



**Susan Beaumont, Senior Consultant**  
**The Alban Institute**

# Ministry Model Assessment

## The Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church

**03/24/09**

A. Background	2
B. Project Scope	2
C. Consulting Approach	3
D. Findings: Survey	4
E. Findings: Town Hall Listening Sessions	21
F. Findings: CLT, Cabinet and Staff Listening Sessions	28
G. Findings: Fruitfulness Indicators	29
H. Consultant Observations	33
I. Recommendations	36

## **A. Background**

In May of 2005 the Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church authorized creation of a Strategic Mapping Team, comprised of clergy and laity and chaired by the Bishop. The team was charged with developing recommendations to help the Conference become more effective in “making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world”.

The Strategic Mapping Team proposed a new conference vision, mission, key drivers, core beliefs and related recommendations. A document outlining these new features of Conference life was adopted at a called session of the Conference on November 19, 2005. The Conference adopted the team’s recommendations overwhelmingly and enthusiastically.

The called session also authorized reorganizing the Conference into nine Districts, created a Center for Congregational Excellence, a Center of Clergy Excellence, a Center for Missional Excellence and a Center for Connectional Resources. A Mapping Team was formed to develop additional recommendations concerning further conference restructuring, enhanced accountability within the Conference, and realignment of the Conference budget.

The Mapping Team completed its work between January and April of 2006. Ultimately the team recommended the adoption of five resolutions:

1. A Model for Ministry
2. Conference Rules
3. Assessment for Model for Ministry and District Alignment
4. Evidence of Fruitfulness
5. Composition of the Core Leadership Team

## **B. Project Scope**

A key element of the Conference Model for Ministry involved creating a culture of accountability. The Vision and Mission, which were adopted in November 2005, are the foundation of accountability. The Core Leadership Team (CLT) and all other Conference bodies are charged with engaging in ongoing assessment of their ministries.

A vital component of accountability is periodic assessment of the Model for Ministry itself. The Texas Conference hired Susan Beaumont, Senior Consultant with the Alban

Institute, to conduct an assessment in order to provide objective data and recommendations to the Conference concerning:

- Progress in achieving the Conference Vision and Mission
- Fruitfulness of the overall structure
- Effectiveness and efficiency of the Model for Ministry
- Continuous improvement of the Model
- Correction of any deficiencies identified

### C. Consulting Approach

The assessment process was designed in the late summer of 2008. Data gathering occurred in October and November of 2008. Assessment included the following data gathering techniques:

- **One-on-one interviews:** Fifteen leaders in the conference were interviewed to help clarify project scope and to assist in the design of data gathering techniques. These interviews were conducted on Aug. 19-20, 2008. Interviews were conducted with the Bishop, Center Directors, several District Superintendents, several members of the Core Leadership Team, and several Appointed Pastors.
- **Data Review:** The consultant examined a ten year trend in conference financial indicators, and 2007/2008 conference-wide measures defined in the "Evidence of Fruitfulness" document; including professions of faith, worship attendance, hands on mission and connectional generosity. *The consultant did not audit the data for accuracy, but relied on the integrity of data that was presented to her.*
- **Assessment Review:** The consultant reviewed conference generated documents describing internal assessments prepared by the conference in 2007 and 2008; seeking to evaluate the depth and nature of self assessment taking place within the Conference.
- **Administration of an online survey:** An online survey sought to establish benchmark indicators of the conference operating culture. Participants were asked to respond to statements describing the degree to which the culture of the conference has changed/is changing in alignment with new core values, mission and vision. The survey was administered by the Alban Institute via Survey Monkey. The survey instrument was available on line for three weeks in November 2008. Participants could access the survey through the Conference web page. Two hundred thirty

five people began the survey and one hundred and eighty two (77.4%) completed it.

- **Listening Sessions:** Town hall gatherings were conducted in five Conference locations. Separate sessions were scheduled in each of these five locations for clergy and lay leadership (for a total of 10 sessions). District Superintendents were asked to identify and invite 12-15 people to each session, for a target group of 120 participants. 91 people responded to the invitation and participated in the district level town hall meetings.

The consultant also conducted listening sessions with the Cabinet, the Core Leadership Team, and non-management employees from the Centers for Congregational Excellence, Clergy Excellence, Missional Excellence, and Connectional Resources.

All listening sessions were conducted in October of 2008. In total, 136 people participated in listening sessions.

## D. Findings-Survey

Survey participants were asked to answer 52 questions about the model for ministry and the re-organization. The survey was divided into five sections as follows:

Clarity and impact of mission	3 questions
Level of satisfaction with tasks performed by the Conference	20 questions
Organizational effectiveness of the Conference	11 questions
Efforts and progress in the five fruitful practices	5 questions
Participant demographics	13 questions

235 people started the survey and 182 (77.4%) completed it. It should be noted that we had no way to control the statistical accuracy of survey participation. The survey was posted online and various efforts were made to encourage people to complete the survey. However, we did not use any control mechanisms to target a control response group or to manage a random sampling process.

This methodology of online data collection does not lend itself to making statistical claims about the extent to which this data is, or is not, representational of the entire Conference. What we can do with this data is explore relative areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and we can draw conclusions about the general direction of opinion. We can speak fairly accurately about which aspects of the reorganization and the new model for ministry are more favorably received and which aspects are less favorably received by Conference members.

## Who completed the survey?

The following charts summarize the demographic data that participants chose to share. This data suggest that the survey was completed by a wide range of participants in Conference life; covering a broad spectrum of geographic, contextual, age, gender and role diversity. The majority of people who responded do not currently serve in leadership on District Ministry Teams or on the Core Leadership Team of the Conference.

The reader will note a significant number of people who chose not to respond to the demographic questions. Two factors should be kept in mind when speculating why people chose not to respond. First, the demographic section of the survey was the final (5<sup>th</sup>) section. It is likely that some people simply became disinterested in the survey at this point, shared what they wanted to share, and simply exited the survey. However, a number of explanations were offered in the comment section indicating a basic level of mistrust about sharing demographic information. Some people expressed trepidation about sharing identifiers that might allow someone to track a specific response back to an individual or a congregation.

