collaborations and Mergers,” 2004, p. 5). Leadership is also one of the five basic elements contributing to Linden's Framework for Collaboration, “The initiative has a champion, someone with credibility and clout who makes this a high priority” (Linden, 2002, p. 60).

The second characteristic discovered by the *Learning Project* was unambiguous goals. This parallels the vision challenge discovered by participants in this project. According to the *Learning Project*, “A clear set of realistic goals is necessary for a collaborative to succeed” (“Nonprofit Collaborations and Mergers,” 2004, p. 5). Unlike those surveyed and interviewed for this project, with the *Learning Project*, there was, “no doubt that all possessed a shared vision for how they wanted to improve the community” (United Way, 2004, p. 5). With congregations involved in collaboration, this vision is often vague. The *Learning Project* does highlight, however, that a shared vision is not enough. Shared objectives are also critical, “Groups that experienced the greatest success documented the explicit objectives they wanted to achieve and revisited them at each meeting to ensure progress” (“Nonprofit Collaborations and Mergers,” 2004, p. 5).

Linden echoes the importance of shared vision. This is one of his five basic elements in his Framework, “The parties have a shared purpose that they care about but cannot achieve on

their own” (Linden, 2002, p. 60). He also distinguishes between the shared vision and shared goals and objectives. In this section entitled, *More Keys to Successful Collaboration*, he says groups should, “Measure and post results of the collaborative effort” and, “Balance the need to plan with the requirement for results” (Linden, 2002, p. 187).

Clearly defined roles is the third characteristic of successful partnerships identified in the *Learning Project*, “Partnerships that made the most progress had a specific plan for how each organization would contribute its unique services to achieve mutually identified goals” (“Nonprofit Collaborations and Mergers,” 2004, p. 6). While role definition did not explicitly boil to the top of the challenges in my project, it is an important element that could also have implications for addressing the investment, resource, and vision challenges facing collaborating congregations. Role definition is also mentioned by Linden as one of the basic elements in his Framework, “The parties want to pursue a collaborative solution now and are willing to contribute something to achieve it” (Linden, 2002, p. 60). He also lists role clarity as one the additional keys to successful collaboration saying collaboratives must, “Help each party play to its strengths” (Linden, 2002, p. 187). This may be a particularly useful concept for the CSCM congregations, especially in addressing the resource challenge that emerged through the surveys and expert interviews.

The fourth and fifth characteristics mentioned in the *Learning Project* is commitment at

multiple levels of the organizations and dedicated staff time, “Partnerships that realized the most success had commitment at both the executive and staff levels” (“Nonprofit Collaborations and Mergers,” 2002, p. 6). Investment and ownership are key challenge facing CSCM.

Constituencies committed at the congregational level often struggle to give up some of their loyalty for the sake of the collaborative venture. Building trusting relationship emerged as the hallmark for instilling a sense of commitment among collaborative players in the CSCM survey and expert interviews.

One of the essential elements in Linden's Framework is also, “Forming open, trusting relationships among the principals” (Linden, 2002, p. 91). He calls these relationships, “the glue to most collaborative efforts” (Linden, 2002, p. 92). Linden says, “Poor relationships will kill almost any alliance; without strong relationships there's no trust, and without trust there will be no collaboration. When trust has been built, people are usually willing to give one another the benefit of the doubt and take small risks with each other” (Linden, 2002, p. 94).

Sustainability in the midst of change is the final characteristic to collaborative success as identified by the *Learning Project*, “loss of key leadership was perhaps the greatest obstacle to participants in the Collaboration Learning Project... in almost every instance, when a key staff person left, the collaborative terminated” (“Nonprofit Collaborations and Mergers,” 2004, p. 6).

