

THE WESTSIDE CHURCH CONSULTATION

A MINISTRY OF THE LOS ANGELES INTERNATIONAL CHURCH OF CHRIST

CONCLUDING SUMMARY & REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

One of the earliest disasters in airline history was foreshadowed in a 1948 novel, *No Highway*, which featured a defectively designed airplane, the Reindeer. The cause of a crash was metal fatigue in the fuselage between the cockpit and the wing section, which was identified by an engineer, the story's protagonist, who had an uphill battle with his superiors.

The real life story involved the Comet, the world's first jetliner, which entered service in 1952 but began mysteriously dropping out of the sky in 1954. The cause was blamed on pilot error due to the British builder's initial blind spots. But engineers from de Havilland soon developed a stress test, which detected a cause similar to the case of the Reindeer, from the book of fiction—metal fatigue. Designers hadn't factored in the role of constant pressurizing.

As a result of fresh eyes of earnest engineers, current models of the Comet were enhanced, and subsequent models were made more robust. Additionally, **every jet manufacturer benefitted from the assessment**. The redeveloped Comet successfully served in the military until 2010, but the American aircraft builders took the lead in making flight safe for millions of passengers, thanks to data gleaned from the flagship of jetliner history.

Transparent reporting and diligent retooling saved lives. The safety of every large jet is indebted to the lessons of de Havilland's Comet. Notice that the industry never stopped making planes because of an early industry failure related to weak design. Companies learned to improve plane designs, reporting their findings, which resulted in all jetliners becoming more resilient. And to this day, flying is safer than driving.

*The leadership in the Los Angeles International Church of Christ invited Tricia and I to help with a crisis in one of their oldest and flagship ministries. In all, we spent nearly six months in Los Angeles. The experience was transformative and illuminating. We believe that that **nearly every larger, old, and cross-cultural congregation can benefit from the assessment**. The LAICC and the Westside has charitably allowed a web version of our sixty plus page reports to be available to others, which contains recommendations that may benefit churches susceptible to similar dynamics (which are highlighted in yellow in the report).*

Stephen F. Staten, Conflict Specialist

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PART I PROLOGUE

*PREPARED BY STEVE STATEN
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This report is prepared for the Westside Church of the Coastal LA Region of the Los Angeles International Church of Christ (LAICC), with the understanding that transparency regarding “lessons learned” will help members in the other ministries.

This report will aid the LAICC in understanding itself, owning its virtues and regrets, against the ever-changing and sensational religious scene of the greater metropolitan Los Angeles region. Of course, more attention is given to the Coastal LA Region and the Westside but the LA family shares a history of people and events. Hopefully the LAICC will leverage the insights gained from the diagnostics of the Concluding Summary and Report for broader gains.

There will be three documents in total: Part I—Prologue, Part II—Assessments, and Part III—Resolutions and Transformative Measures.

PART I—PROLOGUE

The purpose of the Prologue is to capture the larger historical backdrop of the Westside Church, as well as the original vision and mission of the congregation. Due to the fact that there are only small snapshots available of both the Los Angeles congregation and the Westside, important historical developments such as victories and struggles are described in these pages in order that they are accurately recalled.

Historical Los Angeles

Spanish explorers discovered the tip of what is now Baja California in 1533, and named it "California" after a mythical island in a popular Spanish novel. For over one hundred years popular maps portrayed both Baja, which belonged to New Spain (colonial Mexico), and Upper California as an island.

In 1542 Captain Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo and his crew visited the region now called Los Angeles, and met a people who spoke the Tongva language. By 1770 these people numbered about 5,000, covering a range of 4,000 square miles corresponding to the Los Angeles County basin. This tribe, whose name has been lost, was closely associated with another group of natives to the north, the Fernandeños. After the Gabriel Mission was built in 1771, both groups were collectively called the Gabrielinos.

In May 1768, the Spanish planned an expedition to settle Upper California. They reached the site of present-day San Diego on June 29, 1769, and the present-day sites of Los Angeles and Santa Monica in early August. Beginning in 1769, a Franciscan friar and his successors established over twenty like-minded missions in California in just over five decades. Their approach to missions was part Christian and part political, resulting in military outposts that were also religious settlements. Thus, the version of Christianity that natives and settlers first encountered was filtered through Spanish “Catholic” Christians, in which there was no meaningful separation between church and state.

At the same time, the legendary British captain James Cook mapped the west coast on his final voyage in 1778. Although Cook died near the end of this expedition, his reported findings of the Asia Pacific and the west coast would play a significant part in stirring British and wider European interest in this part of the “new” world.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Spanish influence was dominant in Baja and Upper California, extending from near San Diego to north of San Francisco through missions that ran along the coast. Property within 25 miles of each coastal mission belonged to those settlements, and Native Americans lived relatively peaceably outside the perimeter. During this era, intra-tribal skirmishes among the natives were more frequent than conflicts between Mexican and Spanish settlers.

The Los Angeles basin was formally established as a community under a Spanish governor in 1781, and then became part of Mexico in 1821 following the Mexican War of Independence. The subsequent Mexican-American War (1846 – 1848) and extensive negotiations, land purchases and a treaty, moved the border of Mexico to the Rio Grande, making LA part of the United States. Two years later it became a major municipality in the state of California.

Los Angeles would soon be drawing people from all over the world. The period between 1848 and 1920 led to exponential growth due to the gold rush in 1849, completion of the cross-country railroad in 1876, discovery of oil in 1892, and movie productions. With the annexation of Hollywood in 1910, the area of Los Angeles contained eighty percent of the world's movie productions, and was home to at least 10 movie companies. The next one hundred years were spectacular in the realm of developments, migration, industry and entertainment.

The population growth in the Los Angeles region over the last century was not accompanied by a corresponding need for conscience or consistent moral compass. This is illustrated vividly by the fact that while the LA region is home to Disney, it is also home to the nation's porn industry. LA is also associated with notable racial flashpoints—the Zoot Suit riots in 1943, the “five days of outrage” associated with the Rodney King debacle in 1992, the OJ trial, and the LAPD's Ramparts scandal (false arrests, perjured testimony and framing of innocent people) from 1997 and 2001. LA's moral dearth and failures related to race and law enforcement reveal its need for spiritual answers.

It is not possible to precisely describe the greater area of “Los Angeles” due to its many diverse segments. The city of Los Angeles has a population of 4 million within 470 square miles. The county of Los Angeles contains 89 incorporated cities, as well as some unincorporated areas, within 4,000 square miles with a population of nearly 10 million. And the greater metropolitan area of Los Angeles includes Riverside County, Ventura County, San Bernardino County and Orange County, and numbers around 18 million people in an area that covers 34,000 square miles.¹

Los Angeles and its Spiritual Paths

The city of Los Angeles is home to traditional, radical and contemporary churches, as well as unorthodox faiths. It is impossible to find such a wide array of “way out there” trademarks of spirituality headquartered anywhere else in the United States. The Los Angeles mission field has long maintained unique fringes as far as spirituality is concerned, however the vast majority of residents are Catholic, following the Spanish Missions' roots and Mexican migrations.

In 1906 Pentecostalism achieved worldwide attention through the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles, led by African-American preacher William Joseph Seymour. LA is considered one of the birthplaces of this movement, which began among a largely black crowd. In time there were blacks and whites worshipping together under a black pastor, a phenomenon that did not occur in traditional churches.

In 1919, the highly theatrical Canadian, Aimee Semple McPherson, held a series of meetings in LA that held people spellbound. In 1923, she dedicated the Angelus Temple, which became America's first megachurch, and the Pentecostal denomination called the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel was born. The next four Foursquare churches were rapidly planted in the Los Angeles Region. Today the movement has 237,000 people attending worship in 1800 congregations throughout the world.

¹ http://www.fta.dot.gov/documents/LosAngeles_DemographicProfile3.doc

During the 1940s a wealthy religious group that came to be known as the Worldwide Church of God (WCC), founded under “apostle” Herbert Armstrong, established its headquarters in Pasadena. This fundamentalist group had roots in Seventh-Day Adventism, which was very focused on the end times. The WCC strove to maintain Jewish laws including Old Testament festivals, denied the deity of Christ, and was preoccupied with world politics. It largely fell apart following Armstrong’s death in 1986.

The modern Transcendental Deep Meditation (TDM or TM) movement originated in India in 1955 with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, and in 1959 he brought his practice to Los Angeles, where he founded the Spiritual Regeneration Movement and his fame spread. He wooed celebrities and became the spiritual advisor to the Beatles and Merv Griffin, who helped televise the Maharishi’s philosophy of meditation. As a result, the guru’s fame skyrocketed throughout the world. By 1975 there was a full-blown TM craze that reached 130 countries. Today, stars such as Oprah, Ellen DeGeneres, Clint Eastwood, Russell Brand and David Lynch practice TM.

During the 1960s Tony and Susan Alamo began the Alamo Christian Foundation – a controversial and frequently criticized church – in the streets of Los Angeles. In 2009 Alamo was convicted of rape, other sexual assaults, and breaking tax laws, and was sentenced to 175 years in prison. However, tracts can still be found in the area, indicating that followers of this group are still active.

Besides these examples, it seems worth mentioning that the largest base of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) outside of Utah is in Los Angeles, and the Church of Scientology International (CSI), which is not a Christian denomination, but appears to have appropriated the term “church” for tax purposes, has its headquarters in Los Angeles. There are also a notable number of well-known megachurches in and near Santa Ana: Harvest Orange County (Greg Laurie), Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa (Chuck Smith), and Saddleback Church in Lake Forest (Rick Warren).

The Churches of Christ are much stronger in their influence in the Southeast and Texas than they are California, much less Los Angeles. Nonetheless, George Pepperdine, the founder of Western Auto Supply Company, established Pepperdine University in 1937. Its beautiful 830-acre ocean view campus in Malibu is affiliated with the Churches of Christ and the school is known for “academic excellence in the context of Christian values.” The yearly lectureships are the largest in the Churches of Christ. Malibu is in the area served by the Westside Church. One of the former Westside evangelists, Tony Kettering, built important bridges at Pepperdine, along with nearby evangelist Robert Carrillo, a graduate of Pepperdine’s Masters in Divinity program.

The large churches near the city of Los Angeles tend to represent and appeal to a primary, not diverse, ethnic group. Among a 2009 census of the fastest growing and largest multi-ethnic churches in America, not a single congregation is mentioned anywhere within the City of Los Angeles.²

The Los Angeles Church of Christ History: A West LA Focus

The LA church originated from a dream to reach the entire metropolitan Los Angeles area, which is one of the most ethnically diverse places in the world. The towns, neighborhoods and territories possess a wide variety of distinct characteristics and reputations.

The intention of the new church planting, which was originally called “The Los Angeles Church of Christ”, was to be a congregation of disciples that were “willing to go anywhere, do anything and give up

² <http://unityinchristmagazine.com/misc/side-bars/multi-ethnic-churches-listed-in-outreach’s-2009-top-100-fastest-growing-and-largest-churches/>

everything for Jesus.” Its main beliefs were found in the main sermons in the book of Acts (chps. 2, 10, 13), and the creedal statements of the apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 15:1-7, Ephesians 4:4-6), and its chief practices continue to be communion, baptism and discipling.

In 1989 the Boston Church of Christ, along with the San Diego and San Francisco Churches sent a 50-member team led by Tom and Kelly Brown to Los Angeles to work out of three locations—the Central Zone ministry near Pasadena, and the South Zone in South Central Los Angeles and the West Zone centered in Santa Monica. Six months into the planting Marty and Chris Fuqua began leading the UCLA campus ministry³ in West Zone, which was later called then West LA Sector, and eventually the West Region. The West became a significant place in the history of both the Los Angeles congregation and the entire International Churches of Christ movement.

When Kip McKean arrived in early 1990, the congregation was just over 150 members. That same year a small congregation of Christians from Antelope Valley joined the congregation. Soon, talented students, singles and young marrieds, as well as those already in leadership, were recruited to LA from other congregations—first from San Diego, then from Chicago and many other churches. Although there were many “move ins” (especially leaders) who helped, the church still grew primarily by an amazing number of baptisms. This distinct method of building the LA Church contributed to its meteoric rise - in 1994 there was a church meeting with 3,000 in attendance, and by 1998 that number had risen to 17,000. This trajectory followed a highly orchestrated series of events, and West LA was ground zero. If there had been a central location of the Los Angeles church it would have been the West LA region. Lead evangelist Kip McKean, and CFO Keith Rose and many other significant leadership personalities lived on the Westside. Additionally, the Westside’s UCLA campus ministry was a legendary and important part of the LA Church. Many of the early campus baptisms occurred in the backyard of the home of Keith and Maryann Rose.

A LA Story bulletin from 1997 made a statement about the former UCLA leaders, Marty and Chris Fuqua: “Working with a handful of talented members of the original mission team, they were blessed by God with incredible growth from 10 disciples to 120 disciples in just 4 years.”⁴ By later 1993 the Fuqua’s role had expanded and Reese and Mary Kay Neyland were leading the West Region (1993-1995).

Todd and Tanya Spath carried the campus work after the Fuquas, leading UCLA on two separate occasions, which continued to grow. The UCLA campus led to the conversions of many missionaries and evangelists: Rafael Lua received a BA in History from UCLA. He and his wife, Griselda lead the Lifeway Church, a region of the LA church. Dat Do, a UCLA grad, and his wife Natalie were missionaries to Southeast Asia and church leaders in Vietnam, and are pillar members in the Westside. Lisa Mortimer Holman was the first graduate student converted at UCLA who serves on the board of Disciples Today. Steve Hiddleston was converted at UCLA and married Keri Baird, Al and Gloria’s youngest daughter, and they now serve in ministry in Phoenix. Other UCLA grads include Brian Gold, the long time ICOC Benefits administrator, former UCLA alum Jennifer Crowder Becknell serves in the west suburban ministry in Chicago Church of Christ, along with her husband James.

While the Boston Church of Christ was spreading the gospel throughout the world, the LA church was consolidating its resources and leadership in one place. Whereas the Boston Church planted over 50 churches in its first twenty years, the LA Church planted fewer than ten in its first twenty years. There was a clear reason for this distinct approach—to develop legitimacy through a large presence in a major metropolitan city — but this course never had broad buy-in among leaders of the other churches. This

³ The UCLA was piloted a few months earlier under Roger Farinha and Sue (McGuirk) Shoff.

⁴ Author unknown, UCLA: A Model Ministry, LA Story (Contact), August/September 1997, 6.

was due partly to the inability to replicate the model in other locations, and partly because it continually drew strength and resources from the other churches.

Even though the LA church did not send many churches as the Boston congregation did, one of the church plantings was historically significant to world missions—the planting of the Moscow church in July of 1991. The McKeanes initially led the 17-member team, to be followed by team members, Andy and Tammy Fleming. Russian evangelist, Misha Rakovshik, summarizes the sensational story,

“The coup of August 1991 drove many denominational missionaries from the country in fear of persecution. It was a very sobering time for all of us. We recounted the cost of staying with our new brothers and sisters. God blessed the decision by drawing us even closer together ... For the original team, Andy [Fleming] and his wife Tammy were a constant source of friendship and encouragement. From how to have a quiet time, share our faith, and study the Bible with others to how to get along and eat healthy food in our singles' apartments, they taught us everything by example. I believe it was through their vision and faith that 850 disciples were baptized in the first year of the church in Moscow.”⁵

The former Soviet Union was dismantled into 15 different countries, which opened the door for over 32 churches to be planted across eight time zones. The leaders of the work, the Flemings, would eventually return to North America and land in West LA in 1999. The Los Angeles congregation has been significantly involved with funding and discipling Central America and other regions in the world. There were eight church plantings out of Los Angeles that involved significant assistance from sister churches: Moscow (1991), Vietnam (1994), Turkey (1995), Jerusalem (1996), Lebanon (1995), Cyprus (1997), Bahrain (1998) and United Arab Emirates (1998).

The nineties were concentrated with the building of satellites (called regions) much as other megachurches build campuses. The Los Angeles Church of Christ came to comprise distinct, self-organized ministries—the West Region, Ventura, South, South Central, North, AMS, East, Inland Empire, Central, and Orange County. This territory appears connected largely due to the natural properties of coasts, hills and forests. This explains why the greater Los Angeles area came to be seen as both “one” and “ten”—one church, as well as ten churches. Since seasoned ministers were recruited and or trained to lead these ministries, they essentially functioned as self-sufficient units. For most of the decade, the evangelists made the regional decisions, while a handful of elders were over-burdened trying to solve problems. The number of elders was insufficient to meet the spiritual needs, as well as the increasing number of other challenges within the church.

The height of the West Region was probably in 2002, the year before the crisis, which are two ministries today—the Westside Sector and the former Coastal Sector now called the South Bay Sector. That year Al and Gloria Baird, the senior elder couple in the movement, moved into the region, which benefitted the increasing number of families. At that time the West was being led by Tom and Kelly Brown who had been on a decade long break from the ministry until the spring of 2001 when they returned to the same ministry where, twelve years earlier, they had planted the LA Church. A LA Story article that appeared one year later stated,

“Currently, they [Tom and Kelly] lead the West Region of the Los Angeles Church of Christ, a group numbering about 800 disciples that include the famous LA neighborhoods of Malibu, Manhattan Beach, Beverly Hills, Santa Monica and Century City. They both want the Kingdom to know their entire story as a vivid illustration of God's amazing grace and power.”⁶

⁵ Misha Rakovshik, From Dream to Reality, LA Story, November 2001, 3.

⁶ Roger Lamb, Amazing Grace, LA Story (Staying Alive, May 2002).

The West Region and its West LA Sector had seen turnover of leadership, many experiments, and great growth. The longest period over the last two decades that the West Region was led by a couple was with Gregg and Cathy Marutzky (1996 to 2001), Tom and Kelly Brown (2001-2002) and Anthony and Saun Galang (most of 2005-2009). The longest period in which the West LA (Westside) was led by a couple was Andy and Tammy Fleming (2002-2007) and the Galangs (most of 2005-2012). There were many other staff couples for the family, campus, singles, teen and Latin ministries. In early 2000s, there were many changes related to the number of “cooks in the kitchen”. The ministry had been under the influence of the Fuquas, which implied strong connections to missions in Russia. While Marutzky was leading the Region it was being transformed into a mission center for the Middle East. Some of the leaders associated with Marty Fuqua and the northern Federation World Sector went to evangelize in areas like the Midwest, Texas and the Great Plains. The Marutzkys went to Dallas, Tony and Aimee Kettering to Kansas City, and Todd and Tonya Spath to Austin.

During the nineties, McKean made virtually all decisions at the congregational level. It naturally followed that the concept of a leader being “God’s man” or “the anointed” would ripple through the rest of the church, where the local evangelist made decisions. The phrases “top down” leadership and “directive style” owe themselves to this era, not just in LA but also throughout many of the International Church of Christ congregations. Some of the LA evangelists were known to shepherd their people very well, but the art of collaboration among equal partners was, for the most part, something that the LA church and the overall movement began to develop following the McKean years.

By 1999 there was a sense that the movement couldn’t sustain its growth, in addition to other concerns. The LA elders and evangelists were concerned with Kip McKean’s family issues and his pastoral influence. When the Flemings moved from the mission field to Mar Vista that year to take on the role of Administrator for the churches, Andy was troubled by what had become normalized under McKean’s management of financial decisions. There were multiple concerns preceding Kip’s 2001 sabbatical.

The widely reported crisis of 2003 was associated with dramatic developments surrounding Kip McKean’s resignation in late 2002, a lengthy and emotionally charged open letter from Henry Kriete, and subsequent revelations that came to light regarding the way McKean led his inner circle. At the core was a flawed view of authority and issues of control, as well as a tiered accountability culture that left large numbers of people disheartened. Other issues such as the decision-making practices in the ICOC, especially around finances, were symptoms of a systemic problem related to the core issues. Even to this day members the ICOC feel differently about what “first” went wrong, based on personal experiences, but not to the point of disunity.