<b>What district is your congregation in?</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Frequency</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Central North	15.3%	26
Central South	14.7%	25
East	9.4%	16
North	11.8%	20
Northwest	11.2%	19
South	11.8%	20
Southeast	7.1%	12
Southwest	10.0%	17
West	7.1%	12
I Don't Know	1.8%	3
<b><i>answered question</i></b>		<b>170</b>
<b><i>skipped question</i></b>		<b>65</b>

<b>Which setting best describes your congregation?</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Frequency</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Urban	30.2%	45
<b>Suburban</b>	<b>39.6%</b>	<b>59</b>
Rural	30.2%	45
Other (please explain)		40
<i>answered question</i>		<b>149</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>86</b>

Most of those who classified themselves in the “other” category on this question went on to describe a context somewhere between a suburban and a rural classification (large town, county seat, etc.)

<b>What is the number of people who worship in your congregation on an average weekend?</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Frequency</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Less than 50	15.0%	26
50-150	26.6%	46
<b>150-400</b>	<b>31.2%</b>	<b>54</b>
400-800	16.2%	28
800-1,200	8.7%	15
More than 1,200	2.3%	4
<i>answered question</i>		<b>173</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>62</b>

<b>What is your role?</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Frequency</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Lay Leader	16.5%	21
<b>Active Clergy-Elder</b>	<b>66.1%</b>	<b>84</b>
Active Clergy-Deacon	2.4%	3
Active Clergy-Local Pastor	12.6%	16
Retired clergy	2.4%	3
Other (please specify)		47
<i>answered question</i>		<b>127</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>108</b>

When this question was written the intention was that the lay leader category would be the designated response for all non-clergy Conference members. However, many Conference members who function in lay leadership did not select this category, viewing the term “lay leader” as the description of a specific role in the church that they do not hold. Many chose to use the “Other” category instead to register their participation. All of those who classified themselves in the “other” category provided role descriptions that identified them as lay leadership. If we combine the totals for “other” and “lay leaders” and recalculate the %’s the results indicate that 39% of survey respondents were lay leaders and 61% were clergy.

<b>What is your Gender?</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Frequency</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Male	59.1%	101
Female	40.9%	70
<i>answered question</i>		<b>171</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>64</b>

<b>What is your age?</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Frequency</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Under 20	0.0%	0
20-24	1.2%	2
25-34	7.6%	13
35-44	12.9%	22
45-54	30.0%	51
55-64	35.3%	60
65-74	11.2%	19
75 or older	1.8%	3
<i>answered question</i>		<b>170</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>65</b>

<b>Are you a Conference staff member?</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Frequency</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Yes	6.1%	10
No	93.9%	155
<i>answered question</i>		<b>165</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>70</b>

<b>Are you currently serving on a Conference ministry team or committee?</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Frequency</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Yes	37.1%	65
No	62.9%	110
<i>answered question</i>		<b>175</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>60</b>

<b>Do you currently serve on a District ministry team or committee?</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Frequency</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Yes	39.7%	71
No	60.3%	108
<i>answered question</i>		<b>179</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>56</b>

## How do people feel about mission clarity, ownership and impact?

<b>The Mission of the Texas Annual Conference is to equip congregations to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world to the glory of God. How clear and compelling is this mission?</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Frequency</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
I didn't know that this was the mission of the Conference	1.4%	3
The mission is clear, but not compelling	17.0%	37
The mission is compelling, but it isn't clear	16.5%	36
The mission is both clear and compelling	65.1%	142
Other (please specify)		25
<i>answered question</i>		<b>218</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>17</b>

<b>How well informed do you feel about the Conference's new model for ministry (i.e. key drivers, core beliefs and new organizational structure)?</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Frequency</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
I've never heard of it	4.9%	11
I've heard of it, but it isn't relevant to me	8.9%	20
I've heard of it, but feel like I need to know more	31.1%	70
I've been well informed	55.1%	124
Other (please specify)		19
<i>answered question</i>		<b>225</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>10</b>

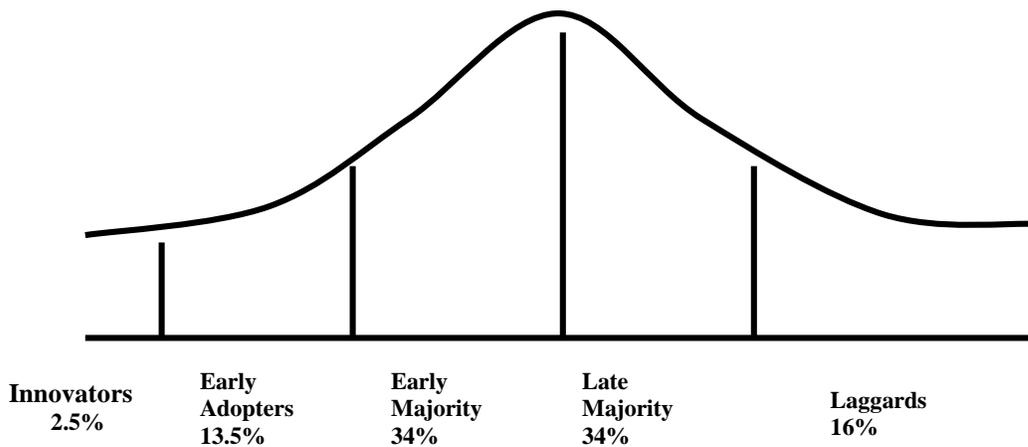
More specific analysis of sub group responses revealed the following variations in ownership and clarity about mission and the model for ministry:

- Lay leadership finds the mission more clear and compelling than clergy
- Clergy report feeling more informed about the model for ministry than lay leadership.
- The mission is most clear and compelling to urban churches (73% affirm that statement) and least clear and compelling to rural churches (49% )
- The Conference mission is most compelling for churches in the 50-150 attendance range (73%) and 150-400 range (65%). It is least compelling for the large churches with over 400 in worship (48%) and the smallest churches with less than 50 in worship (56%).

- Respondents between the ages of 55-64 find the mission more compelling (69%) than those between the ages of 35-44 (50%)

<b>To what extent is the new model for ministry impacting the mission of the Conference?</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Frequency</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
There is negative mission impact	12.7%	27
There is no change in mission impact	16.0%	34
It is too soon to tell	33.3%	71
There is some positive mission impact	35.2%	75
There is strong positive mission impact	2.8%	6
<i>answered question</i>		<b>213</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>22</b>

Before reflecting upon the data about missional impact, let us consider additional interpretive terminology. Within organizational settings change is adopted at different rates by individuals and groups. In his book, *The Diffusion of Innovations*, Everett Rogers describes a consistent observable response to how different types of people react and respond to change initiatives across organizations.