While leadership continuity did not emerge specifically as a core challenge facing CSCM, it is

something leaders within the organization should keep at the forefronts of their minds. There has been significant turnover in pastoral staff throughout CSCM's short history. Usually committed leaders from other participating congregations have stepped in during these times to assist with leadership transition and assure that incoming leaders understand the expectations of their involvement in the collaborative. Linden also mentions continuity of leadership in his *More Keys* section, "Trainers who help develop teams sometimes say that when the team composition changes, you're starting over with a new team. Someone joins, someone else leaves, and the dynamics shift" (Linden, 2002, p. 188).

Other elements in Linden's framework which also have implications for CSCM include, "Developing high stakes," meaning, "the consequences of doing the activity well or poorly are very large" and "those doing the activity will feel the consequences directly in the near term" (Linden, 2002, p. 110). These high stakes were probably felt by some of the congregations participating in this project, such as Northeast Community Lutheran Church.

CSCM has not perhaps done a sufficient job of creating high stakes in our unique context. However, there have been specific times when the external stakes have been high-- when El Milagro, for example, experienced turmoil over pastoral turnover. The leadership of CSCM helped guide the congregation through the difficult time. This has created greater loyalty to CSCM on behalf of El Milagro's membership as a result. The challenge for CSCM is to see the

stakes as being high even when there is not a perceived crisis. The most committed leaders do perceive high stakes saying, “work together to create a viable South Minneapolis Ministry or die.” It is difficult to translate that perception to other members in our congregations unless the crisis is very imminent.

The final element in Linden's Framework is creating a constituency for collaboration. This element has great implications for CSCM's investment and ownership challenge. According to Linden, “A constituency for collaboration is a group of people who strongly believe that a collaborative effort is in their interest, who want to support it, and who have influence over parties involved” (Linden, 2002, p. 131). The larger CSCM can build our constituency for collaboration, the greater investment we will have, and the larger our impact can be. This creates a cycle of sorts. The larger the impact is, the more perceived benefit is felt by the constituency thus creating more trust in the collaborative. People then become further invested as their trust builds in the collaborative and they feel the direct impact of the cooperative work. This, then, also has implications to address not only the investment challenge which emerged by also the “people power” resource challenge that was also identified. This idea is exemplified in the recommendations section.

Recommendations

The following recommendations may help CSCM address some of the collaborative

challenges which emerged from the survey and expert interviews. I have attempted to build on that which CSCM is already doing in order to enhance their efforts. I also make suggestions that hopefully will not tax CSCM's already strained leadership resources.

Addressing the Leadership Challenge

CSCM has been fortunate to have a very committed core group of lay and staff leadership from our member congregations. There are two suggestions I would make to continue to support the existing leadership and nurture new leaders. First, CSCM can build on existing opportunities aimed at bringing congregational leaders together for idea sharing and leadership development. Pastor Judy Burgett Winzig has done a great job of organizing a series of leadership breakfasts for various leadership groups from our congregations. This should continue and could be enhanced. Pastor Judy already works tirelessly serving in multiple leadership roles with CSCM. It would be a strong vote of support if CSCM could encourage the leadership breakfast series by providing a little fund to cover the cost of the breakfast or bring in a guest speaker now and then. When CSCM invests in our leadership at the congregational level through development opportunities such as this, we will hope to see a return on that investment with future support of these empowered leaders in our collaborative endeavors.