Compared to many places around the U.S., the crisis in LA was more tempered by open apologies, repentance, and the development of member run RFAC (Regional Financial Advisory Committee) teams. But there were more challenges for the shepherds of the church. The widely disseminated LAICC membership count of over 10,000 was considered “soft” and “inaccurate” due to a variety of reasons including the motivation to not know or be straightforward with actual numbers. Integrity in reporting was an issue in some of the regions. Following the crisis, the LA Church eventually settled to be around 4,800 members in 2007. While some of this adjusted size reflects far north sectors such as Bakersfield and Antelope Valley peaceably becoming their own congregations, most of the loss resulted from the impact of upheaval and a more accurate numbering of the flock. Additionally, one region was lost when the Riverside Sector of the Inland Empire broke away from the LA church in late 2005. The membership of the LAICC has since increased to over 6,000.

The West Region was, in some ways, buffered against the injurious aspects of the crisis of 2003, although the numerical loss of actual members corresponded with the rest of the LA church. Tom Brown tended to

lead more collaboratively, and when he and Kelly left in 2002 to lead Orange County, the Flemings took over the West Region. Andy was still involved with mentoring the churches and their leaders in both the Middle East and the former Soviet Union. He tended to lead with a more collaborative approach. Also, due to his strong stand on issues that led to Kip McKean's removal, West Region members inherently trusted him.

The LA church found its bearings again under the leadership of Bruce Williams, who emerged as the congregational evangelist. Following discussions in 2003 and 2004 it was decided that the LA Church would stay together. It was Bruce's leadership that was instrumental in keeping the Los Angeles regions together



as one congregation of many regions. At the same time he was also involved in the development of the ICOC Cooperation Agreement and facilitating cooperation in the Southwest ICOC churches. Today the LAICC is both “one” and “eight”—one church, as well as eight churches. Some of the regions changed their names—AMS to Turning Point, East to Lighthouse, and Central to Lifeway.

Los Angeles International Church of Christ Regions (2014)

Since about 2007 the eldership has significantly evolved, especially following the upheaval that occurred in the Westside beginning fifteen months ago. The elders have functioned more cohesively and welcome feedback. This demonstrating of self-reflection is not without effect. Since last year they have been more aggressive about resolving conflicts, beginning with those who hold crucial roles within the church.

Along the way there were questions regarding the role of the congregational evangelist. From the outside it appeared that there was never unanimity (or even suitable internal harmony) regarding the answer. Meanwhile, there were more changes. As the number of elders increased over the following years there were a variety of efforts made to define core leadership roles within the regions. A lengthy restructuring process became effective during the summer of 2012, resulting in four large bodies called GEO regions consisting of two preexisting adjacent regions each. The core LAICC leadership group included one elder and one evangelist from each GEO Region.

The Presenting Story of the Westside Conflict

Both structural changes and other additional developments played a key role in the Westside crisis that erupted in early 2013. When Anthony and Saun Galang moved to the West at the beginning of 2005 to serve the West Region, they were coming from the Inland Empire (where the Riverside sector had broken away from the LAICC), and Anthony was quite open about his need to recover from that ordeal when he took on the challenge of leading the West Region.

In 2009 a merger was proposed for the South (which included cities like Long Beach, Palos Verdes, Torrance and San Pedro) and the West Region (Manhattan Beach, Santa Monica, Culver City, Malibu), resulting on the creation of the new Coastal LA (CLA) region. There were now three geographical sectors—Greater Long Beach, South Bay and Westside sectors and eventually two Spanish Speaking Ministries. The merger resulted in the LAICC's largest region, which was equivalent to the country's 6th or 7th biggest ICOC

congregation and it was difficult to find available ministry skills and experience to lead it. Bruce Williams, the congregational evangelist, led CLA for the first sixteen months.

Many in the Westside Sector had already felt normal “aging” struggles, but now it had a deep sense of loss from less self-determination, even though it was not a region all by itself before the merger. At that time it included about half of what is now called South Bay when the West Region numbered around 500. The 2010 appointment of CLA region leader Marco Pellizzeri became an unsettling factor for some of the staff in the CLA and others, due to personal challenges that he was facing. The harmonized summary of what we heard was: our once celebrated ministry of the LAICC felt like a “step” sector of a very large region along a long coast with a region leader that they didn’t know who lived very far away. Later on, in 2012, the GEO region change furthered the Westside’s sense of loss of self-determination. In all these decisions there continued to be questions regarding how much of a voice the people in the Westside would have in their future.

In August of 2012, the Galangs took a position leading the Oahu Church of Christ. Their successor ministry couple in the West was cardiologist Moe Bishara and his wife Amany, well-known former missionaries in the Middle East. Nearly six months later Moe resigned. His explanation for this decision was presented during a Wednesday night meeting in early March, standing before the Westside sector. The meeting became a flashpoint, as he highlighted many of the developments associated with the Westside’s current plight. Members reported feeling surprised by the manner of the evening, confused, especially as conversations following the meeting revealed a deep sense of polarization. And so a struggle ensued between those who dissented over the 2009-2013 plight of the Westside, and the two primary ecclesiastical leaders of the LAICC. Clearly there was not a well-stated process in place for dealing with such a moment.

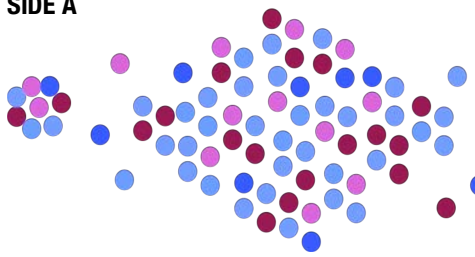
The first attempt at resolving and healing the issues in the Westside was initiated within two weeks, and involved the creation of an Advisory Group with nominated representatives from the congregation. Some of the critical forward thinking developments originated with this group: the Vision group commissioned for hiring the next minister, an Organizational Health Assessment which was a survey of former and current ministers of the CLA Region, and appeals for mediation. In all there was about ten meetings.

Meanwhile, Marco Pellizzeri had already stepped down from leading the Coastal LA region on March 1 and Bruce Williams began serving as interim region evangelist. He and Robin were asked to move to Westchester by the elders. And this also happened when the Williams’ son-in-law and daughter, Stuart and Ashley Mains, happened to be moving in to the Westside to serve in the campus ministry—a decision made months before by other CLA leaders, not by Bruce and Robin.

The reason that Bruce and Robin moved was to lead Coastal LA from the Westside and help with the crisis. Assuming these measures would be well received Bruce would be welcomed to lead the Westside until a permanent leader could be found. However, communication during these crucial March and April months were poor, and there was significant confusion and feelings about his arrival. Bruce never led a meeting of any sort so Al Baird was the de facto leader in the absence of a designated Westside leader. The interpretation of these developments varied significantly.

In an attempt to navigate a variety of issues on the table with the Westside Family Ministry, there was a Midweek meeting held on May 1 where Al Baird and Bruce Williams spoke and answered questions. The main talking points during this era were for the ministry to have its own local budget, become a Region again, have the ability to choose which other ministries to be tied into for modeling and discipling, and improve internal integration between the Family Ministry and the Singles, Campus and Teens. Only some of these topics were mentioned. Other issues were acknowledged, apologized for and given clarity. Overall, the dissenting voices felt that little progress was being made but there were many members who did not feel represented by some of

SIDE A



SIDE B

the proposed solutions from both directions—and there appeared to be two forming sides with a large group in the middle. (The colors on the diagram on the previous page are used to indicate that virtually every member was once close to others who were on each side as well as in the middle).

Four important developments occurred in June and July. First, there was an urgent appeal from those who dissented with the leadership to get outside help. This appeal was initially rejected but ultimately agreed upon, and two LA elders became involved—John Mannel and Marty Fuqua. This measure brought some comfort and direction. Second, a Vision group was assembled to oversee the hiring of the next Westside minister. Over thirty names were collected, all were called, and only two were interviewed. Most candidates removed themselves or were vetted and removed from consideration. This process was reported as difficult for everyone involved.

Third, there was an increase of emails and letters sent to various parties, some of which were anonymous, including one that used people's names without their agreement. This revealed the beginning of dissent-based groups around principle parties. And fourth, an Organizational Health Assessment was initiated that interviewed those who had served in the CLA Region. This was executed in a two-step survey of both the former and present staff. The findings with previous staff regarding the culture and recent history of the CLA leadership were concerning. This too was controversial for various reasons. Sides had formed and, apparently, most of the members were not happy with being pulled in either direction.

Meanwhile, some members were leaving the Westside to a nearby region, Turning Point, for variously expressed reasons—to avoid an ugly power struggle, to better manage their stress, to follow their spouses and so on. The option of worship in the Turning Point ministry was initially described as provisional—until a formal process with someone from the outside could get under way and resolve the issues. Approximately two-dozen people, mostly leaders, would make that move by the end of the year. During the summer, while there was consternation about how the Westside Family ministry leader would be chosen, elder Mark Shump reported that, “about a hundred people were left without a small group leader”, which was due to the significant loss of leaders who left for Turning Point Church.

That was the “presenting story” that we (Tricia and I) obtained between March and September. We had Steve and Jacqueline Morici in most of those appointments. With support from all sides a new approach was being developed.

A New Approach

It is important to back up. Two weeks after the flashpoint midweek, I (Steve Staten) happened to be in Los Angeles. One of the elders, Al Baird, initiated with me and asked me to be in communication with Moe Bishara. The Bairds and the Bisharas had a longstanding relationship going back to the 1980s in Boston. I discovered that both Moe and Al were coming from the same narrative and reported similar dynamics from the other sides. Later, in July I was in Los Angeles and was able to meet with board member and Westsider John Thorne and Moe, who had already left for Turning point, and also talk to Al Baird. The situation had deteriorated which meant that the ideal window was closing for outside mediation and moderation. And there was also the question of availability.

On the 8th of August I was contacted by John Mannel and was formally asked to consider getting involved. My wife and I were not able to leave our post in Chicago until January but we could propose some preliminary steps to the Coastal LA elders and Westside. Our goals would be to obtain a narrative that

factored in a broad number of perspectives, make an assessment, offer mediation and make recommendations for healing and transformation.

During five days in September and two weeks in December, we convened with about fourteen Westside couples from the Family Ministry, including some who had already left to worship in the Turning Point ministry. They reflected a wide range of perspectives corresponding to most of the Westside Family ministry, where the breakdown occurred. In mid-December we sent out a Letter of Intent and Engagement to all present/former Westside sector members. Our goal was to listen, learn, offer assistance, and engage everyone towards full participation. We explained our biblically based craft of Peacemaking and Conflict resolution, and assured the parties that we were committed to obtaining a solid narrative and function as consultants with impartiality. We offered to assist with mediation, where needed, that blended both mercy and justice for everyone.

We expected to work with conflicted parties in and outside of the Westside, beginning in January of 2014. The letter of Intent and Engagement contained a brief description of our Discovery, Mediation/Alignment and Transformative phases, in addition to a case study from our previous work. Once we arrived we planned to teach the entire Westside, as well as use a modified form with some of the former members that we convened with. By the time we arrived in early January the situation had changed.

It was obvious that many of the parties were reluctant or slow to meet or talk about reconciliation and that some were indeed spooked. It took weeks to determine that this was the case and that there were behavioral dynamics that were not anticipated. And we spent more time than was originally planned to move from the presenting story to the actual story, which involved important nuances where no single person in the conflict had all the pieces.

This concludes the Prologue. The Summary and Report will be released in two more parts containing each of the following pieces: Part II—Assessment: Crucial events affecting the Westside, critical concerns and yet-to-be resolved matters. A simplified synopsis of what went wrong will be included where identities and characterizations will be intentionally vague, whenever possible. This part will contain a “lessons learned” section. Part III—Resolution and Transformative Measures: Long-term, intermediate and urgent recommendations to restore functionality and health to the Westside ministry.

THE WESTSIDE CHURCH CONSULTATION

A MINISTRY OF THE LOS ANGELES INTERNATIONAL CHURCH OF CHRIST

CONCLUDING SUMMARY & REPORT

JUNE 30, 2014

PART II ASSESSMENTS

*PREPARED BY STEVE STATEN
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MARK & CATHERINE SHUMP*

PART II—ASSESSMENTS

The Westside church of the LA International Church of Christ is to be commended for embracing a third-party process for assessment. The assessment portion of this report looks at “what was,” but many of the matters have transformed or are in the midst of transformation. The objectives of the January-through-March endeavor were to obtain the story, identify root causes, achieve crucial resolutions, wherever possible, and transform past pains into future gains.

A good assessment avoids branding an individual or a group with judgments on their character, affixing motives behind behaviors, and unnecessarily exposing one’s privacy. It is better, at times, to be vague, to leave room for the reader’s own interpretation on some aspects of the conflicts, and stay detached about developments and interpersonal interactions that we did not witness. The use of suitable questions throughout a broad number of interviews helps ensure that we obtain the closest approximation to the real story without becoming sidetracked by hearsay and perspectives saturated by distress.

In order that the consultants and the congregants maintain a grasp of the greater issues, we ask readers with strong current sense of fault, blame and innocence to read a Preamble Story of Conflict in the Appendix. It probes momentous developments from 1 Kings 1-2 that will remind us not to broad-brush individuals or ourselves by a few failures (or a few successes). Nor would it be wise to overlook important dynamics, which aren’t immediately apparent, that preceded and shaped the events. By looking at underlying dynamics we are able to develop a long view of building a healthy and growing church family, which is a goal of the Westside ministry of the Los Angeles International Church of Christ.

Conventions of Disclosure

The story of 1 Kings 1-2 was released after the deaths of the main figures and before the age of the Internet. On the other hand, the main figures from “the Westside story” are still alive and also shouldn’t be sized up by one chapter in their lives. It seems prudent to have a helpful procedure for disclosure that we would want to be honored if we were the principle parties of a conflict. It is worth mentioning that all of them have served God with great commitment in places like Boston, the Southeast US, Chicago/Midwest/Heartland, Denver, the Middle East, the Asian-Pacific, and Southern California.

The following guidelines are followed:

1. The Concluding Summary and Report will stand as the authoritative witness for the Westside and remain subject to updates and amendments by the consultants.
2. If a party has contributed to the problems in a significant way and has not already faced their responsibilities, we will attempt to call them to the truth privately using this assessment.
3. We will identify dynamics and behaviors cautiously without unnecessarily exposing individuals.
4. We will use a wide variety of real names for the broader background story, and occasionally practice restraint by using pseudonyms such as Person 1, Person 2, one of the parties, a principle figure, etc.
5. We will use the term “wellness condition” if a party seemed consistently inhibited (before and/or after the developments) in their ability to function appropriately, remember within reasonable norms, accept responsibility for their actions, acquiesce to sound rules or processes, experience and admit being wrong, or otherwise function satisfactorily.
6. We avoid judgments on topics of employee performance and interpersonal behavioral issues that we, the consultants, did not observe unless we were brought in to arbitrate such issues. The consultants do not take a position on whether or not someone was performing their overall position well, but on how matters were handled.
7. We will propose protocols in Part III—the Recommendations and Transformative Measures so that the same errors are unlikely to reoccur.

SUMMARY

Simplified Assessment

According to most people the Westside was not in a healthy place for most of the decade prior to the disruption, and this plight is not faulted on a single group. But this assessment of the Westside ordeal reveals that “the bulk of the initial responsibility for the Westside predicament in early 2013 occurred because of top-level leadership decisions, problematic feedback processes and unclear measures for bringing forth legitimate grievances against key decision makers.” Following a breakdown between members and the same key figures, the consultants concluded, along with many members, “even with inhibited grievance measures, some of the most basic, reasonable and intuitive steps were missed by “the dissent”. It was a failure of responsible leadership that led to neglecting other options before bringing things before the Westside ministry in a rushed public manner.” And the most significant and pervasive concern at this time, other than more individual needs, is the “stalled maturation of key figures” near the firestorm. The next minister will want to help strengthen those remaining treasured members who have been vital to the Westside’s past achievements (Heb. 6:10-11).

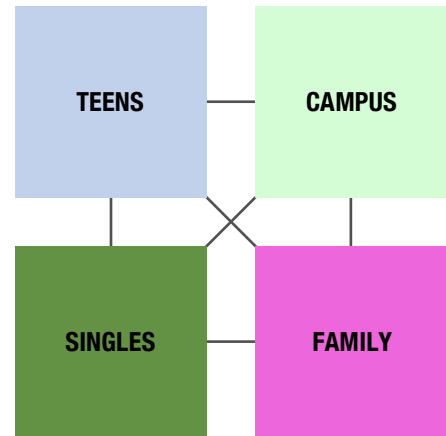
Progress

There is a well functioning Westside Representative Group, formerly called the Ministry Transition Team. There is also well functioning task force called the Family / Singles Partnership Team and a new vision task force called the “God’s Positioning System” (GPS). The Westside has a Provisional Leadership Team of three strong Christians who will guide the rhythm of all of the developments occurring on the Westside, in conjunction with the elders. There are nine positive features of progress in the Westside, described in the Simple Review of Progress at the end of this assessment.

BACKGROUND

The following background leads up to the intense conflict in 2013 that were mostly in the larger Family Ministry of the Westside. The sector belongs to an interconnected system alongside the Campus, Teens and Singles ministries, which means that they felt the impact of the developments.

In order to see the landscape of the Westside challenge, we consider three pieces that can affect a sector a few levels down in a large congregation: the structural development of the LAICC, cross-generational leadership challenges, and the ICOC/LAICC conflict management and appeals processes. And these issues are significant across the larger fellowship.



THE STRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE LAICC: WESTSIDE FOCUS

The decade between early 2003 and 2013 was a story of nearly mythical challenges for the LA church. Their roster probably hovered around a real number of 9,000 and then dipped just below 5,000. The LAICC already felt the crisis that would soon affect nearly four hundred churches with over 100,000 members throughout the world. The leaders were in the midst of structural changes following Kip McKean’s formal removal from his lead pastoral role. And so the evangelists and elders were already managing a congregation in a state of flux when the ICOC crisis that included open letters, blogs, and open forums commenced in February of 2003.

Among the LA elders and evangelists, Bruce Williams possessed the widest support to keep the Los Angeles church as a family of churches. Overall, the evangelists of the ministries conceded to centralized administration and a few other overhead expenses, but they sought more independence. The ministries increasingly functioned like distinct congregations, yet sharing conferences, singles events, yearly LA wide congregational events, administration and human resources.

Bruce Williams was engaged in unity and cooperation on many fronts, including with HOPE worldwide and churches in the Southwest and beyond; but directing the Los Angeles congregation(s) proved to be much more difficult. There were longstanding tensions and conflicts among those in key roles. Some of the members in the LAICC were aware of unresolved conflicts, which were reported as philosophical, related to limited participation in LA events, questions of transparency, or interpersonal matters. Due to an inhibited communication system, the body wouldn’t know when a notorious conflict was actually resolved. The sense of unresolved conflicts played a notable role in diminishing trust.

In May of 2009, the South and West regions were merged in order to form the new Coastal LA Region. An approach called “specialized ministry” was born, which meant that people would be led through their station in life—Family, Singles, Campus, etc. For instance, the Coastal LA singles numbered about 230 and were all joined together to meet centrally on their own for midweek in El Segundo. There was flexibility, where a single could stay within the Family Ministry and participate in Single’s events. On Sundays, its members worship in their respective geographical areas in sectors. The majority of the singles were greatly encouraged by this development because it meant identity, and new opportunities for fellowship and discipling that was lacking in the previous arrangement. However, there was a further disconnect with Family Ministry and Singles as it pertained to outreach, mentoring and other needs. Attempts to develop

bridges achieved meager results and the sense of disconnect was felt in other ministries, indicated in the scheduling of events, the worship experience and other needs.

The merger had been a notable flashpoint for many of the Westside Family Ministry members. Of the approximate sixty people we interviewed, it was brought up by nearly everyone. Even though there was consideration and process, it was regrettably insufficient, conceded Bruce Williams. There was the perception that this served some ministries at the cost of the Westside. The assigned roles of Coastal LA staff seemed illogical to key Westside leaders.

According to the findings of an Organizational Health Assessment, to be discussed later within this document, the overall quality of experience of previous Coastal staff during this era had depreciated. In addition, the structural changes meant that the Westside Family Ministry leaders felt and expressed that an external culture had been imposed—a more top-down approach than they had been accustomed to under previous evangelists.

Meanwhile, the LAICC elders and evangelists were debating the best ways to make decisions through representatives without ending up with a large and unmanageable caucus. There had been previous iterations, but by 2011 it was apparent that a significant decision-making upgrade was needed. The next model would need to determine processes for proposals, vetting and final decision-making that would include the elders, evangelists, the Board of Directors, and the local RFAC. This idea led to the proposal of a matrix that would indicate the proper steps forward, depending on the nature of the decisions.