<b>Innovators</b>	Innovators represent about 2.5% of people. They are eager pursuers of information and the possibility of change. They tend to have a wide spectrum of friends and acquaintances. They are ready to take risks on behalf of the organization.
-------------------	--

Early Adopters	About 13.5% of people in any organization are the opinion setters. In most organization the early adopters tend to be younger and better educated, they too relish new information and opportunity and are quick to adopt change once the change makes sense to them.
Early Majority	This group represents about 34% of an organization. They join in only when they are certain that a new idea will succeed. They are the pragmatists of the organization.
Late Majority	The late majority also represents about 34% of an organization. At first, they are skeptical about change. Some are “the guardians of tradition.” They eventually join into a change effort, if the majority of others have done so and the change is proving itself worthwhile.
Laggards	About 16% of the people in any organization are diehards. They tend to operate with smaller circles of friends and experiences. They seek out people who agree with their opinion. Change is extremely difficult for this group and they may never support a change initiative.

Consider how Roger’s theory might inform the interpretation of this survey data, particularly with regard to the question about the missional impact of the new model for ministry.

- One might attach Roger’s label of Innovator to the 2.8% of Conference survey respondents who perceive strong missional impact. These responders were probably positively oriented to change from the start and have been eagerly looking for signs of positive change.
- Next, consider the 35.2% of respondents who believe that the reorganization has produced some positive missional impact. Perhaps we can surmise that Roger’s Early Adopters and half of the Early Majority make up this category of response. These are the opinion setters in the Conference, and some of the pragmatists who are beginning to feel hopeful about the reorganization
- The 33.3% of survey respondents who believe it is too soon to tell may represent the remaining half of the Early Adopters and the first half of the Late Majority. This group is still waiting to form an opinion about the viability of the change.
- The 16% who report having experienced no change may represent the other half of Roger’s Late Majority; not yet ready to believe the change is real or possible.
- Finally, one might assign Roger’s definition of Laggard to the 12.7% of survey respondents who believe that the reorganization has had negative missional impact. This group may never experience positive feelings about this reorganization effort.

Overall, this distribution of responses seems positive, given the fairly limited period of time that the Conference has been living into this new paradigm. It suggests that the opinion setters and many of the pragmatists are convinced of the model's viability. The skeptics and guardians of the tradition are not negative about the change, but they are still waiting to see if the overall reorganization is going to have any real impact.

Identifiable sub-groups within the Conference showed some variation in their perception of impact:

- Elders are more positive about the impact of the model than either local pastors or lay leadership
- Urban churches report the most positive impact from the new model for ministry (55% said there has been some or strong positive impact) compared to suburban and rural churches (41%)
- The new model is having the strongest impact in the 50-150 attendance range (44.2% who say that there has been some or strong positive impact), followed by the 150-400 range (37.3%), the <50 range (34.6%), and finally in the 400-800 size range (30.8%)

## **How effectively are the tasks of the Conference fulfilled?**

In the design phase of this project we identified 21 basic tasks of the Conference that represent the core work of the Cabinet, Core Leadership team, and the Four Centers for Excellence. Survey respondents were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with the emphasis that each task currently receives, choosing from these evaluative labels:

- Needs more emphasis
- Somewhat satisfied with the present level of emphasis
- Very satisfied with the present level of emphasis
- Receives too much emphasis
- Don't know or don't have an opinion

First, it is worth noting that evaluative choice "receives too much emphasis" was not the predominant choice for any of the 21 basic tasks.

The following chart force ranks the 21 basic tasks of the Conference in the order of expressed satisfaction. The percentages shown reflect the percentage of respondents who were "somewhat" or "very" satisfied with the present level of emphasis on the task:

<b>Tasks of the Conference</b>	<b>% who are satisfied with emphasis</b>
Implementing and monitoring Safe Sanctuary Programs	76.1%
Training congregations for disaster response inside and outside of the Annual Conference	70.1*
Equipping teams for mission and service domestically	65.3
Encouraging the payment of apportionments to ensure adequate resources for mission and ministry	64.2
Equipping teams for mission and service internationally	59.4
Providing fiscal oversight and property management for the Texas Annual Conference	58.8
Coordinating pensions, health benefits, and equitable compensation	57.1
Setting quality standards for pastoral leadership	56.6
Creating an environment of accountability for clergy	55.7
Developing clergy who are growing in their leadership, personal well-being, and theology.	54.1
Enlisting vision-oriented leaders to serve the Conference that reflect the full diversity of the Conference	52.7
Providing effective operation and maintenance of the Conference Service Center facility	52.6
Recording and preserving the history of the Conference	51.2
Creating an environment of support for clergy	48.3
Equipping leaders to engage social justice issues	46.3
Equipping and supporting new church start leaders with tools and resources	45.3
Equipping congregations to identify and encourage persons called and gifted for pastoral ministry	45.2

<b>Tasks of the Conference</b>	<b>% who are satisfied with emphasis</b>
Equipping local congregations with tools and resources for transformation	42.3
Assisting pastors, districts and local congregations with tools to develop lay leadership	37.9
Promoting vital camping ministries throughout the Conference	35.9
Raising leaders for ministry in and to diverse communities (i.e. Hispanic, Asian, African-American, Native American)	30.7

\* It should be noted that this survey was administered two months after the Conference experienced a direct hit from hurricane Ike. This high level of satisfaction with disaster response, so close to the event itself, indicates a very strong disaster response from the Conference in the aftermath of the hurricane.

It is interesting to note that while the mission-related activities are perceived as having sufficient attention, the leadership, clergy support and development issues all seem to hover around 50% or lower. The following corollary list illustrates the perceived need for increased emphasis. This chart highlights the **five tasks of the conference that respondents feel need the most increased emphasis**. (Note: this chart isn't a simple reversal of the above chart because of the number of people who didn't know or have an opinion about a specific task, and the small percentage of people who felt that various tasks received too much emphasis.)