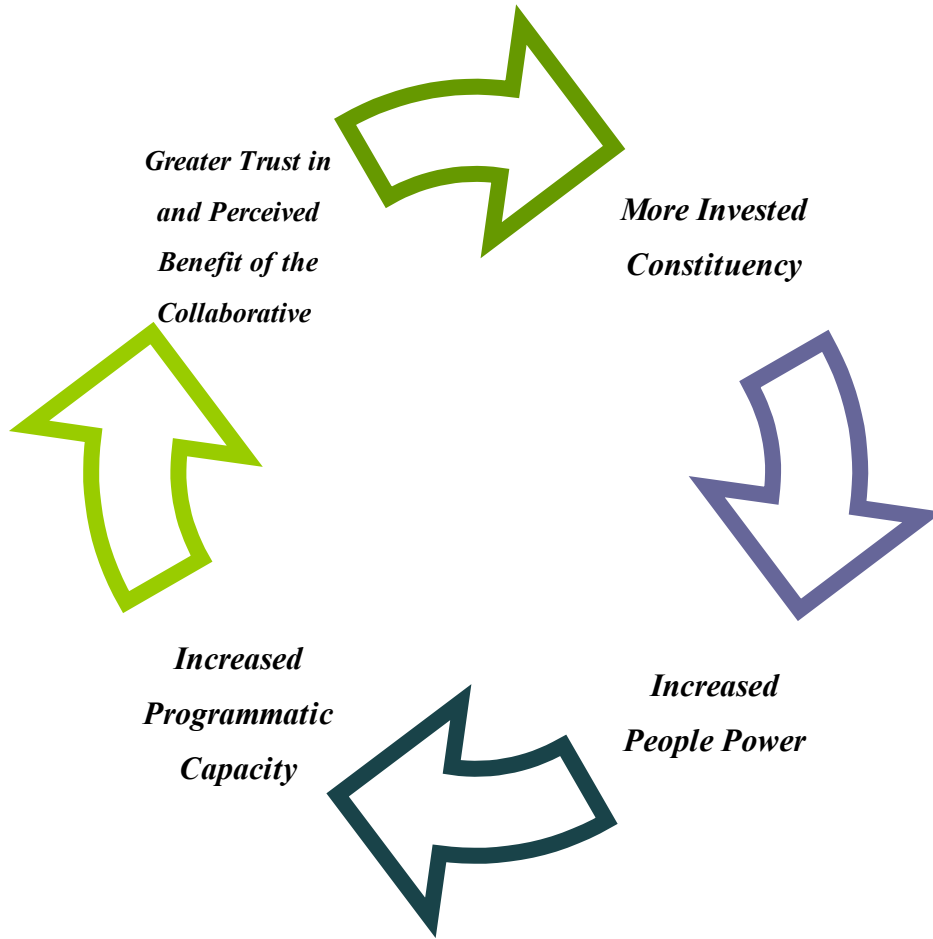
The second suggestion to address the leadership challenge is to support clergy and other church staff that are committed to cooperative ministry. For example, the youth pastor at Bethel

provides hundreds of hours a year of in-kind staff support to CSCM's cooperative youth programs. As the individual donor program is enhanced, some of these resources should be turned back over to support the existing staff in our member congregations, thus taking some of the burden off member congregation budgets to pay these individuals and further emphasizing, tangibly, the benefit of CSCM membership for our congregations. It would be encouraging to our congregation leaders if the Cluster started to be able share our resources rather than always asking for congregations to support our collaborative work out of their budgets.

Addressing the Investment/ Ownership Challenge

In looking at Linden's framework, we have begun to discover the importance of an invested constituency. The following diagram attempts to illustrate the cycle or impact an invested constituency can have in collaborative endeavors.

The Collaborative Investment/ Ownership Cycle



Many of the individuals surveyed believe that building strong relationships can help build trust and in turn create a more invested constituency. Many of CSCM's current activities are aimed at building trusting relationships. The annual worship service at the park, for example, brings all the member congregations together for worship and lunch. It involves people from all of the congregations in the planning and execution of the service and the meal.

In addition to worship and fellowship opportunities, I suggest CSCM begin to implement

strategic opportunities to bring congregational members and leaders together to be more involved in the decision making and to learn about CSCM's successes and impact. I suggest four venues through which this may be possible: Quarterly Council Meetings, Annual Meetings, Cooperative Programming, and Formal Communications.