Another part that was needed for the next decision-making model was determining the size and participants of a core group to represent the entire congregation. But unresolved conflicts needed to be addressed first. In June of 2011, LA elder John Mannel asked for Wyndham Shaw and Douglas Arthur from Boston and myself from Chicago to assist in resolving some matters. We conducted four single session mediations, and did some teaching. We addressed the apparent conflicts with provisional sufficient resolve and apologies, but a few days were not enough time to understand and address the underlying dynamics.

The sense of goodwill improved to the point that the decision-making matrix was more fully developed. One year later a process was formalized in a paper called The Structural Development of the Los Angeles Congregation. If it had been successfully pulled off it could have led to what it was proposed to do—improving the decision-making processes, increasing efficiency, as well as other goals. In July of 2012, the new configuration of the congregation was put forward, resulting in the formation of the four GEO regions—just nine-months before the Westside upheaval.

LIFEWAY (FORMERLY CENTRAL)	ORANGE COUNTY	NORTH	INLAND EMPIRE
METRO LA	COASTAL LA	TURNING POINT	LIGHTHOUSE

There were four GEO regions that were comprised of two regions in pairs and numerous sectors. The range of cultures was not unlike the differences between the New Testament cultures of Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth and

The Four GEO Regions (07/2012 – 02/2014)

Rome. But not all cultures or leadership paradigms that are cherished in one location are fitting for others. And when a restructuring such as a merger or change of leadership occurs, culture is a significant variable, as will be seen in the story that developed in the Westside.

The Coastal LA ministry was joined with the Orange County Region to form a GEO Region. In theory, the formation of the GEO region should not have affected the experience of average members. However, the

decision-making paradigm of the OC was foreign to Westside members, as was the paradigm of the new Coastal LA. The Westside Family Ministry members did not appreciate the more directive approach from people from the other ministries, especially those outside their area. The Singles, Campus and Teen Ministries also wanted representation, and not have decisions determined solely by the Westside Family Ministry. Therefore, the dynamics that led to recurring conflicts in LA were never resolved and so the GEO Region Model was built on fault lines. The largest one being the Westside's preceding self-perception: "Our once celebrated ministry of the LAICC felt like a step sector of a very large region along a long coast with a region leader that they didn't know, who lived very far away." The coming Westside disruption would coincide with the overall fatigue of the LAICC system.

For the purposes of reporting on the Westside ordeal, the GEO region structure introduced two problems for a ministry like the Westside. First, it was perceived that an additional organizational layer brought an infused cultural brand—an older top-down approach. This meant both reduced self-determination and a less-than-welcome style of leadership for many of the leaders. An example was church benevolence. The financial support for legitimate needs was no longer a local matter but something that required more approval hurdles from distant figures.

Second, though it was well known that there were significant dysfunctions at the helm of the church, there were not sufficient measures of appeal—robust mechanisms that everyone has access to for addressing concerns and grievances and resolving these conflicts. These measures would need to take into account a personal grievance against the most prominent roles in the congregation. An undersized eldership may need to seek outside help at times, especially one that numbers around fifteen elders for over 30,000 square miles.

A challenge was that the present leadership paradigm created conflicts that a deficient conflict management and appeals process could not address. One end result was reduced trust within Westside Family Ministry towards some within the GEO leadership, but certainly not all the LAICC elders and evangelists known to the Westside. So when the dramatic events occurred in the Westside they were a direct hit on fault lines that were connected to other LA developments.

CROSS-GENERATIONAL LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

The movement of the ICOC has roots in campus ministry from both Texas and Florida, beginning sometime around 1968. The flagship Boston Church began in 1979 and the largest congregation, the Los Angeles Church of Christ, was planted out of Boston in the summer of 1989. As the congregation and the Westside sector approaches its twenty-five year anniversary in a movement that is just under fifty years of age, the fissures of senior, contemporary and developing paradigms are naturally apparent—just as they are in society.

Senior. Many of the earliest leaders of the ICOC formed their views during the era before cell phones and public access to the Internet, when presidents and CEOs single-handedly addressed criticism, and companies and denominations were organized in tiers and transparency wasn't part of the national conversation. Progress in building media empires, highways, and franchises were made possible by top-down command and control leadership. Even the great empire of the Billy Graham Association and Graham's Crusades were adapted versions of what was happening all over western society following World War Two. The highly directive senior-styled leadership is efficient but typically employs limited feedback mechanisms beyond the suggestion box.

Contemporary. Many leaders born between the late 1950s and mid 1970s formed their views as the leadership sins of Vietnam made it into schoolbooks. The media was becoming increasingly more questioning. Disclosures about the failures of esteemed political figures, scandalous televangelists, and

wars connected to U.S. oil have led us to be more suspicious and question the reason for our marching orders. As leaders felt the pressure of scrutiny, there have been advances in organizational accountability and the development of individual feedback systems. Over time the assessment approaches and coaching for leaders were aimed at improving the health and experience of the company, church or society—not just the bottom line.

Emerging. The upcoming group of leaders, in their teens and twenties, have been influenced by the failures surrounding changes of the earth's condition, the Katrina fiasco in 2005, the 87-day BP Oil Spill in 2010, and any cover up. This generation tends to appreciate speaking truth-to-power usually on the web, even when the methodology is harmful because they tend to see self-protective leadership as the greater evil. These future leaders are bright, tend to be more organic than linear, cherish authenticity more than position, and are focused on brand quality more than power, wealth or accomplishments. They run the risk of being too cynical and naive.

It is hard to fully assess the values and impact of paradigms closer to our own and more recent in their development, both outside and within the church. We can also see answers to problems as well as faults through our generational lenses. For instance, one way of thinking about authority and obedience will blame the fall of Israel on Israel's rebellion against King Rehoboam. Another will see the root cause as the king's unwillingness to listen to his elders and the people. Another will see his self-serving ruthlessness.⁷ It was all of the above. Our formation and life experience give us our currencies and shape our perspective. The goal is to think together, not necessarily think alike. Thinking "together" means adding valuable different perspectives for a collective gain.

The three delineations are more nuanced than these summaries imagine but the consultants observed that a generational fissure that existed in the Westside is the same one that exists in society and other churches. One is not right and the others wrong because it is easier to see the faults of an earlier way of thinking and difficult to see our overcorrections. By itself the generational issue was not the cause of the Westside difficulty, but clearly a contributing reason that conflicted parties often talked past each other.

ICOC / LAICC Conflict Management & Appeals Processes

Conflict Management refers to the problem-solving process supported by leaders and Appeals Process refers to the options and preparations of someone bringing forth an unresolved conflict, an issue of dispute or a grievance. Over the last few years the ICOC and the LAICC have gradually paid more attention to these measures.

A stereotype, which is an unfair generalization, can be harmful so let's discuss the difference between stereotypes and prototypes. A stereotypical statement would be "The LA church does not have good practices for resolving conflicts and they always favor the leader." Like all stereotypes, this is incomplete, a half-truth. However, a prototype is more sensitive and accurate because it zeroes in on a tendency without overstating a problem, "The Los Angeles church is comprised of many ministries with varying degrees of conflict competence; however, the ones that have not purposed themselves to settle matters quickly and properly have been prone to fall into pitfalls of uneven standards, unclear grievance processes, and conflict avoidance. One such example is a matter that developed in the Westside in 2013" (Matthew 5:25, 18:15-17).

⁷ See 2 Chronicles 10 and 1 Kings 12.

The fact is that there has been tangible improvement in the LAICC in this area of conflict resolution. I am directly familiar with earlier episodes in the congregation's history, and have had some involvement. A few years ago, the ICOC Elder's Service Team made the area of conflict resolution a priority. In 2010, the team developed a tiered Conflict Resolution process that enabled grievances to escalate in a fashion similar to Exodus 18:21-26. It is briefly described in document called, *Proposal for Conflict Resolution Process*.⁸ There is a formal documentation process for those who pursue this measure, where a grieved party would keep track of their efforts and take an unresolved matter through levels of objectivity. They would begin locally and move out to the region of churches before making a formal appeal to the Elders Service Team.

In June of 2011, I presented a conflict competence lesson with about thirty elders and evangelists, where I briefly covered flawed practices in our history—some of which favor those in positions of authority. Over the next year, John Mannel spent four days in training sessions with Steve Joiner, head of the Institute of Conflict Management program in Nashville. In March of 2012, I presented conflict resolution material on *Mediation and Apologies, Forgiveness and Reconciliation* to over eighty elders and their wives at the Southwest Elder's workshop. In 2013, I conducted a 90-minute presentation to the Elders Service Team in Los Angeles called The Third Person, which was about the role, principles, ethics and obligations of a Mediator. Again, I illuminated errors common to Restoration Movement and Discipling Movement Churches. These include favoring parties based on their position, race or status—usually subconsciously.

I have not sensed stereotypical institutional resistance in Los Angeles in the introduction of better principles or practices. Inasmuch as improvements were underway, in early 2013 there were not yet clearly known roadmaps for addressing grievances towards main leaders of the Los Angeles church. The reports of who and what was the hold up for bringing in an outside third party varies—if it was a person or a case of institutional paralysis. All of the consultants see improved processes and roadmaps as a very significant issue, but by itself it was not the sole cause of all the Westside's difficulties.

The events that led to this consultant involvement were described in the *Part I—Prologue*, as well as the *Letter of Intent and Engagement*. The Interim Advisory Group (IAG) which was formed—sometimes referred to as “the group of fifty that met once a month”—was comprised of those who had formal ministry roles in the Westside, including small groups, board and office staff. From this group a Ministry Transition Team (MTT) was formed in early January 2014 through nominations to represent the four main ministries—Family, Singles, Campus and Teens. It contained seven pairs of mostly married men and women. Family: Chuck and Carol Bray, Tim and Nancy Priestley, Carlos and Alejandra Santini, James Lem and Patricia Butts; Singles: Aaron Young and Angela Williams; Campus: Stuart and Ashley Mains; Teens: Martin and Tina Chairez as well as Westside elder, Mark Shump and his wife Catherine and facilitated by Steve and Tricia Staten. The MTT has been renamed Representation Team, serving in times of need where representation of the ministries is important in a decision.

⁸ <http://www.icoccoop.org/images/PDF/proposal%20for%20conflict%20resolution%20process.pdf>

The Transforming Community Conflict Approach

We utilized the following Transforming Community Conflict Model⁹ for the congregational assessment. Due to the fact that most of the conflicts became separated by moves and transfers our focus was to obtain a solid understanding of what had transpired from a broadly developed narrative, improving congregational conflict competence, and development of measures learned from all that had happened between 2009 and the present.

STAGE

- (1) Convening** (Sept. 26-29, Dec. 1-14)
- (2) Opening Presentation of P/CM¹⁰** (various)
- (3) Discovery Period** (Dec. 2013-Feb.2014)
- (4) Mapping Dynamics** (Mar. 5, 12 & 19)
- (5) Apologies & Disclosures** (Mar. 19)
- (6) Summary & Report** (May 22-July 31)¹²
- (7) Follow Up** (July, 2014-Dec, 2015)

GOALS

- Willingness**
- Safety and Hope**
- First Assessments**
- Past-Present-Future Report¹¹**
- Collective Resolve**
- Closure**
- Evaluating Progress**

Late in the process we identified needs that we thought could be addressed under task forces: The Family and Singles Partnership task force and a vision-mission and identity task force called the GPS¹³ Team, which focuses on renewal through clarified Vision, Mission and Identity statements.

⁹ The TCC Model represents the idea that conflict can be leveraged for useful learning and possibilities of a better future—if the congregation allows fuller access to its inner workings, relationships and sensitive parts of its history.

¹⁰ P/CM refers to Peacemaking / Conflict Management Principles. The opening two church meetings covered the Judeo-Christian “best practices”: (1) Transparent processes, (2) the use of third party and (3) an aim of justice.

¹¹ This Midstream report was presented in the form of slides as a “draft” of what the consultants have understood.

¹² Part I—Prologue, Part II—Assessment, Part III—Recommendations and Transformative Measures.

¹³ This task force would normally be called Vision Team; however that term was used for a minister hiring process in 2013. The GPS is an acronym for God’s Position System.

OBSERVATIONS

Over three months we identified the **sixteen crucial developments**, arriving at **six chief concerns** to be removed. The **number of broken relationships** is categorized as “unclear” because the parties said that they forgive and want to move on because they are in different ministries. There was no single case within the Westside where two people wanted mediation, but a few where one of the conflicted parties desired mediation with someone who worshipped in another ministry (called a separate church). The main concern was not within the Westside because most of the broken relationships were now across the church, not within the sector. And some of the relationships that could have used mediation early on can make progress in other ways—and some parties have found ways to make their peace with each other. This predicament is probably a direct result of taking so long for an intervention to occur before finding someone qualified and available to commit to sorting out matters. We will make some public recommendations in the Recommendations and Transformative Measures concerning unfinished matters and private recommendations to the next leader.

Following the Discovery, the preliminary “draft” Assessment was presented during the first three Wednesdays of March along with slides. The audio and slides were put online, in three parts.

Part I—The Past: Progress, Discovery and the Pursuit of Closure

Part II—The Present: Current Realities, First Steps Forward

Part III—The Future: Recommendations for Transformation & Resilience



Main Events of Westside Timeline (2009-2013)

It was necessary to begin with a draft in order to test the rough impressions, taken from those who were interviewed, on a broader audience. The feedback was very good but some of the feedback was “corrective.” We reworked some but not all of the critiqued assessment so that we would achieve greater clarity without compromising our evaluation.

CRUCIAL DEVELOPMENTS / CHIEF CONCERNS

Community conflicts don't just come out of nowhere. They involve prologue involving significant parties, established processes, cultural dynamics, values, history, perceptions and interests. Some of these features are hidden, hazy or forgotten. There are various ways to retrieve the most important interests of a community's struggle, such as third party investigation. And there are also ways to explain the significance of main elements of a conflict story. The metaphor of playing space, such as a plateau, is used to illustrate something that was happening to the Westside from 2003 to 2013. Donella Meadows, an expert in systems thinking, brings this concept forward.

A resilient system has a big plateau, a lot of space over which it can wander, with gentle, elastic walls that will bounce it back, if it comes near a dangerous edge. As a system loses its resilience, its plateau shrinks, and its protective walls become lower and more rigid, until the system is operating on a knife edge, likely to fall in one direction or another whenever it makes its move. Loss of resilience can come as a surprise, because the system usually is paying much more attention to its play than to its playing space.¹⁴

The shrinking plateau illustration is useful for imagining the stages in which a community feels restraint well before someone has articulated it. Every community will encounter events or developments that are unpleasant: inhibiting forces, impediments to progress, sudden unwelcome changes, conflicts, bothersome restrictions of resources, or failures. These are natural parts of the human condition—not usually signs of evil.

There were at least sixteen crucial (and compounding) developments classified as the Build Up (1-8) and the Disruption and Fallout (9-16), but the intimate details are not available in the web version.

1. The Grip of Nostalgia¹⁵
2. Merger with More Losses than Benefits for the Westside Family Ministry
3. Questionable Leadership Changes Leading to a Disintegrating Staff Experience
4. Minister Impaired, Hurried Turnover
5. A Poor Shepherding Shield from Mishaps
6. The GEO Region Model Increased a "Corporate" Sense of Church
7. A Role was Mishandled with Campus Minister
8. A Minister Goes on Sabbatical, Another Resigns
9. An Announcement Turned Into a Surprising Declaration
10. A Cultural/Generational Conflagration
11. The Lead Evangelist and Others Move In with Insufficient Explanation
12. Wellness Issues Magnify Perceptions and Misperceptions
13. Careless Use of Polarizing Correspondence
14. Formal and Meaningful Processes Were Impeded By Mistrust
15. Approximately Two-Dozen People Left for a Nearby Ministry
16. Mediations Impeded Due to a Ecclesiastical Fault-Line

Resilient social systems are able to address or rectify these matters to the general satisfaction of the stakeholders. Denial, ignorance, distractions or simply being unaware makes the system vulnerable. It is hard to predict just which unpleasant thing in a fragile system will cause a crash that results in fallout such as the displacement of its members. People tend to over-focus on the inciting event, although important. The greater need is an overall prologue and orderly assessment. In the case of the Westside, the ordeal began with less troubling and innocuous inhibitors that had a compounding effect.

¹⁴ Donella H. Meadows, *Thinking in Systems: A Primer* (White River Jct., Chelsea Green Publishing, 2008), 78.

¹⁵ Nostalgia infers "reminiscing about the past", too much of which can be detrimental to development.

The Pursuit of Greater Closure

The idea of closure is both an individual a collective matter. Each person speaks for him or herself and is most answerable to God for dispositions, actions and reactions. In consideration of collective closure, the greater number of Westside Family Ministry members desired an impartial investigation towards better understanding, improved healing, additional tools, and things such as self-determination, a welcoming church environment and other signs of progress. Generally speaking, the other ministries expressed similar things, hoping to see a record of the outcomes rather than being pulled into matters beyond the ones that directly obstructed them. We believe that these aspirations have been or are being achieved.

A vast majority of the members did not want more public apologies to the Westside from Bruce Williams or Al Baird, feeling that the ones delivered between May and September of the previous year relate to most of the main issues. Most of these related to how the Westside found itself in the predicament prior to March of 2013 and their individual responsibilities. Therefore, we worked on developing a narrative and assessment, looking for things to clear up, dynamics to reveal, and any additional apologies that would be volunteered either by the leadership or principle parties of the dissent. And we wanted to bring light and closure to main takeaways from the Organizational Health Assessment from the year before.

A draft of our post-Discovery Summary and Report was presented with slides to the Family Ministry in three parts on three nights—The Past (March 5), the Present (March 12) and the Future (March 19). We debated among ourselves about asking the other ministries to attend these meetings. We interpreted strong reluctance from outspoken Singles requesting to be excluded, but make a simple summary available. That was the direction we took and I met with the Singles, Campus, and Teens separately to explain things and answer their questions.

The meetings resulted in important clarifications and the clearing of misimpressions. There was an apology at the final meeting of the series on March 19 from former CLA Region Leader, Marco Pellizzeri. His words were well received and helpful because of his nearness to many of the most crucial developments preceding the March disruption. Here are some of the highlights.

“I was doing too much, leading on too many levels, spread too thin, and therefore I neglected my wife, my kids and I didn't do an excellent job with the staff I was leading. In a lot of areas I was mediocre, as I was focused on way too much. It was very humbling to learn that I wasn't doing a good job. It broke my heart... I've learned that I could have said no to some things but I felt like I could do them all. But I was wrong. And that was solely my responsibility.”

“I feel like there were some really good things that came from merging the two regions. I also know that there are some things that went worse that especially affected you most here on the Westside. In hindsight I wish that we had taken more time to collaborate, to vet ideas, and involve you more with the process and taken more time to do that. And I am sorry personally for how that has hurt you or hurt your church. That was not our intention and I feel terrible about that missed step. I know it has been costly.”

“I realized that as my family needs increased and boiled over I became less and less available due to being busy and frustrated. I am not trying to explain away or shirk responsibility but as my family needs became more complex, with more pressure and greater, I wanted to give more attention to the Westside Church when I was leading the region and to connect more but I did not have the capacity or the time availability. And I did not have the time to do that and for that I am sorry ... please forgive me.”

“I handled a personnel matter in a manner that I would not want to be handled. And I am very sorry for that, in hindsight. And Bruce stood up here and took responsibility for when I was on leave and hurting for the situation. It was actually my decision. I apologized to that person/couple but I know that my misstep hurt and I am sorry for that.”

“ If I would have had more wisdom, clarity, understanding and maturity as a person and as a man I should have stepped down from leading the region a lot sooner than I did, in order to best meet the needs of my wife, the family and the staff.”

“ I want people to feel like they can talk to me tonight after or anytime or call me and I will do my best to listen and take responsibility and provide any clarity that I can or answer any questions.”

There was an increase of calm on the Westside even though we were not able to bring some of the former conflicted members into mediations. It appeared that parties within the Westside did not need mediation with each other, even though some relationships obviously needed time and work if would recover semblance to their former closeness. Some who had issues with former Westside members decided that they forgave the person or persons that hurt them and had no need for mediation. Others may not have disclosed that they had unresolved relationships.