<b>Tasks of the conference that need more emphasis</b>	<b>% who believe more emphasis is needed</b>
Assisting pastors, districts and local congregations with tools to develop lay leadership	53.4%
Raising leaders for ministry in and to diverse communities (i.e. Hispanic, Asian, African-American, Native American)	51.2
Equipping congregations to identify and encourage those called for pastoral ministry	46.2
Creating an Environment of Support for Clergy	44.4
Equipping Local Congregations with Tools and Resources for Transformation	42.7

## Is the Conference organizationally effective?

Survey respondents were asked to evaluate the organizational effectiveness of the conference along eleven dimensions of practice. Survey participants were asked to indicate the frequency with which the identified characteristics were observed, using the following choices:

- Not usually
- Somewhat
- Mostly or Usually
- Almost Always
- Don't know

The following chart presents the eleven characteristics *in descending order of perceived effectiveness*. (Note: The chart does not show the % who responded "somewhat" which means that the three percentages shown do not combine to equal 100%)

Organizational Characteristic	% who responded mostly, usually or always	% who responded not usually	% who don't know
Are decisions in the Conference made by appropriately authorized leaders?	57.0%	3.5	21.5
Is the Cabinet effective in its work? (The Cabinet consists of the Bishop and the District Superintendents and works to provide oversight and direction for the work of the Annual Conference)	55.6	5.6	14.6
Is the Conference Staff Team (taken as a whole) effective in its work?	49.3	7.0	21.1
Are you well informed about what the various centers, committees and teams in the Conference are doing?	45.2	18.9	2.0
Are the District Leadership Teams (taken as a whole) effective in their work?	35.0	14.0	29.0
Do Conference members who are capable and interested have equal opportunity to hold leadership positions in the Conference?	33.4	25.4	16.4

Organizational Characteristic	% who responded mostly, usually or always	% who responded not usually	% who don't know
Is the Core Leadership Team effective in its work? (The Core Leadership Team is the governing body of the Conference that makes decisions between Conference Sessions).	32.9	13.1	34.3
Are disagreements and conflicts within the Conference dealt with openly and constructively?	29.9	25.9	29.9
Do important decisions about the life of the Conference involved open dialogue with members of the Conference?	28.9	34.5	9.6
Are new ideas and new programs carefully thought out and tested before implementation?	28.1	25.0	25.0
Are the needs of congregations like yours taken into consideration as new programs are designed and launched?	25.0	41.0	9.5

**Areas of relative organizational strength:** People seem to feel that appropriately authorized people are making decisions on their behalf (although a significant % report not knowing how decisions are made in the new structure). Furthermore, they affirm the role and work of the Cabinet and staff teams. It appears that respondents are attaching themselves to the people in the structure (Cabinet and Staff members) but are slower in attaching themselves to the structure and the organizational process. It's also worth noting that the Cabinet has remained intact as an organizational body throughout the reorganization (although a number of faces on the Cabinet are different). People may be feeling more comfortable with those aspects of the Conference that they recognize from before the reorganization.

**Perceived need for organizational improvement:** Not surprisingly those elements of the organizational design that are brand new in the model for ministry (the Core Leadership Team, the District Leadership Teams, and the testing of new ideas) are perceived less favorably and with the least clarity. And, people do not feel that the unique needs of their congregations and contexts are taken into consideration in this model for ministry.

While 45% of those who completed the survey feel that they have been well informed about what Conference centers, committees and teams are doing; a much smaller percentage (29%) believe that they are engaged in dialogue around those changes, or that conflicts are dealt with openly and honestly. This suggests a general perception of one-way communication, in which people are being told about the changes, but not fully engaged in crafting or owning those decisions.

## **What kind of progress is being reported in the five practices?**

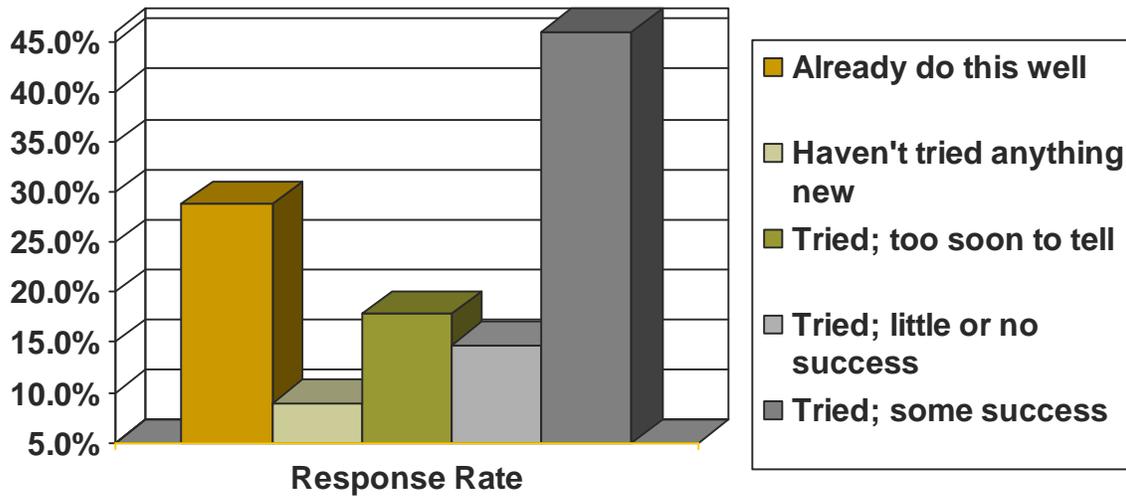
A significant part of the new model for ministry deals with five defined areas of fruitful practice for congregations: radical hospitality, passionate worship, faith forming relationships, risk-taking mission and service, and extravagant generosity. These five areas of practice have been defined and communicated by Conference staff in a variety of venues, including a widely distributed DVD featuring the bishop explaining the practices, and select churches demonstrating best practices in each of the five areas. Since the reorganization churches have been asked to report fruitfulness indicators to the conference center on a regular basis, to build accountability into the Conference around these five practices.

The survey asked respondents to indicate the extent to which their congregation was trying new things and experiencing success with regard to each practice. Participants could choose any of the following responses to indicate what their congregation has done with regard to each of the practices. Respondents were not limited to a single response, but could choose among any of the following responses that they felt were appropriate:

