

Congregational Renewal in the SED

In the Southeastern District it was decided to develop a process of congregational renewal for several reasons.

1. We desired a process that was Biblically and confessionally grounded, that would focus on Word and Sacrament ministry and would emphasize spiritual disciplines rather than a programmatic approach to transformation and revitalization.
2. We desired a process that would be affordable to congregations. At the same time we understand that without a significant investment on the part of the congregation there is little ownership of the process and therefore little accountability for the process or the results.
3. We desired a process that would not focus on church growth metrics as indicators of success. While numbers are important, we believe that the focus needs to be on the impact that the congregation is making on the community as well as the spiritual growth that is taking place in the lives of the congregational members.
4. We desired a process that was flexible enough to deal with the diversity of demographic, social, and economic contexts in which our congregations are located as well as the unique gifts of each congregation. While there are common elements that are utilized in most congregations, even these can be adapted to the individual situation.
5. We desired a process that did not stigmatize some congregations as malfunctioning and hold up other congregations as “super congregations”. We wanted a process that would be applicable to all congregations, recognizing that every congregation has potential for growth and enhancing its ministry.

The steps that we have used in the pilot process have been:

1. We make an initial presentation to the congregation explaining what congregational renewal is, what is involved, and what the commitments are. The congregation then decides if it wishes to participate in the first phase of congregational renewal.
2. The congregation completes a self-analysis profile and submits it to the renewal team.
3. A member of the renewal team meets with the congregational leadership to complete a renewal readiness assessment. This assists the team in getting to know the congregation and how much work to anticipate in preparation.
4. Materials are requested from the congregation and studied by the renewal team. These include the congregation’s constitution, demographics, history, web site (if there is one) and other materials as appropriate.
5. The congregation participates in a spiritual life retreat, followed by at least thirty days of Bible study, prayer and preparation for the visit of the renewal team. At the same time the team is also

praying for the congregation, its ministry and its pastor, as well as continuing to study the materials the team members have received.

6. A team, usually three persons, meets with the pastor and his wife, a separate session with the leaders, and enough focus groups so that every member of the congregation has an opportunity to meet with the team. On this weekend the team leads the adult Bible class and a service of confession, repentance and absolution, as well as preaching the sermon. Following the service(s) a preliminary report is made to the congregation of what the team has learned. Usually within two weeks a written report is sent to the congregation with a follow-up on site presentation.

7. Following a time of prayer the congregation decides whether to participate in phase two of the process which involves a signed covenant to commit to two years of activity in renewal.