First, I believe there is an opportunity to bring together individual congregational councils on a quarterly basis with the CSCM board. This will give council members an opportunity to meet congregational leaders from other CSCM congregations. It will also give CSCM an opportunity to widen our circle of influence, receive feedback, and solicit congregational leaders' involvement in the decision making process. It will help CSCM align our goals and programs with those of the member congregations. This, then, also has implications for addressing the resource challenge. I will discuss this further in the next section.

One important additional note: I would recommend that this quarterly meeting replace the regularly scheduled council meeting for that month. Our congregational leaders' plates are already too full. We want to build ownership and investment in a way that makes leaders feel supported and encouraged rather than in a way that feels to them like we are adding more responsibilities or requirements to their already strained schedules.

Secondly, CSCM has a tremendous opportunity for visibility at our congregations' annual meetings. This is the one time of the year where the entire congregation is gathered together as a

captive audience. The CSCM annual report is always included at these meetings, congregations' approve a contribution to CSCM in their budgets, and the CSCM board representative from individual congregations may have a chance to speak. CSCM can use the annual meeting as a way to broaden our base of support. The board representatives should be briefed about what should be shared at these meetings. If congregations can synchronize when their annual meetings are held, perhaps CSCM can host the lunch meal at a neutral location after each congregation's meeting. The lunch would create an opportunity to build more relationships among the congregations. CSCM can also engage individuals attending the lunch in the decision making process for the coming year, perhaps including discussion and voting. It would serve, then, as a CSCM annual meeting for members from our congregations.

Thirdly, CSCM can build on our annual cooperative events. We currently host cooperative worship services throughout the year such as the ecumenical Thanksgiving Eve Service, Worship in the Park, etc. Occasionally we have sponsored cooperative holiday services such as Christmas Day worship. The Rostered Leader's Group has talked about "round robin" Lenten midweek services, where each CSCM Pastor would rotate between CSCM congregations. This is a great idea and presents an additional way to create visibility about CSCM within the member congregations. It will also take some of the Lenten planning burden off individual pastors, as they will plan one one or two Lenten services which they take out to several

congregations. It also further increases the visibility of CSCM in member congregations. The greater the visibility of CSCM in the congregations, the more opportunities we have to build trust and increase awareness about the benefit of membership with CSCM.

Other ideas that have been discussed include an annual cooperative women's retreat, bringing the women from all the congregations together for spiritual renewal. The current Lutheran Volunteer Corps staff person serves as the Volunteer Coordinator. Next year, we have discussed creating a position that would be half volunteer coordination and half member congregation relations. This also would be a good step toward building our capacity and expanding on our annual member congregation programming.

Finally, we have just recently begun to formalize our communications program and a quarterly newsletter is just getting off the ground. CSCM should focus attention and resources on creating strategies for communicating with member congregations. While the newsletter and website are good first steps for CSCM, it is not enough. We must be hitting congregation members with the CSCM message more regularly. In the past, CSCM has actively participated in adult forums on Sunday mornings, but this reaches very few people in our congregations. As CSCM does its one-year evaluation of our progress on the current strategic plan, it may be wise for us to focus our attention on building the capacity of our communications program. Members need to see the benefit of membership in order to become more invested.

Addressing the Resource Challenge

In working strategically to create a more invested constituency, we also can begin to also address the resource challenge. People power, or limited human resource capacity, is a primary challenge facing CSCM. As has been already mentioned, a more invested constituency creates more people resources and helps spread the burden of collaboration among more people who are invested. Invested individuals have a stake in the collaborative and do not want to see it fail. They are, therefore, more willing to work on behalf of the collaborative to assure its success. There are several steps that CSCM can take to help address the resource challenge.

First, CSCM should work to align its strategic goals with those of its member congregations. The La Conexión program is a good example of this. CSCM created a program for the Latino community housed in El Milagro Lutheran Church, the Spanish speaking congregation of the Cluster. While it is not a perfect working relationship, it is a good example of how CSCM has attempted to create a program that compliments the ministry of one of our member congregations. As new initiatives and programs are created in the future, CSCM should evaluate how effectively the initiative will not only meet the vision and goals of CSCM but those of the member congregations also. As we do this, it is important to bring member congregations into the planning and implementation of the program and build strong connections between the ministries of our congregations and the programs of CSCM. When the ministries and programs

are aligned, members of our congregations are less pulled in different or opposing directions.