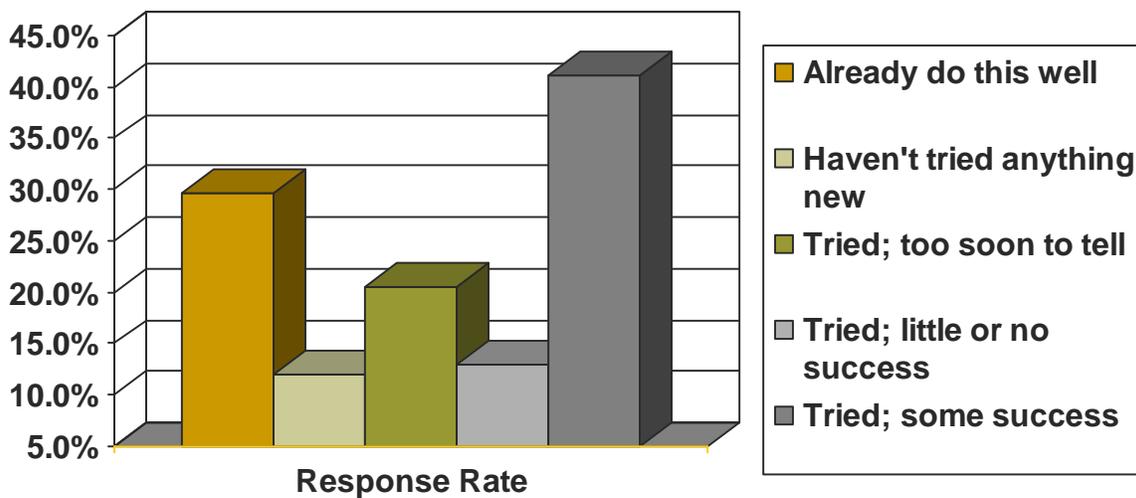
- We already do this well
- We haven't tried anything new in this area in the past 12 months
- We've tried something new, but it is too soon to tell if it is working
- We've tried some new things with little or no success
- We've tried some new things with some success

In each area of practice respondents were also encouraged to describe in narrative fashion what had been tried and what they were experiencing as a result. The following bar charts show each of the five practices and the extent to which respondents feel they are experimenting with and experiencing success.

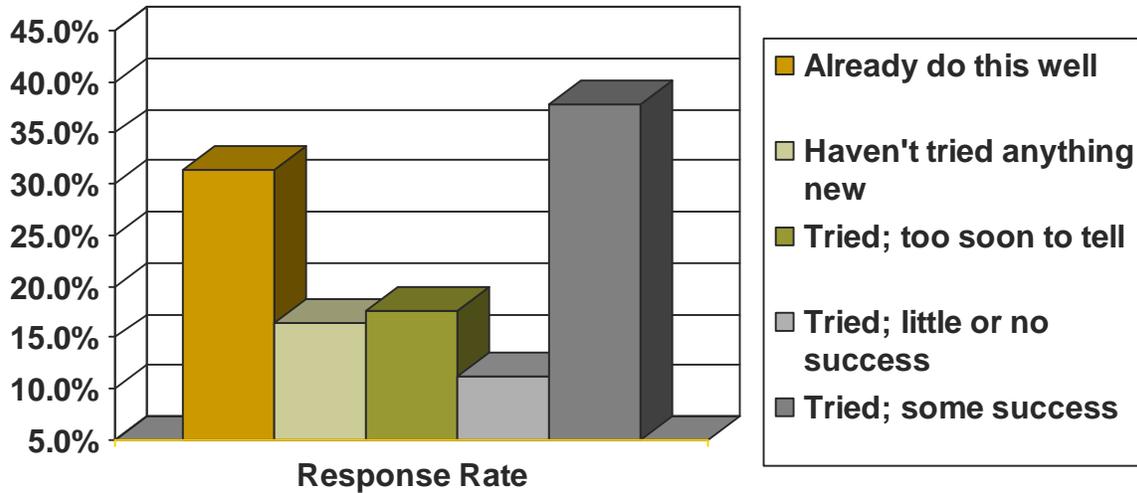
**Radical Hospitality:** Going to extremes to invite, welcome, receive and care for those who are strangers. Looking constantly outward to those who don't come and are not a part of the body of Christ.



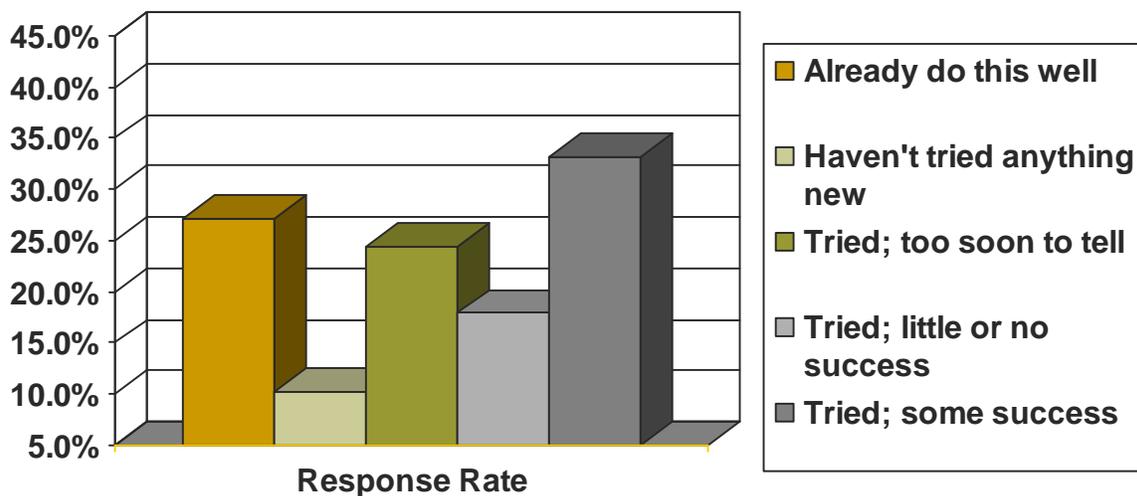
**Passionate Worship:** Engaging the mind, making faith understandable and relevant, touching the heart in a way that transforms attitudes.



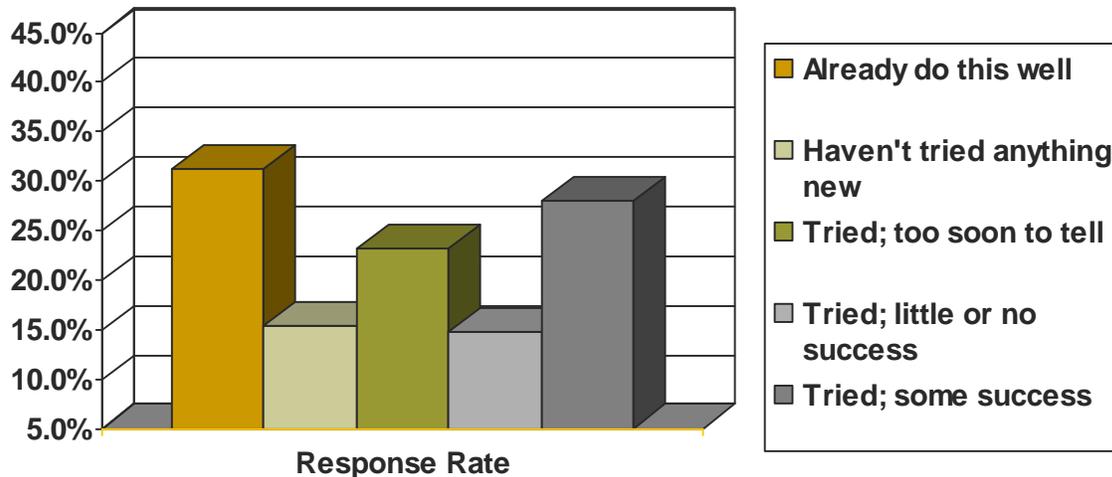
**Risk-Taking Mission and Service:** Moving out of our comfort zone to make a difference in the world. Taking risks in mercy, mission and service as a sign and symbol of our relationship with Jesus Christ.