Time continues to bring new insight that dislodges previously entrenched perspectives. Our March assessment helped some of the current and former parties reflect on the role that deeply held cultural paradigms had in the disruption. Some of the current and former members considered that some of the painful conflicts might have been more generational than personal. The clarifications during the March meetings also led to private apologies from Christians who misjudged fellow members. And Marco's apology was also very helpful.

The month of April 2014 was a time to return to normal ministry, without a new minister in sight, or many serious prospects. Upon our (Steve and Tricia) return in May our encounters with both former and present members of the various perspectives revealed evidence of more self-reflection.

Chief “Former” Concerns, July 2013 (OHA)

Prior to discussing the observations of the consultants, we will mention the summarized results of the Organizational Health Assessment that was executed with former and present Coastal Los Angeles staff in July of 2013. This is important because the Westside, where the disruption occurred, is why the assessment took place. This section allows the reader to compare the concerns of the internal 2013 OHA to our concerns and watch the progress in the future.

During the early summer of 2013, a survey of ten questions was solicited from former and current CLA staff. James Chen headed up this endeavor, with the help of Dat Do. Four of the questions were related to individual background, roles, length of time in the ministry, and additional comments. The more crucial questions are listed below.

Please rate the following aspects of your work while serving in the Coastal LA ministry. Categories: Workload, Quality of relationship with your discipler and central leadership, Quality of interactions with other peer ministry staffs, Support from the elders, Support from the ministry you were a part of, Quality of fellowship in the ministry you served, Autonomy to lead and make decisions, Financial compensation, Access to tools and resources, Transparency into finances and other information at your ministry level. For each aspect where you scored 'negative' or 'very negative' please provide some explanation or examples that contributed to your low scores.

*What was your most positive memory/experience serving in the full-time ministry of the Coastal LA Region?
What was your most negative memory/experience serving in the full-time ministry of the Coastal LA Region?
What do you like the most about the Coastal LA Region?
What are some things that, if changed, would improve your experience working in the Coastal LA ministry?*

The concerns that arose from the OHA will be briefly summarized in two groupings—former staff (2010-early 2013) and present staff (June, 2013). The following comments were edited from the results of the survey, with slight changes to reflect flow and follow up measures by the consulting team.

Former Staff (2009-July, 2013) There were 12 interviewees who were on staff during part or all of the years 2009-2013, and they had an average of 17 years of full time ministry experience prior to leaving the Coastal LA. Within the last few years these individuals transferred out of Coastal LA or left the full time ministry all together.

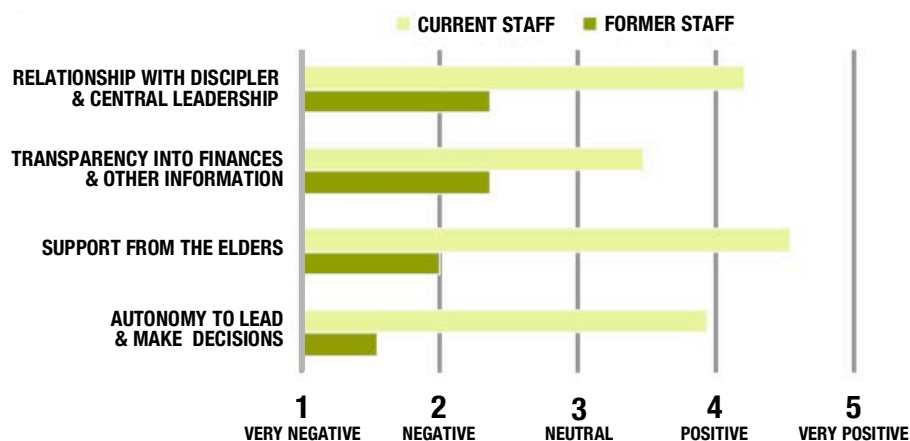
There were a few overall positives from this group of highly experienced ministers—support from the local ministry, quality of peer relationships and different personal comments. Two of the former staff couples from this era are generally positive in their feelings and memories, reporting the CLA experience as beneficial, while four of the couples had very different senses.

The high turnover of these seasoned ministers, minus two couples, was primarily attributed to the following seven concerns: 1) strained relationships with church leadership, 2) a lack of autonomy over finances and local decisions, 3) perceptions of micro-managing, 4) the lack of visibility into how contributions are used, 5) lack of respect to differences in opinion, 6) the priority of numerical growth over other qualitative currencies, and 7) the elders being seen as siding with the central leaders, thus lacking the neutrality necessary to effectively look after the flock. At the time of the survey, there were lingering feelings of betrayal, and interviewees cited instances where facts were not accurately presented before the general congregation.

In follow up conversations with the former staff, some expressed that they were encouraged by the changes in LAICC, the CLA Region and the Westside progress, and have stayed up on the developments. Still, not everyone has completed their healing or found peace.

Present Staff (July, 2013) There were 15 present CLA staff members who were surveyed, and averaged about five ministry years on average. The quality of experience was significantly but not totally different than the former ministers. Overall, the current full time staff members are quite satisfied with their work environment, yet some of the expressed dissatisfactions echoed the sentiments of the former staffs. There remained some unresolved issues between present staff towards the former staff that moved out in 2013.

AVERAGE STAFF RATES FOR DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF MINISTRY EXPERIENCE*



* SOURCE: OHA SURVEY RESPONSES, 11/12 FROM FORMER STAFF MEMBERS & 15/15 FROM CURRENT STAFF MEMBERS

The opinions varied about why there were improvements in the experience of the current staff of mid-2013. For instance, some suggested that the addition of new elders changed the support from the elders. And some speculated that former staff tends to have a hard time adjusting in their careers, and therefore report low. But these kinds of interpretations are subject to bias without actual interviews. Having talked to the men on the former and present staff, I believe that the differences are based in real changes in the experience. I sense from discussions and staff participation that support from elders, the quality of relationships with central eldership and improved autonomy increased more than transparency.

By mid-2013, it was clear from the response that the “specialization” approach of ministry needs to be revisited. The OHA team also stated, “A formal, safe process for handling grievances should be established.” More effort is needed to restore the confidence of the fellowship in the elders’ ability to act as impartial shepherds.

Though the first presentation of the OHA in July 2013 was reported as a meeting that was highly troubled, the one that occurred on January 25, 2014 was much different. The consultants were present to witness the meeting begin with a very specific apology from elder Al Baird. He also commented on the fact that far too little was done to follow up with and assist former staff members by the elders.

I propose that a similar OHA is provided to the CLA near January of 2016 and that the next OHA team is a mix of previous members, such as James Chen, and a non-CLA member.

Chief “Consultation” Concerns (Including Progress)

There were **six chief concerns** particular to the Westside. We are looking at them as they appeared, and as they appear now, with a view to how the ministry can become resilient. The measures for continued progress will appear in Part III—Recommendations and Transformative Measures.

#1—Weak Agency for Resolving Problems (improving, extensive teaching)

#2—Overly Assertive Leadership Group Confrontations (renounced)

#3—Weak Collaboration Between Ministry Staff and other Members (improving)

#4—Reactivity and Non-Reflective Behaviors (improved, still an issue)

#5—Trouble With Prioritizing Competing Needs (work-in-progress, task force)

#6—Stalled Maturation of Key Figures (a current concern)

#1—Weak Agency for Resolving Problems (improving, extensive teaching). It is the opinion of the consultants that if there had been a trusted third party available in February 2013, then we would have had outcomes that all the parties would find highly more favorable than what has occurred in the last sixteen months. Therefore, we must commit to transparent and robust processes.

We (Tricia and Steve) presented six sessions related to conflict competence, self-reflection, problem-solving dynamics, and mediation with the Coastal LA ministry at staff meetings. We examined the biblical principles, best practices, analytical tools, self-reflection measures, and lenses for transforming conflict. We even developed a reality-based case study including role-plays, in order to illustrate how to navigate through areas that had been weaknesses during the previous years. The sessions, which were accompanied by presentations and notes, promoted rich discussion. The Coastal LA region of the LAICC is on the way to becoming much more resilient. Part III—the Recommendations for Resolution and Transformative Measures will note further steps to ensure continued progress.

#2—Overly Assertive Leadership Group Confrontations (renounced). There was an era in the ICOC history in which it became prevalent in some regions for a leader to receive a “Discipleship Group correction” led by a higher-up leader for some reason—sin, performance, or lack of compliance. These styles of discipleship groups were practiced less and less over time but were not fully eradicated. Someone would show up to a meeting in which everyone, except the subject, was fed unfavorable information, possibly inaccurate or with incomplete perspectives, against the unsuspecting subject. Often the charge was “pride” and “pridefulness.” It was said, “You can always get someone on pride.” This approach puts someone in a no-win situation because it makes it impossible to defend oneself without being labeled “defensive.” The outcome of this ramped up approach, in the mind of the consultants, leans towards injustice.

One of the leaders who occasionally used this approach conceded that he would be frustrated when someone on staff seemed unresponsive. His response was “the Hail Mary pass” of stepping up the confrontation within a group setting, “which, looking back was less healthy and not at all helpful.” The group confrontation was a painful factor behind some of the critiques discovered within the OHA.

There are many problems with this tactic, which feels like “ganging up,” that we renounce, even for people struggling with pride, egotism, arrogance or hubris. While strong approaches may appear effective at times, they engender a culture of silent reservation, fear, unhealthy pacts, and contain a risk of emotional and psychological harm. During our interviews and following our teaching, no one has defended the heavy-handed practices of group confrontation.

We do support small group confrontations when they follow a sequence of impartial investigation, involve impartial third parties, the vetting of capable witnesses, and allow for advocacy and defense of the accused as well as prior transparency about the nature of such a meeting. Some of the previously hurt parties received apologies for these meetings prior to our arrival. The practitioners of the heavy “old school” approach agreed with our assessment.

#3—Weak Collaboration Between Ministry Staff and other Members (improving). This particular concern was not unique to the Westside, or the Coastal Region or Los Angeles but seemed more acute just prior to the disturbance. The challenge of intra-congregational collaboration relates to historical and cultural patterns that are more particular to aging churches, and seems to be connected to a generational component between aging leaders, younger leaders as well as non-staff members. Sometimes it shows up as tension between clergy and laity, or staff and non-staff, or ministers and business professionals.

Recognition is the first sign of progress. In October of 2013, four LAICC members—Bruce Williams and three from the CLA Region (Steve Morici, Catherine Shump, Tim Priestley)—attended a minister/business professional summit directly aimed at improving this dynamic. There is an obvious heightened awareness of this dynamic, and over the recent months there have been various processes employed in the Westside such as interviews, surveys, and transition teams and task forces that are helping members influence their self-determination.

#4—Reactivity and Non-Reflective Behaviors (improved, still an issue in early June). The levels of anxiety and discouragement had peaked just before the launch of the consultation. The first three concerns of weak agency, overly assertive leadership and insufficient collaboration draw attention to why the former leaders and members of the Westside were exasperated. However, the CLA leadership became targets of less than appropriate behavior. It was difficult to approach individuals about these apparent behaviors. Similar manners of conduct were widely reported to the consulting team, but the members who observed the interactions over the last sixteen months seemed fearful of addressing them. Some of the most reactive individuals had or still have prominent roles in the observing members’ lives and in the Westside.

Those to whom this concern applies within the Westside will need to find a way to own this before having an increased role in the church. The elders will be informed about who the consulting team felt has been less than appropriate in their conduct. For others who return to the Westside, whose behavior was especially problematic, it will be necessary for them to affirm the assessment, and agree to embrace the transformative measures. It might be necessary to go further, depending on the stance of the future leaders.

For the most part, it appears that self-reflection among principle parties is increasing. When we (Steve and Tricia) returned in May 2014 (after being gone for a month) we encountered a more open spirit from most of the individuals who previously gave us cause for concern.

#5—Trouble With Prioritizing Competing Needs (work-in-progress, task force). There have been clusters of members who tend to share a very distinct sense of priorities about the greatest need—hiring a particular minister, hiring any solid minister, having an identity (like Turning Point Church, Lifeway Church), getting members to return, focusing on grief, returning to structured discipling, doing what such and such church/book/person emphasizes, solving “specialization” challenges, etc. All of these have a place in discussion or are very important, but even some of the most committed and helpful members in the Westside seem to put too much stock in “silver bullet” answers.

To cross over into the next chapter, we should consider four provisos for progress in the achievement of Christ’s aims for our community. 1) Everything that affects the community, do in an orderly way. 2) Stay mindful of our mission from Christ even when we are in flux. 3) Help create a meaningful experience for those immediately around us. 4) Be principle-and-process oriented, rather than reactive or preferential. This often means thinking outside of our comfortable clusters of like-minded friends. When we are overly consumed by one of the provisos for progress—structural order, effectiveness with the mission, quality of felt experience, or high principles—more people will be left out.

Though this area is still a challenge, we have made formal progress in two forward-thinking areas: 1) a task force formed for understanding the partnership between the Family and Singles ministries, which has resulted in clarity and camaraderie; and 2) five members and a facilitator formed a GPS task-force for clarifying our vision, mission and identity in a Westside context.

#6—Stalled Maturation of Key Figures (a current concern). There are many figures in the Westside who have been great treasures in both Los Angeles and beyond. A small but noticeable number seem to have battle fatigue and lack of closure concerning those who left the Westside ministry. Their main symptom is their inability to manage their grief without affecting others. The stalling of maturity shows up in their interactions and their being unusually difficult to please. Closely related to the impeded maturity is the lack of luster in discipling that shows up in marriages and family, as well a few individuals shouldering too much. The next minister will be wise to focus on Christ being formed within key voices of the Westside (Galatians 4:19, Colossians 1:28-29). This will help in the rehabilitation of the entire ministry and to reinvigorate old relationships and develop new ones.

In many ways there has been progress on most of the six concerns; however, without formal record, agreement and stronger measures, these areas of past concern could recur. The processes for continued progress will be covered in *Part III—Resolutions and Transformative Measures*.

REVIEW OF PROGRESS

By the end of March of 2014 a midstream report was presented to the Family ministry and put online for all members to review. It was an opportunity to play back, in a sense, what we heard during the Discovery Phase in a harmonized account. This process provided further clarification, improved our accuracy and solidified our findings. By the end of March there was a general renewed of hope felt in the Family Ministry, evidenced by the Response to the Consultation Report.

The month of April meant a few small setbacks of order and communication due to the fact that there was not a fulltime minister present for the Family Ministry. Although a hiring process is now rebooted with one seemingly viable candidate at the end of June, we probably won't see the interviewing process complete and the position filled before August. We learned from April's sluggishness, so the Representation Team has concentrated its energies on a meaningful and focused July, in time for the twenty-fifth year celebration of the Los Angeles International Church of Christ and the Westside ministry.

There are a number of developments that indicate notable progress has been made, in spite of not having a fulltime leader. That progress is largely due to many longstanding members carrying heavy loads, and some of them wearing multiple hats.

1. We discovered that there is **nearly complete agreement** in the Westside on the nature of lessons learned about things such as process and resolutions for solving problems.
2. We covered material on numerous presentations on Sundays and Wednesdays that heightened the awareness and **improved conflict competence** of the ministry.
3. We saw **misimpressions cleared up** about the nature of the arrival of key figures into the Westside near the heightened time of the crisis—the Shumps, The Mains and the Chairezes. As result we sense a strong support for their continued service, going well into the next leadership era where a leader will develop their ministry team accordingly.
4. During the height of the crisis, an Organizational Health Assessment was performed on former and current staff of the Coastal Region, of which the Westside belongs. As we approach one year from the OHA completion, I (Steve Staten) have reached out to nearly every former minister/evangelist that were surveyed in order to make sure that they are kept abreast of the progress. We sought feedback from all of them, including their wives, with the final version of the main Transformative Measures. At this point there seems to be **encouragement and affirmation** concerning much of our assessment, actions and/or provisions for the future of the Westside and the CLA.
5. There is an active task force that has already begun **improving the partnership** between the Singles and the Family ministries, following years of disconnect. Once those lessons have translated into greater integration, we believe that they will be useful in partnering with the Campus and Teen ministries.
6. There is **a healthy chemistry** where it was lacking earlier in the original Ministry Transition Team, now called the Representation or Rep Team. The group originally formed from nominations, representing the Family Ministry, Singles, Campus and Teens. Some reservations in the meetings were evidenced from the onset, even through mid-March. However, by the end of June there had developed a spirit of trust, camaraderie and interdependence.
7. We were able to get nearly everyone into **functioning small groups**, which at one time left about one hundred members confused about where to experience intimate fellowship and talk through the developments. Although there is great work yet to be done to become cohesive and strong groups, it finally seems possible for each member to find a welcoming group.

8. Many of the longstanding servants are not waiting on a minister to come along for our next chapter, the second twenty-five years. Well-respected members are beginning to dream, have visions, and contribute to discussions about the future. A GPS team of respected members was nominated to review the Scriptures, the Westside's past, the demographics, the current membership, our resources, and opportunities. Their charge is to think in terms of their heading and how they want to be known, both by God and the community. There is **general gladness about moving** forward and this endeavor will help the Westside grasp vision, mission and identity as it has in earlier eras. The GPS is just launching, following the consultation, with some guiding considerations.
9. There is evidence of **an overall mood of gratitude for all of the former ministers** who served the Los Angeles congregation, Coastal LA and the Westside. And those whose actions caused hurt are most often referred to without punitive language or other signs of inhibited closure that was apparent just six months ago. This difference of perspective may be related to a sense of reflection associated with the silver anniversary of the congregation.

Even with these positive developments, the Westside is fragile without a strong base of leadership. The consultation team will stay on call to help with the hiring process and any interruptions to progress that occur.

This concludes *Part II—Assessments* of the *Concluding Summary and Report*. It should be encouraging to understand that the complex nature of some of the past problems does not mean complex solutions.

ASSESSMENT APPENDIX: A PREAMBLE STORY OF CONFLICT

During conflicts, it is commonplace for people to ask questions that are less than helpful or even tangential: *Who are the good guys? Who is to blame? How will we deal with that person or persons? How can we quickly solve the problem and make our pain go away?* Identifying culpability is necessary, but looking for a blanket scapegoat and quick fix misses the point. Let's look at a story in the Bible that illustrates the more important questions.

The specific conflict episode is found in 1 Kings 1-2, and most of its surrounding context is learned in the texts of 1 Samuel 22-30, 1 Chr. 15:11, 27:33-34, and 2 Samuel 2-3, 11-19. It is used to demonstrate three things: 1) how human weaknesses bring out the worst in an interplay where there is no one to "check" the behaviors, 2) conflicts do not sum up a person or their life and 3) the presence of mayhem does not necessitate the existence of scapegoat(s), but more likely reveals aborted responsibilities on behalf of crucial stakeholders.

The issue of King David's successor was raised at a time when he was not appearing healthy. It became a particularly harrowing ordeal when some sought to follow the convention in secular kingdoms—select the oldest living firstborn son of the king, which would have fallen to Adonijah. Another of the king's sons, Absalom, had already nearly robbed the kingdom, but he was repelled and killed. The first two kings of Israel, Saul and David, were selected through a combination of personal attributes and God's vetting through a prophet. Adonijah would have none of that, saying, "I will be king."

It was at that point of his self-assertion that the flawed behaviors of four individuals intersected, as recorded in the first two chapters of 1 Kings: aging David, his son Adonijah, army commander Joab and Abiathar the priest. This enabled a crisis. The leadership of the kingdom was up for grabs due to poor communication, unclear protocols and the appearance of the king's declining condition. Let's begin by considering the good sides, weaknesses, and dark sides of the main character, David.

A **good side** is one's area of consistent victory and glory to God. David's good side was that he was constantly repenting, maintained a deep devotional life and that he attempted to exercise self-reflection, once it was clear that he failed. Prior to old age and the final events of his reign, he was a loving leader who tended to be merciful even to those who betrayed him.

A **weakness** is an area where one is not especially gifted, or a blind spot where one regularly fails. A recurring weakness usually happens when someone is experiencing crisis or pressure, to which they respond with fleeing, fighting, denial, etc. A predictable weakness that recurs during a conflict is commonly called an Achilles' heel, from the story of the mythical well-armored warrior who failed to protect his heel where he was shot with an arrow. The notion that his death occurred from a small heel-wound is how the term Achilles' heel has come to mean a person's point of probable vulnerability. So even a heroic figure may be found in serious trouble when they do not take full precautions to account for their exposure.