They are then able to make a more significant impact as the work of their congregation is intertwined in the work of CSCM.

Related to the first suggestion, the second is to create niche ministry centers. El Milagro, for example, has created a niche ministry site for the Latino community. La Conexión is housed at El Milagro. Every weekday English as a second language classes are taught at El Milagro through the CLUES organization. An Spanish speaking Alcoholic Anonymous group meets there also. EL Milagro is a Latino community center for its neighborhood. Through the strong management of their church administrator, El Milagro has also benefited financially through the earned income of renters using their building. Consolidation and merger have not been welcomed ideas for most of the CSCM congregations. One way to remain viable while at the same time exercising good stewardship of our physical properties, is to strategically open each church up to the larger community through creating niche ministry centers. CSCM can support this work through creating programming that will enhance each ministry site, thus allowing each worshipping community to remain viable.

Thirdly, CSCM can address resource scarcity though sharing staff, at all levels, among member congregations. For example, by employing two full-time custodians among all our churches, each congregation would see a payroll savings. Perhaps we could, together, afford

more qualified custodians, pay a more livable wage, and offer benefits. This is something difficult for congregations to do alone. While we have been sharing pastoral staff among several of the congregations, there are more opportunities for this type of sharing. Our member congregations could be more effective if each pastor were able to focus on the work that best uses his/ her strengths. Perhaps one focuses on family ministry, another on ministry to the elderly, and one on church leadership and administration. This would not only create more congregational interdependence, it would surely increase effectiveness. One pastor trying to fill all roles is likely to let some of his/ her work slip-- it simply is not possible to do all the required roles well, but through greater pastoral sharing, it could be possible.

Fourthly, we must redefine our traditional definitions of success. When we become caught up in the numbers of people attending church on Sunday morning or define CSCM's success based on the numbers of new people attending our member congregations, we have missed the point. Our mission is to, "Live our faith in Christ together through service in South Minneapolis." Our success, then, should be measured by the numbers of changed lives as a result of our services, the quality of service we are able to provide our community, and the inter-congregational relationships built, not on Sunday morning worship attendance and offering revenues. While people would argue that the numbers on Sunday morning impact each congregations bottom line, I would argue that we can creatively address those issues with many

of the suggestions I have already outlined. When we begin to see our ministry more broadly, we can see the important role we play in our communities and the unique ministry we provide outside of Sunday mornings. Maybe our congregations will never grow in membership, but that does not diminish their importance in the communities in which they reside. Success needs to be broader for urban congregations with limited resources. When we are overly focused on what is lacking, it is hard to see the wealth we actually have.

Finally, if there are not sufficient monetary resources to support our cooperative endeavors, none of these recommendations will be able to be implemented. CSCM must enhance its fund raising efforts. Our over dependence on grant funding limits and dictates the work we do. Part of our strategic plan is the creation of an earned income venture. The Resource Development Committee should be actively seeking out these opportunities. Grant funds, funds from individual donors, and ministry partnerships with suburban congregations are also important revenue streams, but an earned income stream, if properly managed, may be a more reliable and stable source of income for CSCM.

Addressing the Vision Challenge

Many of the vision issues with which we started as an organization have been resolving with the strategic plan. However, CSCM has not communicated a vision with which congregation members have been able to identify. As part of CSCM's communications strategy,

leaders should consider how to present CSCM to our constituents in a way that connects them with the mission of the organization. Many members would not even know that CSCM has a mission and most do not know our mission statement. The leaderships has discussed a rolling strategic planning process where each year we add to and modify our strategic goals. Perhaps there is a way we can involve all constituents more actively in our organizational planning process on an annual basis. The addition of a town hall style meeting, like that David Raymond uses, into our regular planning process will engage our constituents, make them feel as though their ideas and opinions are valued, and in turn create a more invested constituency that identifies with a clear vision that they helped to create.