**Faith Forming Relationships:** Growing in Christ-likeness through study and learning in community; nurturing, learning and holding one another accountable in intentional ways.



**Extravagant Generosity:** Teaching and preaching the practice of the tithe, unapologetically; focusing on the Christian need to grow in the spiritual quality of generosity.



The good news is that the majority of responding congregations believe that they are trying new things in each of the five areas, and experiencing some success with their efforts. It is important to note that all of these assessments are subjective reports of how respondents interpret the efforts of their own congregations. These are not objective, measurable reports of what is actually happening in congregations.

Among survey respondents, congregations are making the most efforts and experiencing the greatest success in the area of Radical Hospitality. The Conference staff team and Cabinet report that this is the area where they have invested the greatest energy in terms of resources and communication. So, the positive news is that invested efforts are perceived as bearing some result.

Risk taking mission reports the highest response rate to “we already do this well” and the highest response rate to “we haven’t tried anything new in this area in the past 12 months” indicating that respondents are investing more energy into other areas of practice; areas in which they are less satisfied with current practice.

Faith forming relationships carry the least positive perception with regard to “how we’re currently doing”. This category also reflects the highest response rate to “we’ve tried something new, but it is too soon to tell if it is working.” The Bishop acknowledges that this is the practice which has been most difficult for the Conference to define and resource.

An examination of survey results by sub group reveals the following variation in experience around the five practices:

- In general, lay leaders are more optimistic about how well their churches are doing with the five practices than clergy are. And elders are more optimistic than local pastors
- Urban churches report greater optimism about hospitality, faith forming relationships & mission/service than their rural and suburban counterparts
- Rural churches are more optimistic about new worship efforts, than either urban or suburban churches
- Hospitality efforts are experiencing the greatest success in the program size congregation (attendance range of 150-300)
- The corporate church (attendance of 400+) is having the least success with new efforts in worship when compared to other sized congregations
- Generosity efforts are having the most success in the small church
- 35-44 year olds report higher %'s of satisfaction with current practices in all 5 areas, when compared to 55-64 year olds
- Fewer 55-64 year olds are trying new things
- But...55-64 year olds report greater levels of success in the new things they are trying

## E. Findings- Town Hall Listening Sessions

Town Hall meetings were conducted in five different Conference settings. Two sessions were scheduled in each location to accommodate perceived scheduling preferences for clergy (afternoon) and laity (evening). The separation of clergy and laity was designed primarily for ease of scheduling and did not represent an effort to keep the two groups separate. Following is a chart that reflects attendance at each location. It is important to note that some people traveled considerable distances to attend sessions. We cannot assume that the people who attended a session represent the district in which the listening session was housed. Clergy significantly outnumbered laity in listening session participation.

Location	# Clergy	# Laity	Total
College Station	13	4	17
Missouri City	9	7	16

Baytown	11	6	17
Jasper	11	5	16
Longview	12	13	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>91</b>

An appreciative inquiry format was used to conduct the listening sessions. Appreciative Inquiry is a narrative technique informed by positive organizational psychology. It seeks to elicit reflections and commentary about “who we are when we are at our best”, with the belief that organizations can learn and grow best out of a reflection on their strengths.

The following six questions formed the basis of each town hall meeting. All participants were encouraged, but not required, to respond to each question:

1. In what ways is your congregation more effective in its mission because of the Conference?
2. What resources of the Texas Annual Conference have been most helpful or useful to you and your congregation in the past?
3. In what ways could the Texas Annual Conference be most helpful to you now?
4. What, in your mind, has been the greatest benefit or outcome of the Conference re-organization (and the new model for ministry)?
5. Imagine that it is five years from now and the Conference is fully engaging its mission and living into its vision. Describe what you see that is new, different, better, energizing and worthwhile.
6. If you could make three wishes for the continued evolution of the Texas Annual Conference, what would they be?

Each response given in response to these questions was recorded in verbatim fashion. At the completion of the listening sessions the consultant reread all of the transcripts from the ten sessions and prepared a topical index code to be used in sorting and summarizing the data. The topical codes were created on the basis of the subjects that were actually initiated by listening session participants; they were not imposed on the data from some external source. Over 50 topical themes were noted in the transcripts. Next, an assistant to the consultant went through the listening session transcripts and assigned one or more of the topical codes to each of the responses given in each

listening session. Those codes were then sorted and summarized to identify the most frequently discussed topics, by question, across listening sessions.

There is an important point to note before reflecting on the listening session data. During an appreciative listening session participants don't necessarily talk in response to the actual question posed. They use the question period as an invitation to reflect on what they came to speak about. The reader needs to be careful to account for this phenomenon in the interpretation of data. No effort was made to exclude data that did not pertain to the question being asked. Similarly, even though participants were asked to reflect from a place of positive energy or strength, many people chose to offer negative criticism instead. Again, no effort was made to eliminate negative or critical comments. All of the data was retained as indicative of the energy, concern and passion of participants in these topical areas. Therefore, when a topic shows up as a frequently discussed topic, it does not necessarily mean that all of the comments offered were positive comments. In the presentation of data an effort has been made to reflect this tension by providing a notation to indicate the number of negative or critical statements that are included in the total.

**Most frequently discussed topics in response to Question #1:** In what ways is your congregation more effective in its mission because of the Conference?

<u>Topic</u>	<u># of times mentioned</u>
• Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations	21 (1 of which was negative)
• Metrics of Effectiveness	21 (9 of which were negative)
• Mission and Service Opportunities	19
• Congregational identity/mission	10 (3 of which were negative)
• Meeting Scheduling	9 (9 of which were negative)

Responses to this question reflect basic appreciation for the identification of the five practices and the articulation of clear language about what these practices refer to. Many participants reported that for the first time their congregations are having conversations that matter, using the shared language of the practices.