David's weaknesses were his sentimentality and his autocratic behaviors. His sentimentality showed first in his parenting of Adonijah, of whom it was said "His [David] father had never interfered with him by asking, 'Why do you behave as you do?'" He was also very handsome and was born next after Absalom." David's close association with the habitually rogue commander Joab was also a blind spot. David confused natural leadership skills and effectiveness with trustworthiness. Also, the king had too few advisors and did not always follow processes established with the Law in handling wrongdoing. In fact most of the entire era of the kings of Israel/Judah was a major downgrade from the processes established by Moses preceding the era of Judges.

Kings like David were associated with various injustices, such as the abuse of power, pursuing or protecting self-interests, such as the cases with Uriah, Tamar and his own sons.

A **dark side** is an area of weakness that is not surrendered or brought out into the open and held accountable. David's initial dark side was lust, for it threw him into a spiritual frenzy. Early on, the king was magnanimous, but late in his life he developed a revengeful spirit, of which no one risked confronting him. For instance he had Joab, his military commander, killed without processes established in the Law. And he gave execution orders to Solomon to have a former adversary named Shimei killed, despite an oath David had made to him and the fact that Shimei proved his newfound loyalty: "But Zadok the priest, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, Nathan the prophet, Shimei and Rei and David's special guard did not join Adonijah." (1 Kings 1:8)

The cautionary tale of 1 Kings 1-2, near the end of David's life, reveals how his less flattering sides coincided with the weaknesses and dark sides of those once close to him—Adonijah, Abiathar, and Joab. Misfortune would have it that these traits played out during a power struggle.

Joab had been effective as the commander of the royal army. For the most part he was fiercely loyal to David and even gave the king good advice on occasion. However, as commander he was also directly involved in the conspiracy and murder of Uriah. And Joab took revenge for his brother's death by murdering King Saul's commander Abner against David's wishes. But Abner had acted in self-defense. Clearly, Joab was not a reliable and spiritually minded guide for David. At times he could be a person of principle, especially when it applied to someone else. And yet, the commander aligned himself with Adonijah, probably on the presumption that the next in line in birth order should be king.

Adonijah was good looking, entitled and selfishly ambitious, but his character virtues are unknown. His first recorded words were "I will become king." As firstborn son to David through Haggith, Adonijah expected to get the throne. In fact he staged his ascension with pageantry even before the King had died. Like Joab, he was a predictable danger.

On the other hand, there was David's loyal associate Abiathar. David and Abiathar first met each other when Saul was pursuing them. They immediately bonded and Abiathar remained with David, and became priest. Once David ascended the throne, Abiathar was appointed High Priest and the "king's counselor." But Abiathar later turned and supported David's son and rival, Adonijah, which resulted in his banishment. Overall Scriptures indicate that Abiathar was a loyal and reliable servant but he was somehow seduced to support Adonijah. As a Levite and High Priest he should have acted as such to resolve any significant dispute in Israel (Exodus 24:14, Dt. 21:5, Ezekiel 44:22).

The weaknesses and dark sides of David, Adonijah, Joab, and Abiathar met in the arena of a struggle for power. There was previous carnage in Israel surrounding Absalom's coup d'état and death, the appearance that the king was not well, in one way or another. And there was little or no communication of a succession plan and a lack of clarity about who was actually in charge.

David did best when he allowed a prophet in his life, which apparently did not happen as often as necessary. Clearly Nathan was intimidated of David. On one occasion he used a clever ruse to confront the king and on another he attempted to use Bathsheba as a go-between to bring bad news. The story of 1 Kings 1-2 portrays one of the final scenes of David's life. His weakness of sentimentality towards his son and his dark side concerning revenge played out when Israel was nearly divided and led by his son Adonijah. Had it not been for Nathan and his willingness to speak up to David, the kingdom would have succumbed.

It would be a mistake to say the problem began with the disloyalty of Joab and Abiathar, or with David's lack of leadership. The earliest inciting source would be the king's parenting of Adonijah. From the perspective of a

consultant, this was a matter where key people with significant responsibilities failed to operate within their roles, follow legal measures or reasonable processes established by Moses, stay self-reflective, and actively involve the right people such as prophets in their lives. In fact, some of those individuals seem to have been mismatches for the roles they played. The sins that followed were the product of a highly dysfunctional system with more than one malfunctioning part (or party).

People that too easily lay the blame of an entire matter at the feet of one or two individuals are mistaken. The responsibilities should best be broken down into inciting factors (David's parenting of his sons), the first breaking of rank/role/protocols (Adonijah), the subsequent breaks of responsibilities (Joab, Abiathar), and the under/over corrective measures (David) and so on. The safeguard for forestalling the failures of a king was the leading prophet (Nathan) and the high priest (Abiathar). This was a complex mess. Overall, David shared the larger load of inciting dysfunction, however he was the most self-reflective and devoted. This was evident even at the close of his life (1 Chronicles 28-29).

It could be argued that David was somehow digressing when the Adonijah affair occurred, perhaps from a condition related to his age. Clearly he was not at his best, and the mutiny appears to have led to his reawakening. In any event, David bred the dysfunction that led to Israel's problems long before his old age. And yet, the way that he is viewed throughout Scripture and popular memory is not by his lesser side, but his better side. The apostle Paul said, "Now when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his ancestors and his body decayed" (Acts 13:36).

Even though David was at times deceitful, lustful, and worse, it would be wrong to summarize him as a liar, adulterer, or murderer. If he stayed unrepentant of a sin it would be a different matter, but David was ever transforming through all of his failures.

It would be just as easy to scapegoat Joab for the turmoil. He rightfully resisted David's bad orders at a critical time when David was erroneously counting his fighting men. Psalm 60 is a tribute to the positive part of Joab's legacy. Similarly, Abiathar's seduction under Adonijah is his only recorded failure.

This story suggests that we should see the shared responsibility concerning Israel's ordeal and suspend brazen judgment about David and his associates on the basis of one episode. Perhaps the exception is Adonijah. The story and many other stories like it were not written to tell us who was more right or wrong, but to inform us of what happened. We only have enough to see complicity of actions and behaviors, not God's comprehensive verdict on complex people.

It is obvious that the tempting search for an easy scapegoat and answers to quick fix questions would not truly resolve the issues. If David and all the parties continued to live, similar problems would likely reoccur because the root problems had been in the works all along. Solutions are found through the right questions: *What was the overall narrative, operating dynamics, including the inciting events, in order? What were the accountability processes and were they actually utilized? What were the primary roles and responsibilities and how were they handled, mishandled, and by whom? What were the results and reactions? Who was being self-reflective? Who wasn't? Final question: with all the history, defined roles, seen/unseen dynamics, and backstory of the primary parties—what was the root cause or causes.*

THE WESTSIDE CHURCH CONSULTATION

A MINISTRY OF THE LOS ANGELES INTERNATIONAL CHURCH OF CHRIST

CONCLUDING SUMMARY & REPORT

JULY 31, 2014

PART III TRANSFORMATIVE MEASURES & RECOMMENDATIONS

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PART III—TRANSFORMATIVE MEASURES & RECOMMENDATIONS

Just over seven months after we began the Discovery process, we are releasing Part III of the Concluding Summary and Report with a record of the accomplishments, setbacks, ongoing progress, and yet to be finished business of the Westside Church Consultation. For purposes of remembering how we began, conducted and ended our engagement, we list the following dates and reminders of our intentions:

The Project Dates:

- September 25-29, 2013 – Convening
- December 1-13, 2013 – Discovery Interviews, Develop Strategy
- January 2 - March 31, 2014 – Discovery, Ministry Work, Teaching
- March 5, 12 and 19, 2014 – Midstream Reports (Past, Present and Future)
- May 1 - June 29, 2014 – Interim Ministry, Introduce Measures
- May 31 – Release *Part I – Prologue*
- June 30 – Release *Part II – Assessments*
- July 31 – Release *Part III – Transformative Measures and Recommendations*

From the perspective of the consulting team, the Westside ministry of the Los Angeles International Church of Christ is determined to reach a new chapter. As one of the flagship ministries of both the LAICC and ICOC, the ministry is crossing a threshold just in time to close out the first twenty-five years of the congregation. It is our hope that the five transformative measures, which are the main focus of this report, will be of assistance. They include rigorous alignment for those in primary roles, the development of crucial processes, fortification and spreading of core convictions, advancing discipling measures, and reclaiming a sense of shared identity and purpose. These steps will not be accomplished overnight, nor in a matter of months.

We begin with a special note for the busy reader. Our thoroughness ensures that there is a trail to follow if any of the issues from the past resurface; however, many Westside members who have “turned a page” might be initially satisfied with the Summary on the following page. Readers from outside the Westside that are experiencing or have experienced similar dynamics brought up in the Assessment may want to go straight to the Transformative Measures

SUMMARY

The following measures, if followed as suggested herein, are the key elements that would have prevented the distress that erupted in 2013 in the Westside. They are also the steps forward for reclaiming lost ground and recapturing lost vision.

TRANSFORMATIVE MEASURES

The instruments of progress are recorded in the order they became apparent to the consultants, not necessarily in their order of importance.

- #1— Embrace Robust Processes.** There are five processes that will help advance the organizational health of the ministry: Making Significant Decisions, Transferring of Members between Ministries, Managing Grievances and Concerns, Staffing Ministries, and Meeting Decorum.
- #2— Rigorous Alignment.** An increased accountability for primary roles in the ministry would ensure that individual wholeness, proper match of gift to assignment, and accountability would be intact.
- #3— Rediscovering Core Convictions.** There are areas of opinion, questions and ongoing discussion; however, there are major/core beliefs that a disciple of Christ lives for that he would be willing to suffer for—the key points of Christianity.
- #4— Return to a Culture of Discipling.** The members, regardless of their age or maturity, need to be strengthened through relationships in Christ. There are multiple models and means for this type of development to occur.
- #5— Re-Envision Your Greater Cause.** Christ's followers make their greatest contribution when they more fully grasp who they are and what they are trying to do.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the most part, these considerations will be of interest to Westside members who experienced the last five years.

- #1—Celebrate Your History**
- #2—Ensure That Worship Reflects Your Diversity**
- #3—Formulate a Policy for Returning Members**
- #4—Develop a Media Team**
- #5—Move Towards the Development of Deacons**
- #6—Continue With the Integration and Participation Between the Four Main Ministries**
- #7—Review the Region or Sector Question of Self-Determination**
- #8—Build Bridges Among Nearby LA Ministries**

TRANSFORMATIVE MEASURES



Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2)

Near the beginning of this Westside project we discussed the topic of *metamorphosis*, the Greek word translated as “transformation”. We studied the biblical character of Aaron, who went from plague-starter to plague-stopper, and weak-kneed leader to prototypical High Priest. The evidence of his transformation is that he learned how to get in the proper lane, where he found his truest calling and destiny.

When *metamorphosis* is Googled in an image search, the most common find is the Monarch butterfly. The life cycle of a Monarch starts when the mother Monarch lays her egg on the milkweed plant. In three days, an incredibly tiny eating machine of a caterpillar emerges, taking three weeks to grow to its full size. At one point, after it has attached itself to a solid surface, it covers itself with a liquid that comes out of its body. Then, within two minutes, it transforms from caterpillar to chrysalis, where the amazing metamorphosis begins. Inside its chrysalis form it releases chemicals that dissolve itself into a liquid mush that is often associated with “the goo period”. Only imaginal cells survive the ordeal of the caterpillar’s death. These imaginal cells take around 8 days to repurpose the brainless ‘goo’ until a head, wings, and internal organs are formed. A butterfly emerges, but the transformation is only part of the amazing story of the Monarch. Monarchs are typically born in the northern United States or Canada. They migrate up to 3,000 miles in order to spend the winter in Mexico. They never meet their parents, but are able to fly to the same trees in Mexico where their parents or grandparents wintered the year before.

They key to every stage of the wondrous butterfly cycle are its imaginal cells, which carry the memory of identity, design, and destiny. The correlation to imaginal cells for a disciple is the formation of “Christ in you”.



To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.” (Colossians 1:27–29, NIV)

Christ is the continuing portion of our identity in the kingdom, and is found throughout Scripture, the formation of the church, and the continued development of a person from ‘goo’ through godliness. It is through Christ - his example, his teaching, and his intentions - that we continually seek transformation.

The following measures consider the prologue to the LAICC history, the current West LA environment, issues that once plagued the Westside, the current needs, and some long-range aids for transformation. The goals are “Christ in You” and the shortening of prolonged ‘goo’ periods.

#1. Embrace Robust Processes (Advancing Organizational Health)

The body of elders and evangelists bear the bulk of the following responsibilities. In some cases the board, human resources, and other roles of administration and representation will be involved.

There are **five scenarios** that beg for processes, each of which should be based on mutual respect, understanding, impartiality, documentation, and clarity of communication:

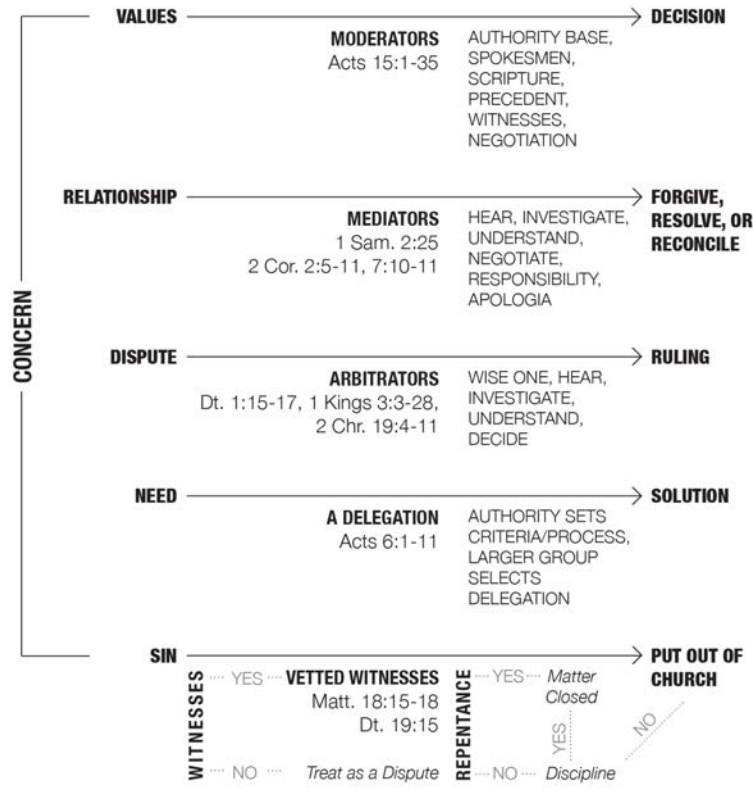
- 1) Making Significant Decisions
- 2) Transferring of Members Between Ministries
- 3) Managing Grievances and Concerns
- 4) Staffing Ministries
- 5) Meeting Decorum

The following statements of commitment are meant to serve as placeholders, in the absence of another process, until more vetted ones are developed. Some of these commitments will likely need to be fleshed out and thought through on a congregational level.

- **Making Significant Decisions**—We will follow decision-making practices in such a way that God and the ministry are served. Some decisions will involve different kinds of roles and representatives, depending on the nature of the decision. Leaders are in place to provide guidance, and to make some educated decisions and “audible” decisions on the fly; however, decisions that are of greater significance - including staffing, permanent meeting locations, and special events; or decisions that involve large spending - will not be subject to snap decisions by one or a few. Key terms are *Communication*, *Representation*, *Empowerment*, *Involvement*, *Collaboration*, *Cooperation*, *Vetting*, and *Partnership*. The presence of representatives, disclosure, debate, leaders of various roles, thinking processes, decision-making and communication are evident in Acts 6:1-7 and Acts 15:1-35. While polling can sometimes be very helpful, nominations are to be preferred over voting, especially when decision-making pertains to filling positions. A good nomination and vetting process allows a trusted party to screen subjective and sensitive issues that would hinder someone from performing in a role.
- **Transferring of Members Between Ministries**—When someone attempts to move in or transfer from another ministry or congregation, we will have a designated person follow up with an official from the previous location. If there are unresolved issues, they will only be placed on the membership - providing other local congregational considerations are met - if they are willing to commit to a mutually agreeable third-party resolution process.
- **Managing Grievances and Concerns**—We will follow easily observable processes for members, including the staff, to present a concern or grievance to capable and impartial parties. Based on a preliminary investigation performed by an elder and/or deputized party, the situation will be classified in order to determine whether it calls for moderation, mediation, or arbitration (see the *Internal System* diagram on the following page). The third party will assume responsibility for assimilating a mutually agreeable process. Meetings involving serious personal matters are to be conducted where everyone knows who will be in attendance, is informed on the general topics, and has the option of bringing a mutually trusted witness. If a matter persists where the process fails to improve the outcome, functionality, or health of the ministry, outside help should be sought. If the *External System* is to be used, another region of the LAICC can be treated as the first tier outside of the local ministry (see the *External System* diagram on the following page).
- **Staffing Ministries**—The placement and arrangement of staff is a blend of proper decision-making and consideration of all those whose vocations are concerned and the flock’s well being. As such, we will follow well-established procedures for hiring, evaluating, and providing metrics and means for improvement. We recognize the occasional need for re-allocations, moves, and other alignment measures to develop best fits in the congregation. If a termination occurs, we accept the responsibility to follow up with major life transitions throughout the pursuit of new vocations. In all these we will be answerable to other representatives of the body for those processes. Decisions in hiring or termination do not require unanimity, but need some consistent and sensible measure of consensus.
- **Meeting Decorum**—No dissatisfied member, including a leader, should ever use a meeting of the body to present their unresolved concerns, no matter how legitimate or sincere they are, without a proper vetting process through the elders. Dissent should be taken to the body of elders or other official processes involving representatives within the congregation or the ICOC (make use of the internal and external systems and relationships).

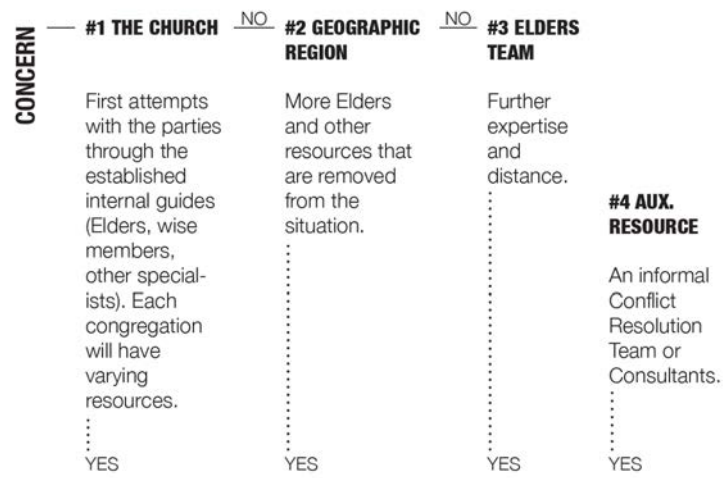
INTERNAL SYSTEM

CLASSIFYING AND PROCESSING COMMON NEEDS & CONFLICTS



EXTERNAL SYSTEM

APPEALS PROCESS FOR PERSISTING CONCERNS



MATTER CLOSED

Concept of tiered systems is derived from Scriptures
Exodus 18:13-23, Deuteronomy 1:9-18, 2 Chronicles 19:4-11

#2. Ongoing Alignment (Accountability for Primary Roles)

To the elders and evangelists: You should make use of outside ministers, consultants, workshops, education and conferences, and gifted members to ensure that Westside leadership has the best opportunities for personal and professional growth and objective appraisal.

The overall wellness of the Westside congregation is more important than the pleasure, philosophies, or tastes of any singular member or subgroup. Those with spiritual maturity and willingness to be in the thick of it for the whole Westside will naturally have more influence, which is why these leaders, representatives, and vocal parties must be carefully appraised.

Therefore, anyone who wishes to contribute to the direction of the Westside must be willing to participate in measures initiated by the elders for ongoing training, education, and the obtaining of outside perspectives. Their interpersonal skills, approachability, speaking styles, and willingness to collaborate are chief virtues. This proposed measure for calibration aims at addressing status quo, reducing the most avoidable dysfunctions related to dominating personalities. But the single greatest reason for this transformative measure is that ceilings can be raised for new possibilities by the constant personal growth of influential members. It should be an honor to be among leading voices, and an honor to have them in our midst.