Conclusion

With all of the challenges facing religious congregations today, churches must innovate in order to sustain their futures. While collaborating has its challenges, it also has many benefits. The ministry potential that is unlocked through collaboration can revitalize struggling congregations and empower them to more effectively serve their diverse communities. One survey respondent got it right, “CSCM has a promising future.” The experts interviewed for this project and the literature consulted reveal many insightful recommendations for CSCM to consider, many of which may further help sustain our future, help us more effectively serve our community, and allow us to continue working well together.

Appendix A

CSCM Collaboration Survey Questions & Responses

Survey Information:

- 14 out of 40 surveys were returned (35% response rate)

- Individuals surveyed represented:
 - CSCM congregation members/ leader
 - Pastors/ Church Staff
 - Board members
 - CSCM staff

Note: number in “()” next to each bulleted response below = number of people giving this response

Question #1: In your opinion, what is the greatest benefit of collaborating as a part of City South Cluster Ministries (CSCM)?

- Sharing Resources-- including: leadership, ideas, facilities, and responsibilities (6)
- Increased ministry/ program capacity (5)
- Accomplishing things impossible to do alone (4)
- Avoiding duplication of programs in our community (2)
- Growth (2)
- Expanding network/ sphere of influence (2)
- Building Christian Community (2)
- Increasing the ELCA presence in the community (1)

Question #2: In your opinion, what is the greatest barrier or challenge to collaborating as a part of City South Cluster Ministries?

- Investment, ownership, and commitment from congregation members (6)
- Lacking time, energy, coordination needed to be effective (3)
- Turf-issues/ fear of sharing resources (2)
- Misunderstanding of the Cluster's purpose (1)
- Difficult to know how to plug-in (specifically for newcomers) (1)
- Collaboration seems to be the goal, rather than a tool for accomplishing other things (1)

Question #3: In your opinion, what would most enhance or improve CSCM's collaboration?

- More opportunities to build church-to-church relationships (4)
 - ... in order to increase ownership, participation, and involvement (4)
- Greater communication and personalization of the Cluster message/ broader recognition (6)

Question #4: What has been most rewarding about your involvement in CSCM?

- Building new relationships/ helping and supporting one another (7)
- Seeing growth and accomplishment over the years (4)
- Response of the community to our programs (2)
- Personal involvement in specific CSCM programs such as La Conexión or the Depression Awareness forums (2)

Question #5: What has been most disappointing about your involvement in CSCM?

- That more people are not involved/ volunteer/ support the Cluster (4)
- The slow pace of implementation/ lack of progress/ patience needed (3)
- That I personally am not able to do more (2)
- That there isn't more/ better communication (1)
- That there isn't more outreach being done (1)
- That we are not recognized by the Minneapolis Area Synod of the ELCA (1)
- That I have felt excluded (1)

Question #6: If you are comfortable, will you please share your affiliation with CSCM?

- Bethel Lutheran Church (5)
- Our Redeemer Lutheran Church (3)
- Minnehaha Communion Lutheran Church (2)
- Epiphany Lutheran Church (0)
- El Milagro Lutheran Church (0)
- Board Member (4)
- Pastor/ Staff (3)
- CSCM Staff (0)
- No Response (2)

Question #7: Are there additional comments you would like to make about collaboration at CSCM?

- CSCM is a good model/ illustration for urban social ministry (2)
- CSCM is the necessary change for urban churches (1)
- CSCM has a promising future (1)
- Can we be the bridge builder between our faith and our diverse communities? (1)
- There is a need to expand membership. I hope CSCM can expand its circle in the next 12 months (1)

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