Conference efforts around the metrics of effectiveness meet with mixed reviews. Many support the notion that the basic effectiveness of the mission should be measured quantitatively. However, there is considerable frustration with and criticism of the DOVE reporting system. It is generally seen as cumbersome and, for many, ill suited to the ongoing reporting task. There are those who believe that reporting the metrics has become more important than the missional task of the Conference. There are others who believe that the emphasis on quantitative metrics needs to be better balanced with qualitative data measures to record new efforts and initiatives, not just bottom line results.

Mission and service is frequently cited as the element of Conference life with which people are most pleased. Much of the conversation in listening session revolved around the energy from the recent “nothing but nets” campaign, recent hurricane recovery efforts and the connectionalism that empowers shared mission and service.

Participants are appreciative of the ways in which the new model for ministry is inviting congregational dialogue to improve clarity about the mission and ministry of the local congregation. Conference efforts to get clearer about its mission and approach are prompting congregations to get clearer about their mission and ministry.

The emergence of meeting management as a category in response to this question illustrates how participants can distort the appreciative inquiry process. In a number of the listening sessions people entered the session upset about the manner in which they had been invited to participate. Many felt that it was more of a mandate than an invitation. A number of participants also felt that there had been little consideration given to attendance challenges (in terms of scheduled time and required driving distances). These participants opened the session with their concerns about meeting scheduling, and indicated that this is part of a larger pattern of problems with meeting scheduling in the Conference. This is a classic example of something that people came into the sessions with an agenda to speak about; they did not speak about the scheduling of meetings in response to the actual question that was posed; they came in to complain about this aspect of Conference life.

**Most frequently discussed topics in response to Question #2:** What resources of the Texas Annual Conference have been most helpful or useful to you and your congregation in the past?

<u>Topic</u>	<u># of times mentioned</u>
• College Ministry	17 (12 of which were negative)
• Youth Programming	15 (11 of which were negative)
• Technology	14 (4 of which were negative)
• Resourcing congregations & and their leaders	12 (1 of which was negative)
• Camps and Camping Ministry	10 (2 of which were negative)
• Apportionments	9 (6 of which were negative)

This question seemed to provoke more criticism of the Conference than commentary on strength in the areas of college and youth ministry. Much consternation and concern was expressed about a perceived vacuum in campus and youth ministry as a result of the reorganization. Some participants pointed out that campus and youth ministries had been struggling for a long time prior to the re-organization. Many expressed concern

about the future of United Methodism (and the Conference) without a more comprehensive and careful approach to college and youth ministry.

In the technology area, participants expressed appreciation for the Conference web page as an interactive communication device. They appreciate the past use of the AV library and more recent DVD training resources.

The camps and camping ministry were reflected upon with great nostalgia. Participants are grateful for the historically powerful role that the camping ministry has played in the life of the Conference. They are concerned that the camps are currently being neglected and under-funded.

In the area of apportionments people talked about the need to do a better job of linking apportionments and mission/evangelism.

**Most frequently discussed topics in response to Question #3:** In what ways could the Texas Annual Conference be most helpful to you now?

<u>Topic</u>	<u># of times mentioned</u>
• Technology (website, IT support, teleconferencing etc.)	18
• Metrics of Effectiveness	18
• Lay Leadership Formation & Empowerment	13
• Resourcing congregations & leaders	12
• Customization of Programs/Model	12
• D.S. role and relationships (more time with DS and/or better definition of the role	10

In the area of technology people spoke of the need for more video-conferencing to improve meeting management and conference connectionalism. They spoke about the need for technology support in the local church and dreamed of getting access to grant money for technology enhancements.

With regard to metrics people spoke about their desire for qualitative measures and more personal contact to balance the collection of quantitative measures. People want better ways to report new initiatives and efforts made, that are not yet translating into measurable results. Others long for some kind of formal recognition of those locations that are not likely to respond to any amount of effort with metrics of growth. In short, they want a way to be recognized for things they are doing that are not showing up in the metrics. Finally, people would like access to Conference wide data that is generated through the DOVE system for use in their own settings.

Participants seem generally appreciative of the resourcing role that the Conference Center and staff offer. In the area of lay leadership development they would like to have access to more on-line or podcast training for lay leadership roles. A wide variety of specific resourcing requests were articulated, and an expression of need for more general resourcing needs.

There is an expressed desire to more fully customize the model for ministry. Expectations are growing that the Conference staff needs to provide greater diversity in materials around congregational transformation and the five practices, to accommodate a wider variety of needs (small church, rural church, Latino church). A frequently quoted phrase was, "one size does not fit all" in this Conference. There was particularly strong critique about the "Don Nations" generic approach to church transformation efforts.

During the listening sessions there was considerable energy invested in discussion about the role of the District Superintendent. One of the promised benefits of the reorganization was that the local church would actually experience more face to face time with their District Superintendent. In fact, churches are experiencing less time with their D.S. There is a growing awareness that the size of the new districts precludes much direct time with the D.S, and people are fearful that this will result in less Conference connectionalism and less attentiveness to their particular needs.

**Most frequently discussed topics in response to Question #4:** What, in your mind, has been the greatest benefit or outcome of the Conference re-organization (and the new model for ministry)?

<u>Topic</u>	<u># of times mentioned</u>
• Ministry Model (District structure, hubs etc.)	38 (14 negative)
• Metrics of Effectiveness	18 ( 7 negative)
• D.S. Role and Relationships	16 ( 9 negative)
• Communication from Conf. to Churches	16 (14 negative)
• Conf. Board and Committee Structure	13 ( 6 negative)

Listening session participants were positive about the overall vision behind the restructuring. They see great untapped potential in the model.

They appreciate having the Centers as resource agencies, but the performance of the Centers meets with mixed reviews. Strong criticism was directed toward the timely and accurate handling of pension and benefit issues. In general, people feel that the Centers are not being held to the same level of performance accountability that the congregations are being held to. Response times and the quality of response from the Centers are inconsistent.

As people talked about the new model for ministry they frequently expressed concern over the size of the new district structure. This was typically expressed as a concern about not being able to fully connect with other churches in the larger districts and not getting enough time with the D.S. People are generally hopeful about the idea of Hubs, but don't feel that the Hub concept has fully developed. They are concerned that less contact with the D.S. means that the Conference has lost its face in the local church.

People spoke about the need to focus and filter communication efforts that come from the Conference to the churches. The local congregation at times feels overwhelmed by the amount of communication and the frequency of new directives. At times, messages are contradictory and the local church chooses to do nothing, rather than sort through the overwhelming volume of messages to figure out what they are supposed to do .