Practically speaking, there are three simple periodic “checks” that will help ensure that the leadership is in best form:

- 1. Long Range Mentoring**—the suggestion is that there should be, besides spouses, at least three respected people who leaders can name and count on as mentors, peer advisors, or guides. They will help with these categories of questions:
 - What are your strengths and unique abilities?
 - What are your known weaknesses and blind spots? “Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord.” (Lam 3:40).
 - What are your struggles? (i.e. sin, addictions, unresolved relationships, areas of grief, health, psychological issues, etc.)
 - Family life: What are the dynamics of your marriage and/or household? How are your children doing?
 - What are your lifelong aspirations?
 - What stage of life are you in vocationally, and how are you managing it?
 - What mode (or mood) do you go into during stress or strong disagreement?
 - What are your full responsibilities and extended commitments? (i.e. all income streams, roles, boards that you serve on, and other time consuming efforts)
- 2. Individual Assessments and Team Equilibrium**—assuring that the right person is in the right seat on the ship. Various forms of leadership and gift assessments are available, where the most basic involves bringing in expert church builders to perform reviews. The goal is to stay in our lane by living according to our gifts, and being aware where others are stronger. Equilibrium is ensuring that there is not too dominant of a personality or culture that overrides the overall needs of the body.
- 3. Wholeness and Refreshment**—accounting for fatigue and other conditions that affect our ability to help others. Nature illustrates the importance of factoring in the impact of being in the front. Canadian Geese fly in a V-formation because they can go about 70 percent further than they could on their own. The physics indicate that the front goose breaks wind for the flock. Two other elements in the nature of geese contribute to their efficiency: (1) the honks are sounds of encouragement, and (2) the front position is rotated as needed. While the gift of front-leading leadership is not owned by most Christians, and we all can’t just be put in a rotation, we see the need to evaluate the condition of the entire leadership team and determine whether adjustments should be made - retreats, encouraging sabbaticals, and well-timed role changes - that will allow for renewal.

#3. Rediscovering Core Convictions (Knowing What You'd Live and Die For)

To the teachers, elders and evangelists: The protection of the flock belongs to all elders, the evangelists and teachers (Ephesians 4:11-16). However, those teachers gifted with the texts, hermeneutics, and who have dedicated themselves to extensive study, are like the ancient Levites, who made the Law clear, providing "meaning so that the people could understand what was being read" (Nehemiah 8:8).

The challenge of maintaining orthodoxy (correct apostolic doctrine) in Los Angeles is greater than in many cities like Seattle, Dallas, Chicago, and most of the United States. Former and present members of the Los Angeles area are more vulnerable to the spell of more alternative "Christianities", which are hybrid mixes of religions and experiments that are meant to satisfy popular religious wanderlust. There was plenty of evidence during consultation to draw attention to this local challenge.

The phrase "religious wanderlust" is being used to infer to the restless wandering through religious options and paths that are more tempting during times of dissatisfaction, and are not grounded on guiding principles. This kind of problem has parallels in fictional quests. For instance, J.R.R. Tolkien's Bilbo Baggins warned Frodo "You step into the Road, and if you don't keep your feet, there is no knowing where you might be swept off to." Before we illustrate ways to avoid being carried away with winds and waves sweeping through LA, let's begin with a brief tour of a wandering.

Wandering. About one hundred years after the resurrection of Christ, religious wanderlust led to two alternative "Christian" movements, whose founders attempted to take the edge out of Christianity and make their case in Rome. Valentinus (c. 100-c. 160) furthered an intellectual Christianity, called Gnosticism, which had a system that allowed believers to do with their bodies whatever they wanted. And a man named Marcion (c. 85- c.160) sought to take the Old Testament connection out of the New Testament, repudiating the Creator's heavy restrictions. Similar escape clauses to biblical spirituality have been happening ever since.

Over the last seventy-five years, at least three prominent men have taken it upon themselves to make Christianity more acceptable to the masses. A Lutheran, an Anglican, and an Evangelical each have attempted to remove stumbling blocks, rescuing the church from perceived shackles. All three failed, as you will see, because they allowed popular culture to affect Christianity.

During the Second World War, the famous German theologian Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) began publishing essays that raised doubts about the supernatural elements of the New Testament. For Bultmann, the Gospels were filled with miracles that the modern world would find objectionable, as myths. Perhaps both world wars in Europe took a toll on his faith. In an effort to save Christianity, he attempted to do the church a favor by 'demythologizing' the New Testament, a term used to describe undressing the supernatural portions. While Bultmann was a genius who contributed positive things to New Testament scholarship, he is best known as a liberal who "liberated" the reading of Scriptures from faith in a God who intervenes in human affairs. Following the war, many Protestants experiencing wanderlust found themselves taken in by Bultmann's good God who had no power to intervene. The result was that many Protestants embraced a novel approach to religion based on subjective concepts of love.

Another "rescuer" was an Anglican bishop from Southeast London by the name of John A.T. Robinson (1919-1983). During the sixties, members of the postwar Church of England possessed a popular mood of feeling disconnected with God. The supernatural 'God out there' was not felt in the pews, through religious icons, dogmas or clichés, by entering one of the great church structures, or by praying upwards to a God sitting on the clouds. Robinson himself admittedly had trouble connecting to God at some level, and deconstructed his beliefs when he was "in a period of forced inactivity during an illness for which he was

hospitalized.” During his reduced duties he read various German dissenters from tradition such as Bultmann and Tillich. Robinson discovered that his sense of disconnect dovetailed with material from a new ‘Death of God’ movement. Like Bultmann, he rejected the supernatural, but he wanted to retain the ethic of love.

The worlds of Anglicism and major American denominations were turned upside down in early 1963 after Robinson released a sample of his upcoming book, *Honest to God*, in an article called “Our Image of God Must Go”. He expected to sell 6,000 copies of his book, but sold well over one million in 17 languages. The societal impact was great, but in a not-so-great way. He rightfully stated that God is everywhere and in all things, but emphasized it in such a way that participating in church meetings added little value compared to living ethically. Robinson denied heaven and many other Christian doctrines, and his goal was to “make God real for the modern, scientific and secular age.” In his pursuit, the bishop fostered doubt about the idea of faith, and furthered the notion of situational ethics—if you do things out of love for the other person, whatever the situation, rules of morality don’t apply.

Some have wondered whether the Beatle’s mantra “all we needs is love” and Lennon’s refrain “imagine there’s no religion” originated with John A.T. Robinson, who boldly championed these themes in England before the compositions were recorded. It is ironic that Robinson also wrote things that were helpful to conservative Christian scholarship, but *Honest to God* stands as the manifesto of theological liberalism.

Coming closer to home, we have Los Angeles minister Rob Bell, a well-known evangelical who moved from Michigan in 2011. Unlike Bultmann and Robinson, Rob Bell affirms the supernatural, places a high value on corporate worship, and his presentations possess insight and inspiration. However, like the other rescuers, Bell appears to strip controversial beliefs about judgment and punishment away from the Bible, and argues for situational ethics. For instance, as the tide has turned in the U.S. for sexual relations and marriage between same-sex partners, he affirmed that position, but he did not do so on the basis of biblical exegesis. Bell stated, “the ship has sailed,” referring to the beliefs that the masses have embraced. And he also fills in nuanced questions about judgment not explicably answered in Scripture with strong assertions, as if he has an inside scoop. His answers tend to undermine the urgency of evangelism.

Others such as Michael Kruger, a scholar of early Christianity, have commented on his error.

“While Bell is not trying to take away the supernatural elements of the faith, he is trying to purge it of elements that he thinks will make God out of date. Unfortunately, these happen to be core doctrines of Christianity—sin, God’s wrath, the cross, atonement.”¹⁶

By shaving down Christianity until it is just “love”, these otherwise smart men have allowed reactive and subjective concepts of love to redefine God. The biblical narrative of love provides a rich tapestry of stories and principles that keep us from reducing love to the novel whims of a troubled reactionary, and creating a God in our own image.

The Los Angeles area contains many individuals and groups that contribute to the region’s religious wanderlust—and most of them seek love. It is important to emphasize that these folks are not evil, but fellow seekers who sometimes have very good things to contribute while overcorrecting from something that appears to be a problem. We have made these mistakes ourselves. Some inadvertently de-emphasize discipleship, overemphasize feeling, or remove theology dogma. Now, let’s talk about how to get our theological bearing.

16 <http://michaeljkruger.com/tag/rob-bell/>

Rediscovery. The transformative measure for *Rediscovering Core Convictions* will be prefaced with a brief illustration. A little over a hundred years ago, the famous writer G.K. Chesterton was experiencing wanderlust concerning Christianity of the creedal faith in the early church. To explain his journey, Chesterton spoke of a yachtsman who set out south from England to discover an undiscovered island. But the seafarer miscalculated his course, and soon experienced amazing terrors of being out on the high seas. When he saw land, he experienced such delight looking at a sight that was both unfamiliar and familiar. He soon realized that he had landed in his home country, which he now saw through a new and old perspective. It was old, because it was his home but it was new because he hadn't seen its glory in such a way before. The yachtsman's sense about his homeland changed because he saw what he had all along—but through a new perspective. Chesterton admitted that he was the yachtsman, concluding, "We need so to view the world as to combine an idea of wonder and an idea of welcome. We need to be happy in this wonderland without once being merely comfortable."

The Christ of the Bible and the creeds is both fascinating and familiar. Creeds, of course, are summary statements about Christ made at baptisms, during communion, and contained in writings, prior to the collection and formation of the New Testament canon. These are found in passages like 1 Corinthians 15:3-7, Ephesians 4:3-6, and 1 Timothy 3:16. The popular and longer creeds, such as the Nicene Creed, bear a striking resemblance to main elements of the main sermons in the book of Acts.

How does one overcome the desire to wander about unguided through the galaxy of opinions? The answer: by retracing our voyage around the story of Christ through different angles of study. We don't have to go out blindly into the harrowing seas, hoping to land in the right spot. If orthodox Christianity is an island, as in Chesterton's metaphor, the point is that we can overcome restlessness by surveying the faith from fresh perspectives: the prophecies, Christ's locations, his teachings, his example, his words, his view of himself, his kingdom message, his interactions with all kinds of people, his unique and unmatched contributions, his impact on a few, his famous clash and death in Jerusalem, his return from the grave, his influence on mankind, and so on.

One of the best ways, if not the best way, to inoculate a congregation from the spurious views being put out there is to develop an appreciation for a fuller knowledge of Christ. When multiple people are wonderstruck by Christ, the entire church will feel more like wonderland.

The Core Beliefs of the larger body of Los Angeles Church were affirmed in 2006 within a document that many have probably forgotten about.¹⁷ These beliefs have not been controversial, or a cause of the problems, and therefore they have not come under the purview of this project. They are a mix of creedal statements and best practices for a discipling church. By themselves, merely stating Christian dogmas doesn't change lives. So the appeal here is for a planned rediscovery of age-old beliefs, a planned cruise around the coastline of the faith. In this way, the members of the Westside will discover that the narrative of Christianity brings life to our convictions, which is superior to bullet point faith. The approach could take the following form, to be determined by the emerging leadership team and teaching ministry:

- Workshops and Classes Mostly Centered Around Jesus Christ: How the Bible Came About. Jesus in Prophecy. The Incarnation of Christ. Literature from the First Century. Major Lessons from Biblical Archaeology. The Sermon on the Mount. The Parables. Baptism, Communion, and Fellowship in the Early Church. Jesus and Other So-Called Saviors. Exploration of the Atonement of Christ.
- Congregational Sermons, Midweeks and Devotional Studies comparing Christ and his teachings to alternative religions in a non-antagonistic way (1 Peter 3:15-16).

¹⁷ *The Cooperation Agreement.*

- Developing an outreach strategy similar to the Apostle Paul's approach in Athens. He turned his distress over the many idols - evidence of ancient Religious Wanderlust - into a meaningful conversation (Acts 17:16-34). A well-prepared outreach series designed to welcome seekers, and a strong web presence are just some ways of spreading core convictions.

The Westside once had a strong Sunday morning teaching curriculum called The Rock Ministry, which was facilitated by Mark Shaw. One of the most common requests that we heard during consultation was that this ministry be increasingly supported by and involve more staff members. Due to the regional religious makeup, we see the teaching ministry as an important part for strengthening and bolstering the Westside. As such, all of the teachers should be in agreement with basic church doctrine and practice.

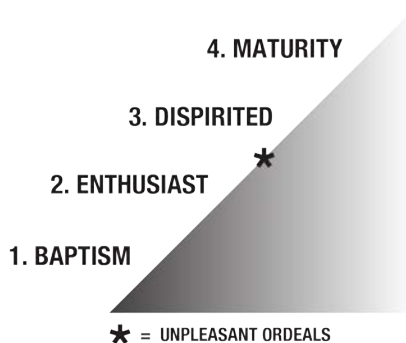
#4. Return to a Culture of Discipling (Strengthening of One Another)

To the evangelist, the elders, the leadership team, including spouses, and other mature members: The original use of discipling conceptualized an individual learning something in such a way that it became part of their new practice, understanding, or inner growth, resulting in joy for both the teachers and the learners. The charge is to redevelop a culture of discipling, focused on strengthening our members.

A recent movie, *Monuments Men*, is based on the true story of eight individuals who set out to recover art stolen by the Nazis: seven men and one woman, led by art conservationist George Stout. In all there were over 300 people involved in the efforts, helping to recover about 5 million pieces of art and return them to their rightful owners or home countries.

One particular adventure that was also the focus of the movie centered on a salt mine in the Austrian Alps that contained nearly 9,000 paintings, drawings and watercolors, and large numbers of sculptures, tapestries, and other art that was designated for Adolph Hitler himself. As the Allies advanced, the Fuhrer sent out orders to destroy anything the Allies could use, which included destroying art. As the war in Europe was ending, a Nazi district leader was very close to blowing up the mine, while the Russians were about to claim the region and its plunder. It was during this short window that the Monuments Men accomplished an amazing feat - recovering a large amount of the mine's cache - and pulled out just in time to save significant cultural treasures.

The Westside's treasures are its many men and women who participated in and witnessed legendary moments in the history of the congregation. Some had been ministers, church leaders, administrators, overseas missionaries, and other servants. Today they belong to the group of business owners and other types of professionals that possess extraordinary talents, insight, and wisdom. The fact is that a fair number of these treasures are in need of recovery and repair. The leadership will do best if you see this as a challenge and adventure, not a chore. The goal of this focus is to cultivate an environment that will encourage personal development where the strong help the weak, and the mature help the struggling.



Identify the Strong and Mature. The biggest challenge is that over the last decade the ratio has widened between the more mature and victorious mentors, and those who are distressed and dismayed. This dilemma is not uncommon for aging churches or congregations that experienced a crisis. Consider the following description of stages between baptism and maturity, as well as a simplified explanation for how they relate to one another.

Stage One is the initial period following **baptism**, characterizing the era where the new convert tends to be very idealistic, grateful, and

willing to go with the flow. As the individual grows and gains some experience, they likely end up as an **enthusiast**, in Stage Two. They are advancing in understanding and effectiveness. They figure out methods that work, and are good at getting people to stage one and helping them grow. The Stage Three person, being **dispirited**, has probably become troubled by a disturbing life experience, flaws in their leaders, or somehow being wronged. The longer a person is in this stage, the more likely that they will become cynical and appear as negative, non-reflective, or even inconsolable. In worst cases they are hardened, overly noncompliant, and tend to pull others into their constellation of sadness. Stage Four, **maturity**, is key to progress.

Stage Twos and Stage Threes, the enthusiast and dispirited, often don't get along very well. A Stage Three might see a Stage Two as overzealous, naïve, and irritating – one who is “too fired up all the time”, overly simplistic, and out of touch with reality. And Stage Twos are bothered that Stage Threes aren't doing their part, are too critical, lukewarm, and are holding the church back.

A Stage Four person has been baptized, became an enthusiast, experienced a dispirited season, and passed through to victory - appreciating the values of all three stages. In fact, one can't be described as fully mature unless they are overcoming strong temptations, have discovered the strength to surrender, learned to accept the hard realities of life, and will allow for life-shifting events (Genesis 39:1-23, Job 40:3-5, 42:1-17, Luke 4:1-13, Matthew 13:18-23).

Maturity could be defined as becoming our most whole and responsible version of self as we maneuver through life's surprises. It is not a permanent stage because new challenges can set us back to Stage Three for a new struggle.

The Westside will make the most progress when those who have thrived in the face of adversity, Stage Four, increase in number. And that will happen when people in Stage Three are treated like treasures, not bothers.

The following trademarks of maturity are not intended to be strictly accurate, but a rough gauge:

1. Appetite for solid, nutritious food (primarily scripture)
2. Imperviousness to personal offense
3. Immune to cunning ways (due to our growth we see through shortcuts, compromises, & hidden agendas)
4. A conscience informed by scripture, not opinions or culture
5. A sense of humble surprise when used by God (rather than expecting to be lifted up)
6. Can see God throughout uncomfortable experiences
7. Don't take matters into our own hands that belong to God
8. Have a long view (wait on results for gratification)
9. Exhibits self control under distress
10. Can be fine with not getting our way (according to others)

The leadership of the Westside should observe those who appear to be both strong and mature (someone can be mature but weakened by health or life situations). These individuals will be called upon to assist with the most challenging situations that arise in the sector. We close this point with our goals for you emphasized in these two passages:

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” (James 1:2-4, NIV)

“Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.” (Colossians 4:12, NIV)

Establishing Functional Discipling. Over the course of our lives we will probably often revisit the concepts of discipling, which is a means for learning and growth. The possibility of getting into discipling ruts due to things like mismatched arrangements increases over time. Let's quickly refresh our understanding of what is meant by the term *discipling*.

- The meaning of the verb *matheteuein* is “to be/become a disciple” or “to disciple”. It appears in the Gospels three times (Matthew 13:52, 27:57, 28:18-20) and once in the book of Acts, where it is translated as “strengthening” (Acts 14:21-22). It is this word that is most associated with discipling. Initial discipling draws attention to becoming a follower of Christ, and subsequent discipling is about strengthening as a follower.
- The verb *manthano*, “to learn”, is used about 25 times. It means “to learn with a moral bearing and responsibility” (Matthew 9:13, 11:29, 24:32, John 6:45, Acts 23:27, Galatians 3:2, Philippians 4:9, Titus 3:14, and Hebrews 5:8).
- The noun *mathetes* refers to “a learner” or one who accepts instruction. It appears about 250 times in the New Testament (Matthew 11:2, Luke 5:33, John 3:25, and John 9:27, among others).
- The terminology in the New Testament changes slightly from *discipling* (or strengthening) towards *maturing* in the epistles (Colossians 1:28-29). Both discipling to be like Christ and maturing in Christ require learning and result in personal growth.
- It is helpful to acknowledge that various terms that result in strength and maturity can be useful substitutes for where we have only used discipling: training, mentoring, etcetera.

Application of discipling (regardless of the term):

- A clearly defined relationship (trainer/trainee, leader/young leader, peer-to-peer, small group, triad, all tangible situations where we are looking out for each other's growth on a formal basis). Some examples: Jonathan and David committed to looking out for each other (1 Sam 23:15-18), Jesus selected the twelve “that they might be with him” (Mark 3:3-13), Jesus focused on Peter (Luke 5:1-11, Matt 16:13-20, John 21:15-23), Jesus trained Seventy-Two (Luke 10:1-22), Paul and Barnabas had each other, and Paul mentored Timothy (2 Tim 3:10-4:5).
- Clearly defined areas to discuss where we wish to be more Christ-like, such as marriage, family, performance in a role, male-female conduct, finances, holiness, a weakness or area of frequent struggle, etc.
- For a time, young disciples can make much initial progress with just one more mature Christian. As we age as Christians, we will develop specific areas where we become capable of strengthening others, and tend to seek guidance from more than one person.
- Established schedule, routines, or rhythm that all parties agree to.
- Prayerfully, with the goal of becoming mature, we will have evidence of progress.

Most common misapplications of discipling:

- Overuse of the *deficit* approach—“you are not where you need to be”
- Quick judgments, especially of hearts—we are not daily or weekly heart assessors.
- Technique overreliance (rebuke, challenge, correct, teach, encourage, accountability)

During the distress of recent years there was a reported drop in members being involved in each other's lives, and much of the discipling before the upheaval was described as insufficient. As such, no one should be surprised to see serious cracks appearing in marriages, families and other households, which will eventually show up in the children. We are appealing to you, the more mature among you, to put your hand to the plow and help your fellow Christians in the following three stations of life:

Discipling Household Leaders

One of the best ways to have the greatest ripple effect in spiritual strength and maturity for families is for some of the most prominent and leading household figures, mostly males, to set an example. When Joshua stood before Israel he let people know where he stood in his allegiance to the Lord (Joshua 24:1-28). He told Israel's story, and about what God had done in the past, and he drew some serious conclusions on a memorable occasion.

“But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.” (Joshua 24:15, NIV)

The people replied, “Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods!” (vs. 16). Once the most standout household leaders are apparent, the Westside leadership can develop their discipling approaches. There is going to be much work. The next hire for the Westside Family Ministry evangelist absolutely must love his wife and children and have them as his priority. Then that lead couple and the Westside elder and his wife, as well as other strong married couples, can co-develop plans and opportunities to strengthen the households.

These comments about Household discipling apply to Single Parent households and apartments and homes where singles intend to share the same residence for long periods.

Mentoring of Singles

Anyone who attends the “specialized” Singles ministry of the Coastal Region, which is a combination of singles from three sectors, will immediately take notice of its impressive gathering of many races and walks of life. There is gratitude for their large pool of relationships - up and down the coast - which creates energy. Nonetheless, there are needs that aren't being met because of the many years of disconnect from other parts of the church body.

The Singles ministry tends to be more transient, with the living situations varying with job opportunities and income levels. Many of the newer Christians don't have a background that lent itself to strong management of personal finances, or spiritual practices about how to conduct oneself with the opposite sex. And the financial stability of the Singles is not a strong point, which is an indication that career development is needed. Some of the Family Ministry professionals could help with career strategy. In some cases it will begin with putting together a great résumé or a household budget, in other cases it will involve improved upward mobility or working on a personal business. One of the most requested areas is for help in pursuing successful relationships through the course of dating and engagement, moving towards marriage.

Mentoring of the Young

Whereas a clear number of disciples among the Singles expressed desire for mentoring in career development, finances, and dating, the Teens and Campus also expressed desire for discipling—from the Singles. The teens wished for general social exposure to members from the Single and Campus ministries - to walk with them, so to speak. The campus students were more varied in their needs. On a related note, the Teens would like more autonomy from their parents, specifically in the creation of meaningful events.

#5. Re-Envision Your Greater Cause (Know Who You Are & Where You're Going)

To the leadership, gifted visionaries, communicators, and presenters among you: When we comprehend what it is that we are doing and why we have greater stamina. Solomon pointed out that the requisite for endurance and happiness is both a vision and standards: "Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained. But happy is he who keeps the law." (Proverbs 29:18, NASB). The following story illustrates how our faith in our cause affects our joy in the journey.

The four preceding transformative measures alone will not be sufficient to instill faith and sustain us for our heavenly aspirations, though they are initially more crucial. What will soon be needed is the kind of big picture thinking that Israel received from Moses, and the first disciples received from Jesus. The following parable illustrates the importance of knowing the answer to the question, "What are you doing?"

A man came upon a construction site where three people were working. He asked the first, "What are you doing?" and the man replied: "I am laying bricks." He asked the second, "What are you doing?" and the man replied: "I am building a wall." As he approached the third, he heard him humming a tune as he worked, and asked, "What are you doing?" The man stood, looked up at the sky, and smiled, "I am building a cathedral!"

The term *cathedral thinking* is used in both religion and business, borrowing from the idea that workers who built large cathedrals shared a common purpose of constructing something that might not be completed in their lifetime. King David and the people of Israel had cathedral thinking when God provided a vision for the temple that Solomon would complete. Think of the overlapping ministries of Ezra the priest and Nehemiah the governor, and what they were able to accomplish under great adversity—the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

The New Testament saints had a sense of who and what they were striving to be/become (*identity*) and accomplish in their lifetimes (*vision*), and they were provided strategies along the way for completing shorter legs for the long journey (*missions*). In time there were apostolic letters that contained reminders that could be interpreted as mission statements. Their cause was to strategically reach as many people as possible for Christ, leaving ecclesia outposts throughout the known world, each comprised of Christ-like witnesses. As the church expanded it followed a pliable ecclesiastical template, allowing the cause to appropriate to new settings, yet not forsake its central figure and core beliefs. The most successful Christian movements throughout the ages recognized that the cause of Christ required refreshed articulation in order to enliven new audiences.

The early Boston congregation believed and acted upon the oft-repeated saying "we will reach the entire world in one generation". The result of cathedral thinking was the planting of fifty churches around the world including the LAICC, and the first churches were considered pillar churches towards the fulfillment of the greater cause. During the eighties, the Chicago Church of Christ was the earliest congregation that developed a regional plan with clear understanding of vision, identity, mission, and even something of a mission statement.

The Chicago church was roughly the size of the current Westside Sector in 1986, when the Chicago mantras were:

Vision: "Reach the entire world in one generation."

Identity: "We are a church for all people of every race, comprised of baptized disciples of Jesus."

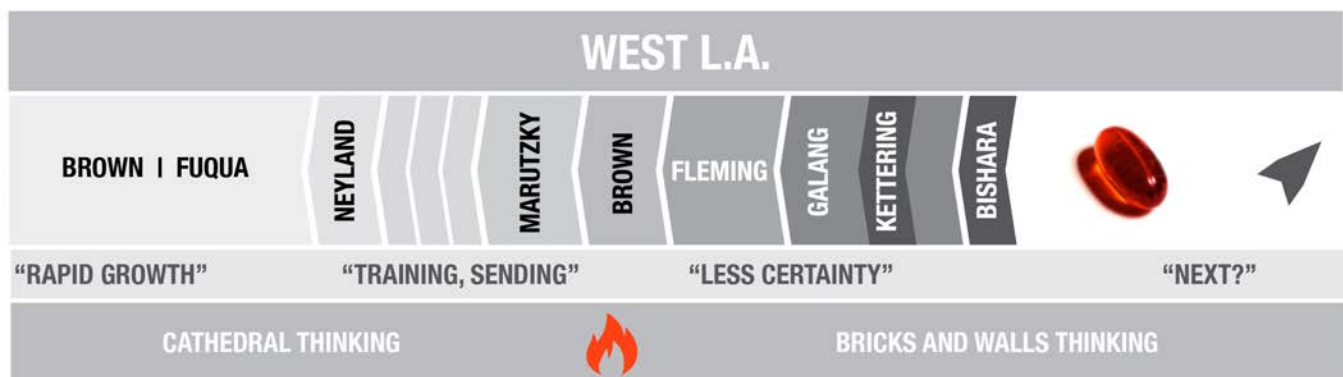
Mission: "We are pursuing Operation Saturation where, God willing, we will plant or rebuild a disciple-making church in every major Midwest city."

Mission Statement: "We are a people who go anywhere, do anything, and give up everything for Jesus."

As a result we saw large numbers of people move to Chicago from all sorts of backgrounds, and within twelve years we had fifteen discipling churches throughout the Midwest, with sizes ranging from 50 to 2,000. Even though we would definitely word one or two of the statements differently today, some of the achievements were “firsts” in Church of Christ history.

The Los Angeles Church demonstrated cathedral thinking throughout the nineties, although we can see much clearer today that there were substantial deficiencies in construction. The West LA members, in particular, had greater tolerance for so much transition because they believed in the vision of a large church. During *Discovery* many of you reported the past joy of West LA’s role in the big picture of world evangelism and the training ground for ministers, because you saw fruit of your labors. Then came intense developments beginning around 2000, resulting in the crisis of 2003.

The Westside was somewhat buffered from the intensity of the crisis because of the leadership of Tom and Kelly Brown and Andy and Tammy Fleming. However, speaking metaphorically, the crisis exposed problems in the cathedral, which is why the ministry lost most of the greater sense of cause that it had in the past. No single person or group can be blamed for this limitation. As a fellowship, we were limited in our skills to address challenges, bring healing, and recast visions following a crisis. The West’s heavy sense of nostalgia for parts of the past and lackluster vision (bricks and walls) contributed to the distress of 2013. Fortunately, the Westside is now in broad agreement about the past and present.



Following a meeting on June 6, 2014, we launched a vision task force called the GPS (God’s Positioning System) team. Its charter is to answer these questions in light of the Scriptures, LAICC and Westside history contained in the Prologue, the geography and demographics of West LA, and its various cultures:

Vision: “What are we doing?”

Mission: “What are we striving to do during the next leg of our journey?”

Mission Statement: “What distinct purpose(s) will fuel our decisions?”

Identity: “How do we wish to be known in the presence of God and man?”

The GPS team will set out to develop a one-page document that will have value for both the church and the community that describes simple statements of vision, current mission, mission statement, and identity.

DEFINITIONS

Vision. A standard definition of vision states that it “serves as a unifying focal point for everyone in the organization—like a North Star. In fact, your vision statement needs to be something you can achieve at some point in the future. In secular organizations visions are also referred to as big, hairy, audacious goals or BHAGS.”¹⁸ In church work they are called a NREG—“noble, righteous, enduring goal”¹⁹ The nation of Israel set out to move over two million men, women, and children to the home of their forefathers, a land filled with milk and honey. Going to the Promised Land was an awe-inspiring vision that took forty years to accomplish, but would have taken less time if they had stayed grounded spiritually.

Mission. It is important to distinguish between the mission (legs on the journey) and a mission statement (intentionality behind every action or decision). A mission can provide much inspiration. For instance, Paul’s intention of launching missions in unreached Gentile regions such as Spain is inspiring (Romans 15:14-29). Declarations that contain the current mission inspire because they are tangible and measurable, which is why they are memorable. The ICOC set out a mission to “plant a true church of disciples in all 170 nations with a city of over 100,000 by the year 2000.”

Roughly consider the composition of the Westside and the greater West LA area and make note of the underrepresented gaps. Who would the Holy Spirit tell us to reach out to? Remember that the Holy Spirit led the early church to reach people of all kinds.

Mission Statement. Church consultants Gil Rendle and Alice Mann state that a mission statement contains our “geographical scope (where we minister), the people we have been called to serve (target audience) and what gifts we bring to our unique ministry. Despite carrying so much information, the mission statement is to be brief, concise and memorable.” The problem with many mission statements is that they can come across as ornamental, and fall into disuse because they were worded to impress, not inspire. It is also tempting to put too much into a statement, which is why Rendle and Mann suggest using “heavily coded words that have deep meaning for members of the congregation.”²⁰

The following sentence from the apostle Paul contains most of the elements of both a mission and a mission statement—“It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation” (Romans 15:20).

Identity. Individually speaking, we are each identified with Christ. This topic relates to our collective character, as distinguished from the world around us. It is about this question: “How do we wish to be known in the presence of God and the community of West LA?” In clarifying your identity, remember to cherish characteristics that are upheld in Scripture and already part of your unique legacy - such as discipleship and ethnic/cultural diversity. You also have an opportunity to improve on Scriptural traits where you feel you have been traditionally weak. An example: “and we are striving to be bridge builders and peacemakers.”

¹⁸ Erica Olsen, *Strategic Planning For Dummies* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 111.

¹⁹ Eds. John (Jack) S. Burns, John R. Shoup, Donald C. Simmons Jr., *Organizational Leadership: Foundations and Practices for Christians* (Downers Grove: IVP Press Academic, 2014), 85.

²⁰ Gil Rendle and Alice Mann, *Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 84.

GUIDELINES

Use Your Bible. Much of the vision, mission, and identity questions are found in passages like Matthew 5:1-16, Matthew 28:16-20, John 13:34-35, 17:20-23, and Ephesians 3:1-4:16.

The Most Important Consideration: Setting out to please God with your vision statement, next mission, mission statements, and description of your identity.

Language. Does the language of the simple GPS statements inspire only a certain type of individual? Is the wording too ancient, too modern, or too ethereal sounding?

Pitfalls. There are some common hazards of going about this the wrong way, especially in following the current branding craze. Let's not envy other churches in the way that Israel wanted to be like the other nations (1 Samuel 8:1-22). When churches seek to sort out their "holes" they can find themselves endangered by the following pitfalls: copying the cool church around the corner, following one man's agenda, changing speeds and directions found in the latest books, videos, and conferences.

Identity Traps. Be aware of some of the identity traps:

- Being more concerned with the cool factor than biblical spiritual metrics
- Appealing only to a homogenous segment of the area
- Trying to replicate or compete with someone else's identity
- Focusing on form rather than substance.
- Attempting to appeal to a few rather than representing an integrated community

Wisdom. Don't overshoot by developing statements to fix everything you see that is wrong in the church. In doing so you might introduce your own blind spots or cultural preferences. Consider the principle behind Jesus' caution of pouring new wine into old wineskins (Luke 5:35-29).

Remember Your Marketable Advantages. The Westside Church has a very unique history, possesses diversity, borders four regions in the LAICC, and arguably has the greatest campuses.

Reality Check. There are significant challenges where there is a lack of mature members to carry the loads of discipling and counseling with marriages, families, and other households. Your statements should be relevant.

Develop Goals. Develop goals that flow from the GPS page. Reduce a few of the recommendations in the next sections to bite size: "Our goal is to identify about ten deacons by June, 2015"

Test drive. Invite others to read and respond to the GPS statement page. Use a variety of select members from the Westside and leaders of other nearby and growing parts of Los Angeles International Church of Christ such as North, Turning Point, Inland Empire, and Metro LA.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are not as crucial as the transformative measures, and could be described as outlooks, practices and ideas to be considered over the next eighteen months. Although some of these recommendations can be very transformative, they will only be cosmetic if the five Transformative Measures are not given the greater priority.

#1. Celebrate Your History

This recommendation has repeatedly been made and is occurring, but should be mentioned for purposes of the record. The Los Angeles International Church of Christ and the ministry now called the Westside is approaching a milestone. Twenty-five years ago this month the Los Angeles Church had its first formal church meetings, and there have been many hills and valleys over the last generation.

“ I will open my mouth with a parable; I will utter hidden things, things from of old—things we have heard and known, things our ancestors have told us. We will not hide them from their descendants; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done.” (Psalm 78:2–4, NIV)

There were praiseworthy things, wonders, and other good things discovered during the consultation. We performed a common practice called Appreciative Inquiry, which is a way of developing confidence in journeying to the future (the unknown) and carrying forward the best parts of the past (the more knowable). Since we are to carry forward parts of the past, we should know what is best about the past.

- The LAICC has experienced consistent growth since 2007, a growth of approximately 1400 members.
- You have the strongest and most functional eldership in the LAICC history.
- This last year has brought great progress in resolving old relationship issues around the church, though the work is not complete.
- The plantings out of LA are part of our legacy as we have contributed team members, lead ministers, and special contributions to Moscow (1991), Vietnam (1994), Turkey (1995), Jerusalem (1995), Lebanon (1995), Cyprus (1997), Bahrain (1998) and United Arab Emirates (1998).

#2. Ensure That Worship Reflects Your Diversity

The Westside possesses the rare feature of both ethnic and generational diversity. You are comprised of baptized members from high school age to senior citizens, including a wide variety of ethnicities: Asian, Caucasian, African American, Latino and beyond. It will be beneficial at some point to perform a more thorough demographical analysis of the church, compared and contrasted to the geographical region, but the Westside is already strong in these two areas. One of the ways to maintain a sense of diversity is for an individual or team to plan and propose capable and spiritual members from all sorts of backgrounds to provide teaching or testimonies throughout the events of the Westside.

#3. Formulate a Policy for Returning Members

The Coastal LA elders and the Westside leadership team should review the move in or transfer of anyone into the Westside that was either part of or very near either side of the disturbance of 2013. It is recommended that the elders and Westside leadership team consider a merciful review of each case to deem whether they should 1) be automatically welcomed upon agreement to the main points of the assessment - especially the grievance and decorum processes described within this document; or 2) also provide a written statement to be read at a Westside midweek, owning responsibilities for their role if applicable.

#4. Develop a Media Team

The Westside ministry could benefit from two developments. First, develop a distinct website designed with the greater West LA community in mind. This would not replace the current Westside internal website that is linked with the rest of the church. Second, the bulletin could be upgraded to reflect the next chapter of the Westside Church.

#5. Move Towards the Development of Deacons

The qualities of Deacons are the ones most needed in a maturing congregation where there are too few ecclesiastical leaders (1 Timothy 3:8-13). There are three things that properly vetted servants provide. First, they are respect worthy and temperate, which helps define a center. Second, by “holding to the deeper truths of the faith with a clear conscience” they will tend to be custodians of the faith. Third, it is great training ground for eldership. There is fresh material that has recently been developed about the proposed use of Deacons if the Westside pursues this recommendation.

#6. Continue With the Integration and Participation Between the Four Main Ministries

A task force was developed to investigate the past, present, and future of Family and Singles ministries. They are close to publishing a report of their progress, which has already been felt. Some of the small groups are going to experiment with ways to mix things up in a meaningful way. Since these measures are being considered at a regional level, it will be good to think collectively. It has been suggested that equal measures be applied to Campus and Youth and Family.

#7. Review the Region or Sector Question of Self-Determination.

The question of the Westside becoming its own region came up relatively often during *Discovery*. The ministry cannot currently support three couples, nor does it have the strength of leadership to operate through its improved but fragile state, and the sector does benefit from having ties to all five elders of the Coastal region. We recommend that the Region or Sector question be revisited within eighteen months. This assumes, of course, that the Westside is able to support itself as a distinct cost center and that the leadership has strengthened.

Here are some considerations. The “perceived” advantages of being a distinct region are that the lead minister is able to have a seat at the table among the other region leaders, more budgetary freedom, and not having to attend region meetings a few times a year that are further down the coast (Mira Costa). The “perceived” disadvantages are that there would be distance and lack of cooperation with the specialized singles ministries, lack of shared retreats and staff meetings, and having only one elder to help navigate issues that come up. There are other perceived advantages and disadvantages. But whatever the outcome (region or sector), a hybrid of the advantages of both worlds is imaginable. When it is time to visit this issue it will be a matter of looking at the interests of all the parties.

Out of respect to the larger LAICC, if every sector were to become a region it would congest the overall decision-making processes. The Westside membership hovers around 300, whereas the LAICC consists of eight regions ranging in size from just over 500 to nearly 1200, each containing sectors. When the West was a region, it contained another 200 members south of LAX. The arguments for becoming an exception would be strengthened by using features of its campuses, its geographical considerations, and the ability to be a unique bridge ministry because of its physical touch to most of the other regions.

#8. Build Bridges Among Nearby LA Ministries.

The Westside is adjacent to the North, Lifeway, Turning Point, and Metro regions. We propose that increased efforts be made in the future to share experiences with each other, swap pulpits, plan joint retreats, and invite their most effective leaders in to give fresh perspectives to the Westside. Bridging also includes getting to know lesser-known elders within the Coastal Region, and exploring ways to participate with the nearby Spanish-speaking ministries. When a problem, or hearsay of a problem, arises about a situation in another nearby ministry, you should go out of your way to trust, assume the best, and not draw conclusions unless you hear both sides. Ensure that, as far as it depends on you, the church is following the best problem-solving practices proposed in this document. If someone is curious as to why the Westside is interested in improving connections to the rest of the LAICC, you might remember what has been taught over the last six months when we said “Let’s be a bridging ministry, for bridges are better than walls and moats.”

* * *

These recommendations already have broad support and the impulses behind most of them came directly from Westside members.

FOLLOW-UP

Accomplishments

- ✓ Followed the above statements of approach and principle philosophy, which became described as the *Transforming Community Conflict Model*.
- ✓ Practiced discipling, counseling and mentoring, assisting on normal ministry topics that came up with marriages, families, and other matters.
- ✓ Developed a tight timeline of past events and detailed the progress made by previous resolution processes (Advisory Group, Vision Team), using their findings (i.e., Organizational Health Assessment) and lessons learned.
- ✓ Developed a Representation Team and a Leadership Team to play various roles in moving forward and influencing or making decisions.
- ✓ Developed a hiring process for the next lead minister of the Westside.
- ✓ Obtained and documented detailed feedback for the overall consultation from a wide variety of individuals.
- ✓ Cleared up confusion around major events and personalities related to the first months of 2013.
- ✓ Launched two task forces: the Family and Singles Partnership and the GPS (Vision) Team.
- ✓ Identified and disclosed root conditions preceding the struggles (events, structure/roles, values, and culture) and addressed them with Scripture. These findings were stated at meetings and/or covered in the earlier reports.
- ✓ Used a transitional reflective approach called Appreciative Inquiry to think backward and forward as the consultation project was completing.
- ✓ Released three Concluding Summary and Reports to the congregation.

Incomplete

- ✓ Navigating the hiring process towards identifying a couple to lead the Family Ministry and oversee the sector. (Completed July 26-27 with the hiring of Ken and Lina Chau)
- Send the reports to those who took the earlier Organizational Health Assessment and are willing to read them and provide feedback before considering them in their final form.
- The single page GPS (Vision) statements of vision, current mission, mission statement, and identity.
- Region/Sector Exception Review—sometime in the next 18 months the region or sector question should be revisited.
- Achieve documented mandate statement indicating how the individual ministries (Family, Singles, Campus, and Youth & Family) will improve partnership and achieve greater integration.

Setbacks

- We were unable to meet with everyone who initiated with us.
- Took too long to understand the culture of the LAICC, and how its satellites operate like separate churches, making them outside the purview of close cooperation.

CONCLUSION

The principal individuals mentioned within the documents have had opportunities to give feedback on the contents. Many of them have expressed general agreement to the assessment, and no one has expressed significant objections. When we handle our struggles openly and respectfully we can help others. The web version of this report might encourage other ministries who have experienced struggles similar to those that the Westside is successfully overcoming.

This broader story and assessment coincides with an important transition in our fellowship of churches. In 1992 our movement began to be referred to as the International Churches of Christ. This period could be called ICOC 1.0 (1992-2002), an era when we possessed cathedral thinking. When the crisis surrounding issues with significant leadership came to light, we went through a rough transition. Then came ICOC 2.0 (2003-present), where we went from crisis, through recovery, to a very new culture of cooperation. During that time the number of our churches increased from about 400 to 500. However, we must undergo a significant transformation if we are going to be up to the challenges of the times.

The next era, ICOC 3.0, will necessarily be symbolized by increased collaboration with our most competent and mature members. Over the next decade many of our aging ministers will be passing the torch to a younger generation, while also staying in the race. We believe it will be helpful for churches and individuals to compare notes with each other during this era of newly emerging leadership cultures and paradigms. To that effect, the general release of these reports means that the Westside story can help our fellowship usher in a new era.

* * *

Please send any comments and corrections to: stephenfstaten@gmail.com

Other Westside Consultation correspondence can be found at:

<http://coastallachurch.org/coastalla/westsidechurch/transformation/>

THE WESTSIDE CHURCH CONSULTATION

A MINISTRY OF THE LOS ANGELES INTERNATIONAL CHURCH OF CHRIST

CONCLUDING SUMMARY & REPORT

JANUARY – MARCH 2014

PART IV RESPONSE

*PREPARED BY STEVE STATEN
WITH TRICIA STATEN,
STEVE & JACQUELINE MORICI,
MARK & CATHERINE SHUMP*

PRIMARY CONSULTATION RESPONSES

During the first three Wednesdays of March, 2014 the draft conclusions of the consultation was presented to the Westside ministry, recorded, and put online in three installments—The Past, The Present and The Future.²¹ Following those presentations general feedback was obtained. A final report, *Summary of Observations and Recommendations*, will be available in pieces, and completed by the end of May, replacing preceding assessments.

We have not yet accomplished some of the main post-consultation goals: (1) the hiring of a new ministry couple, (2) deciding on current staff fits, (3) proposing various scenarios for the Westside structure within the Los Angeles Church, and (4) developing ideas for closer partnership with Family and Singles Ministries. A Westside survey will be used in the determination of these topics.

Meanwhile, we are posting more specific feedback to the three-month project from those Westside members who were interviewed during Discovery. The following responses were selected for three purposes. First, to mirror back what we frequently heard in terms of strong and weak points. We used the clearest and most helpful statements to express weaknesses felt by more than one person. Singular views at any end of the spectrum were omitted. The second purpose was to encourage you with broadly reported progress and also be clear about any unfinished business. We made sure that there were many voices and perspectives. And the third purpose is for professional reasons because this public record might end up in the hands of other ministers who will consider our services. As such, we will put both supportive quotes, main critiques as well as share the lessons learned in the closing comments. The primary responses solicited were:

- 1. What do you feel about the three-month process? (Strong/Weak)**
- 2. What stands out the most to you from the assessment presentations?**
- 3. How do you feel about the Staten's work?**

²¹ <http://coastallachurch.org/coastalla/westsidechurch/transformation/>

1. WHAT DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE THREE-MONTH PROCESS?

STRENGTHS

- “ I felt the clear and open communication and the biblical framework Steve used to teach from were the strengths of this process.” —Carol Bray
- “ We feel that overall the process was extremely effective and encouraging. Steve approached the pending issues carefully by meeting with people, listening, gathering information, and carefully analyzing the situations. He did not rush into conclusions but took time to investigate.” —Paul & Charlene Nagakura
- “ Organizational dynamics and processes clearly rooted and anchored in scripture ... Clear presentation of facts and accounts, an obvious display of great preparation by consultants, transparent updates on progress or lack thereof, a well thought-out outreach plan (getting the perspective of campus, singles, marrieds, former Westside sector disciples now in Turning Point).” —Carlos Santini
- “ Your experience from previous situations helped in communicating hope and a sense that there is light at the end of the tunnel.” —Ray Brown
- “ It’s definitely a fair process that is inclusive, meaning that everyone from all sides of a dispute are welcome to provide their comments and unfettered viewpoints. By the end of this process, I highly doubt that anyone would say that it wasn’t conducted in a fair manner or that they didn’t have an opportunity to voice their issues of concern.” —Dat Do
- “ I believe having an outside consultant team come in with “no skin in the game” was a great step in the right direction by the church which showed us we are committed to resurrecting the Westside. Walking us through your Breaking Bad series had tremendous positive impact on our members in my opinion. Your exploration, defining, breaking down the mediation process, as well as giving us practicals in mediation, forgiveness and reconciliation that has given me the tools to work through everyday conflicts as well as future conflicts too.” —James Lem
- “ Steve’s Bible knowledge; awareness of dynamics within the LA church; familiarity with many participants; methodical, objective approach; Tricia’s calm demeanor and approachability, material on conflict, personality, apologia.” —John Thorne
- “ Having written communication/documentation, transparency when uncovering new information, and being open to discover additional “issues” and finding solutions for them” —Nancy Priestley
- “ You provided necessary leadership, taught to educate all parties, provided confidence an faith, validated the pain and grief, the closure with Chairezes, Shumps, Mains, Pellizeris.” —Mark Shaw
- “ [The] objectivity, thoroughness, follow-through, proven process, teaching and preaching materials were relevant and effective.” —Natalie Do
- “ A well thought out organized plan that was communicated, followed, soliciting prayer and fasting and plenty of opportunity for feedback.” —Adrienne Newsom

WEAKNESSES

“

The amount of time that transpired without knowing the dynamics between Turning Point and the Westside Sector.” —C. Santini

“

[There was the need for] providing shepherding for those whose leaders left the congregation.” — Nancy Priestley

“

I wish more time could be taken in the delivery [of the Sunday Breaking Bad materials] and also the time line could be lengthened. I would consider is more time spent on each part because we need more time to dissect and download information!” —James Lem

“

The lack of an initial assessment to reveal that consultants had only limited authority (family ministry, not singles or campus or TP or leadership that had been removed from the West).” — John Thorne

“

I think the explanations made by Marco, the Shumps and the Mains should have come at the first midweek and an open discussion for questions and answers follow.” —Robyn Horton

“

It would have been great if all the ministries in the West (including Singles, Campus, Teens) were together for all the lessons beginning to end.” —Angie Nakamoto

“

One weakness was the lack of clear communication about the specific next tasks and meetings. It's possible that this was lost in the amount of communication coming at us—but I would have liked to see a clear central resource (website?) that included a calendar and updated status (blog?). ” —Tim Priestley

“

I felt like it took a little long to get to what happened.” —Susan Johnson

“

Looking back, I see how all the lessons and pieces fit together but going through it was confusing.”—Cindi Whitcomb

“

The teens would have preferred that you asked them how did they feel about how the teen ministry was going and to ask them without the Teen Ministers or Elders being present. It will it would still be helpful if you do that in May when you come back, that way the new ministers and current teen leaders can take the teens cares and concerns into consideration.” —Tony Newsom

“

Lack of involvement of Turning Point members (former Westside). And there was “sin” that affected the church, not addressed fully in three months.” —Angela Williams

2. WHAT STANDS OUT THE MOST TO YOU FROM THE ASSESSMENT PRESENTATIONS?

- “What stood out the most were the historical facts which were presented to the congregation in an unprecedentedly transparent fashion. These facts included the root cause of our current situation in the Westside Church. The events that led up to our members' dissatisfaction with central leadership were presented in an unbiased manner, rather than in an anecdotal manner that favored ministry leaders. The Organizational Health Assessment (OHA) certainly helped to dispel certain false notions that the Family Ministry had started some kind of rebellion because married disciples were being unspiritual. ... Our members can now look forward to the future with anticipation and with a certain level of reassurance that we're not doomed to repeating the same conflict.” —Dat Do
- “Seeing the Timeline clarified what has happened in the past few years and helped us to see where we need to go. Recognition and explanation of what really happened to us as a church was necessary and helpful. This is what we expected for a long time but it was a relief to see it fully explained for the first time.” —Paul & Charlene Nagakura
- “The data was tremendous and rewarding; I wished more persons could have been present to experience the dynamics, the knowledge and the benefits.” —Patricia Butts
- “I appreciate the timeline of events. It really hit home the brewing of the perfect storm.” —Susan Johnson
- “What stands out the most have been the clear timetables presented, along with some incredible use of real stories, analogies, and scripture with the hopes of preparing us to be conflict competent both now and in the future. Also, the OHA was presented in the best possible way!” —Carlos & Alejandra Santini
- “It was healthy to clearly identify the problems, pain, timeline, players involved, current situation and the dynamics involved in how things devolved.” —Mark Shaw
- “Results and transparency of the survey stood out. It is interesting and humbling how we can go on for years without assessing these issues. It's important to have an "objective outsider" - outside looking in, come in and offer input/disciplining. ... I especially appreciate the resources and information, and the Bible studies for personal assessment.” —Angie Nakamoto
- “Clearing up misinformation and misunderstandings. I learned very much just hearing directly from Stuart. Marco's sharing was also very powerful and long overdue.” —Catherine Shump
- “Loved the observations and reports and the personal sharing. The OHA was very well presented, although discussion of the results still need to happen.” —Angela Williams
- “One thing that stood out was the analysis that we had a culture of directive leadership that moved to collaborative with the Flemings—then back to directive. That was a great insight. Very simple, very clear. I also personally liked the sharing from the Shumps, Stuart and Marco.” —Tim Priestley
- “I really appreciated how much care went in to those midweeks. I thought the honest communication, clear explanations and biblical teachings was very strengthening and encouraging.” —Carol Bray
- “Simple and practical information being REVEALED and not being covered up or concealed. Disciples appreciate the truth and tend to draw back if they feel something is not being fully disclosed.” —Tony Newsom

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE STATEN'S WORK?

“ I really am grateful for all the hard work and careful and thoughtful planning from the Statens. They have a great and needed ministry. Honestly, the LA Staff Leadership group needs what the Statens have been doing with the Westside group...” —Carol Bray

“ In my 20 years of being a Christian, I have never seen or heard such an absolute perfect blend of industry and biblical best practices rolled into one. Brilliant and faith building work. I have communicated my interest in becoming an apprentice of this much needed approach. THANK YOU from the bottom of our hearts!” —Carlos Santini

“ The Statens have been a great source of encouragement and guidance in this process. I appreciate their openness, candidness, and desire to see the resolution of conflict.” —Scott Horton

“ I have to admit, I was skeptical at first. I certainly didn't think that the Statens would be able to effectuate meaningful change considering our church's long-standing culture and paradigm long-held by the old guard, so to speak. However, I'm pleasantly surprised to see how impactful their work has been already.” —Dat Do

“ I feel you and Tricia's work here has been exceptional! Your material, topics, presentations have been right on point. ... I realize we still have a ways to go, however, the future of our church and it's members looks so much brighter than six months ago even four months ago!” —James Lem

“ I believe that they have done a phenomenal job. Steve has displayed incredible competence in communicating biblical principles of resolution. I have come to completely trust his reasoning and thinking to be biblically sound. He has done an excellent job in showing us how to stay calm and trust the process.” —Jason Williams

“ We would never have survived the Westside spiritual earthquake. Steve and Tricia are expert builders and have worked tirelessly. I am grateful for Steve's long-term relationships and reputation, it helped in the process. I feel protected, heard and supported by the work done here.” —Robyn Horton

“ From the very beginning, you have been open, humble, real, and loving. I deeply and sincerely appreciate all of your hard work. It didn't feel like it was "your job" or "assignment." You have shown an empathy, sincere love, and sheer understanding, honestly, I have felt from a few leaders. Your work has changed my mindset about conflict overall - there are many facets and it can be sharpening and maturing. It can be good, bad, and ugly. Your work is transforming, educational, insightful, comforting, validating, encouraging, strengthening, and godly. Timely. Necessary. Everyone needs to hear what you have to say. Thank you from the depth of my heart for being genuine, trusting, respectful and caring. Thank you for truly listening and helping us ... me.” —Angie Nakamoto

“ I appreciate the Staten's expertise as a consultant, being level headed to assess the crisis. Being willing to dig-deep and open “Pandora's box” in areas that were not dealt with correctly before.” —Nancy Priestley

“ Excellent job! There are so few people (I really can't think of anyone) that could have come in here and produced a lasting positive impact—with such a wide variety of views and feelings of the people.” —Tim Priestley

“ I love that you guys didn’t come in trying to please anyone but God ... you have a great balance of grace and truth.” —Susan Johnson

“ I feel great about the Staten's work. They utilize a proven process to properly identify key issues of our organization and follow the process to thoroughly analyze the collected data to come up with viable solutions. They are objective, fair and consistent. Since the Staten's started working with the ministry in Westside, members are becoming more hopeful that issues will be resolved and new, high quality minister will be hired soon ... Along with many members, I personally feel very faithful and excited that our ministry will thrive and do better than ever in the next few months.” —Natalie Do

“ I also feel that the Staten’s showing support and helping the parents feel that they had their support liberated many parents and gave them faith that a new and improved youth and family ministry could be built here in the West Ministry and the parents did not have to leave this ministry for it to happen.” —Tony Newsom

“ I really appreciate the way you came in and loved everyone. You're both a safe place for us and listened to us during this time of need.” —Eric Nakamoto

“ The Staten’s work was truly refreshing and brought much hope to our ministry. They demonstrated exemplary devotion to resolve conflict through a thorough discovery process. In doing so they have encouraged a ministry that had been hurt and losing hope. They were impartial in every way and seemed to give timely challenge to proper parties. On personal level, they connected with us and enjoyed their fellowship. We highly recommend their professional service to anyone or any organization with serious conflicts.” —Paul & Charlene Nagakura

“ This has been such a great process and biblically led. It has had great sensitivity to all the emotions while keeping a forward moving focus.” —Myoko Williams

“ Great heartfelt lessons, and also impartiality that was so needed. Suggestion: Need a concurrent program that helps meet the needs of the affected staff, which were running pretty ragged.” —Angela Williams

“ I am amazed at what you have accomplished. ... The sermons, midweeks, leader’s meetings, were all part of bringing about this change—and your humble, inclusive, respectful way of interacting with everyone. It has also helped that you talked about the West in a positive light, how much you love the church here, it’s legacy, etcetera.” —Catherine Shump

“ The amount of data and learning materials presented has been as though we have all gone through a Master’s course in only a few weeks.” —Patricia Butts

“ Overall the Statens did an amazing job. I think they were thorough, made themselves available to anyone that wanted and needed to talk and that was super helpful! I really appreciate all the time and energy they poured into our sector. They gave us their hearts and we needed to feel loved and believed in.” —Cindi Whitcomb

COMMENTS

I want to thank the people from the broader advisory group that responded, as well as anyone else that we met with during discovery.

The positive comments stand for themselves and I would like close the loop on some of the helpful “critical thinking” that are included in your comments. We have covered some of these topics before but it is important to have a response on record. There were two challenges in this project that I knew about but significantly underestimated.

First, the Westside was part of a region that was part of a church that was not built like any other that I am aware of. The recurring question is “Is LA eight churches or is it one church?” When people move from one region to another, sometimes with left over grievances, it feels like different churches with different protocols, and little or no communication. This can create complex issues, which I did not foresee.

Secondarily, last December we sent a two-page Letter of Intent and Engagement with a one-page proposed plan for former members, the ones that we interviewed. I also mentioned it verbally to some of the folks that left for Turning Point. In January there was little or no interest from principle parties to work with me on resolving matters in the Westside and it appeared some former members were somehow spooked before we even arrived in. To this day we are not exactly sure why. As a result, one of the critiques that I received was that the process “did not provide the resolution with those who left” is accurate. I regret the amount of time it took to comprehend this conundrum and I feel all the wiser from this mistake of following my assumptions.

Two other things that I would do differently is to get written clarifying “apologia” from accused parties from the onset. Just as the comments under “Weaknesses” stated, we could have cleared up certain pieces of the Shump, Chairez, Mains and Pellizeri situations earlier. And a number of people suggested a standalone website for the process. Although we had highly communicative area on the Westside website with timelines, correspondence, teaching and updates, it’s web address was long, which felt archaic. Lesson learned. Thank you.

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

From Al Baird, *elder*

8/11/2014

I want to take this opportunity to share about the outstanding service that Steve and Tricia Staten provided to the Westside Sector of the Los Angeles Church of Christ for about six months between late 2013 and early summer of 2014.

Through an unfortunate series of events and misunderstandings, a crisis developed in the leadership of this group of 300+ disciples. During this time, I served as an elder for the group. For a time, I attempted to mediate the 'sides' and perspectives, but came to realize that those involved did not perceive me as neutral (and in retrospect, I was not totally neutral because I was too close to those involved).

We asked Steve & Tricia to come and help. And help they did. Not only did Steve's training and experience help, but the fact that they could approach the issues with no emotional involvement and could not only be neutral and unbiased; but equally important, those involved felt they were both fair and equipped to help bring resolution and healing.

We are very thankful for the Statens and the help they brought to the Westside. Should you need help in resolving conflict among disciples, please consider using these experts,

Sincerely,

Al Baird, elder

From John Mannel and Marty Fuqua, *elders*

8/13/2014

To Whom It May Concern;

The intent of this letter is to express gratitude and appreciation from the Los Angeles International Church of Christ to Steve and Tricia Staten for their help, support and professional insight over the past year.

The Los Angeles Church covers a vast geographic area with a massive population. Our regional ministries provide diversity that meets the unique needs of the variety of cultures and backgrounds that are in abundance in this great metropolitan area.

By the end of 2012 a conflict occurred in one of our ministries that exposed a breach of trust and weakness in relationships between the leadership and a significant number of members. Though some progress was being made it became apparent that our internal resources could not be dedicated to the extent necessary to bring the situation to a positive resolution and time was moving on. As a result in the summer of 2013 Steve and Tricia Staten were contacted and asked to work with us to bring both their professionalism with their unique skill set and training in conflict management and an independent point of view for us to best move forward.

In September of 2013 the Staten's came to LA and began what would be a ten month process, during that time a cumulative total of six months would be spent living in LA and working with the specific ministry to help resolve the issues. The Staten's work ethic was admirable, they worked tirelessly to meet with members and staff to listen and provide guidance. During this process the leadership of the ministry underwent change and the Staten's stepped in to the leadership role for several months. Steve's transparency and documentation of the process helped everyone rebuilt trust that had been damaged. And he became involved in planning of the search for a new ministry leader for the group.

As for the LA Leadership, we felt a deep sense of relief and confidence due to the trust and devoted focus that the Staten's provided. The ministry that they worked with has recently hired a new couple to lead them and everyone attending their meetings can feel the excitement and unity in the fellowship of this ministry.

We fully endorse the Staten's in their work and we are grateful for their help both to the ministry worked with as well as the teaching and training we all benefited from during this process.

Sincerely,

The Los Angeles International Church of Christ