As people discussed the conference board and committee structure they shared their confusion about the role of the Core Leadership Team. They also spoke about the difficulty of getting information through to the lay leadership of the church and the fact that committee structures at the District level seem underdeveloped.

**Most frequently discussed topics in response to Question #5:** Imagine that it is five years from now and the Conference is fully engaging its mission and living into its vision. Describe what you see that is new, different, better, energizing and worthwhile.

**Most frequently discussed topics in response to Question #6:** If you could make three wishes for the continued evolution of the Texas Annual Conference, what would they be?

The responses to questions 5 and 6 are summarized together because of the future hopeful orientation of both questions:

<u>Topic</u>	<u># of times mentioned</u>
• Lay leadership formation and empowerment	25
• Clergy development and training	21
• Ministering to and with greater diversity	21
• Faith development/Discipleship	12
• Continued enhancement of model for ministry	11
• Renewed College Ministry	10
• Revitalized Youth programming	10
• Congregational identity and mission	10
• Communication from churches to Conference	10

Participants understand that the empowerment and engagement of the laity is an important next step in the continued development of the ministry model. Clergy feel that

they have been solely responsible for sustaining momentum around the model in their congregations. Lay leadership feel ill informed about the new model and want more opportunity to interact with it, without having to wait for direction from their pastors.

Finding and equipping vibrant clergy is seen as a key to the future success of the church, particularly the identification and empowerment of younger clergy. The need to equip and enhance ministry in more diverse ministry settings was articulated as a key initiative for the future. People understand that every congregation needs to grow in its capacity to handle diversity locally, and that more specific ministry settings need to be developed to accommodate diversity not fully served by existing church contexts (Latino, Asian and African-American).

Participants believe that the future of United Methodism requires clearer articulation of Methodist identity, greater clarity of local congregation mission and identity, and greater attention to youth and college aged ministries. People want to ensure that there is a next generation of United Methodism.

Finally, listening session participants are looking for more ways to provide feedback to the Conference. Communication efforts are seen as one-way, from the Conference Center to the congregation. Participants are seeking more feedback loops and more opportunity to register their particular needs and ideas.

## **F. Findings- Listening Sessions: Cabinet, Staff And CLT**

The consultant conducted listening sessions with the Cabinet, the non management staff team and the Core Leadership Team of the Conference. These listening sessions were also conducted using an appreciative listening format. However, in these listening sessions participants worked in a paired format to respond to the question, instead of staying together as a single large group. This was done to ensure that people would record their observations, hopes and dreams freely, without being inhibited by the presence of their supervisors. The interview questions were somewhat modified to invite reflection on the work of the team/cabinet (in place of the question asking for reflection of impact on their congregation). Verbatim records of the first five questions were not captured for these groups because of the paired interview format. While the consultant was able to listen to and participate in discussions around the five questions, the data is not available for sorting and coding. However, individual responses to question #6 were collected, coded and sorted, and are presented below.

**Most frequently discussed topics in response to Question #6:** If you could make three wishes for the continued evolution of the Texas Annual Conference, what would they be?

<u>Topic</u>	<u># of times mentioned</u>
Clergy Development and Training	12
Lay Leadership Formation and Empowerment	11
Vision Buy-In at all Levels of the Conference	11
Faith Development/Discipleship	9
Mission and Service	8
Communication throughout Conference	7

The list of hopes and dreams from Conference Leadership and Conference members show some remarkable similarities, given that there were over 50 different discussion topics recorded in the listening sessions. In general, I found the leadership of the Conference to be very much in touch with the opinions, hopes and concerns of Conference membership. In my opening interviews with Conference leaders I was introduced to every major issue/concern that surfaced later in the survey and the listening sessions. In other words, leadership was aware of the issues of the Conference, and already grappling with how to address those issues and concerns, before I gave voice to those concerns through the interviews and listening sessions. This is a marker of effective leadership.

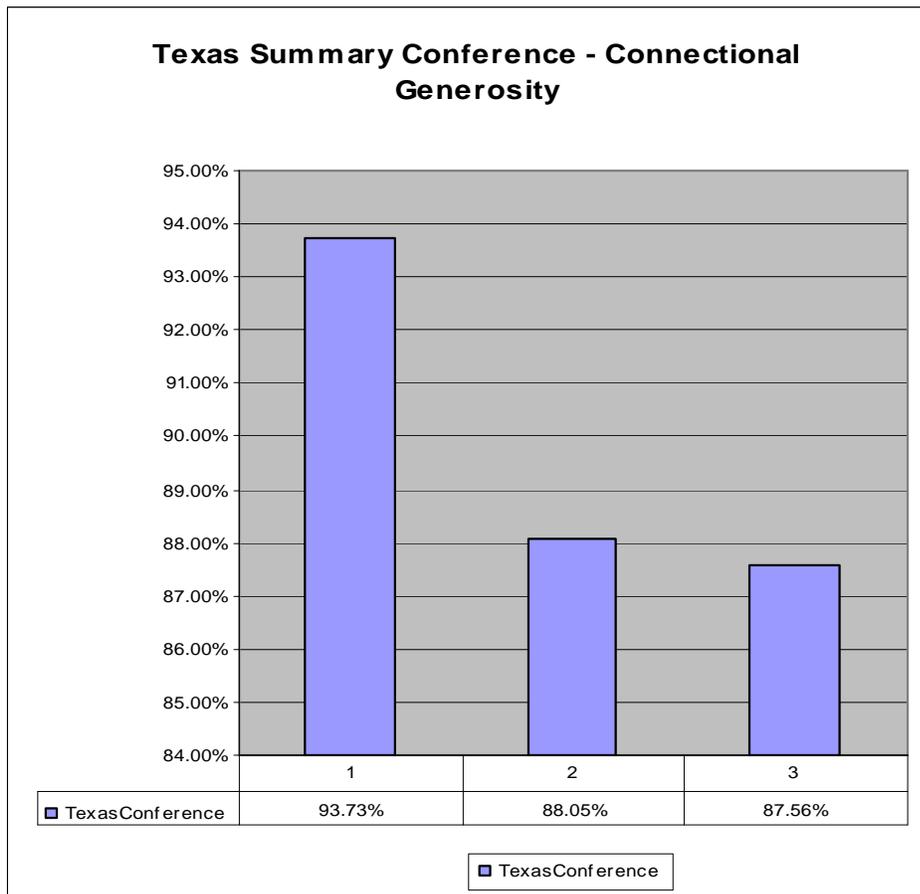
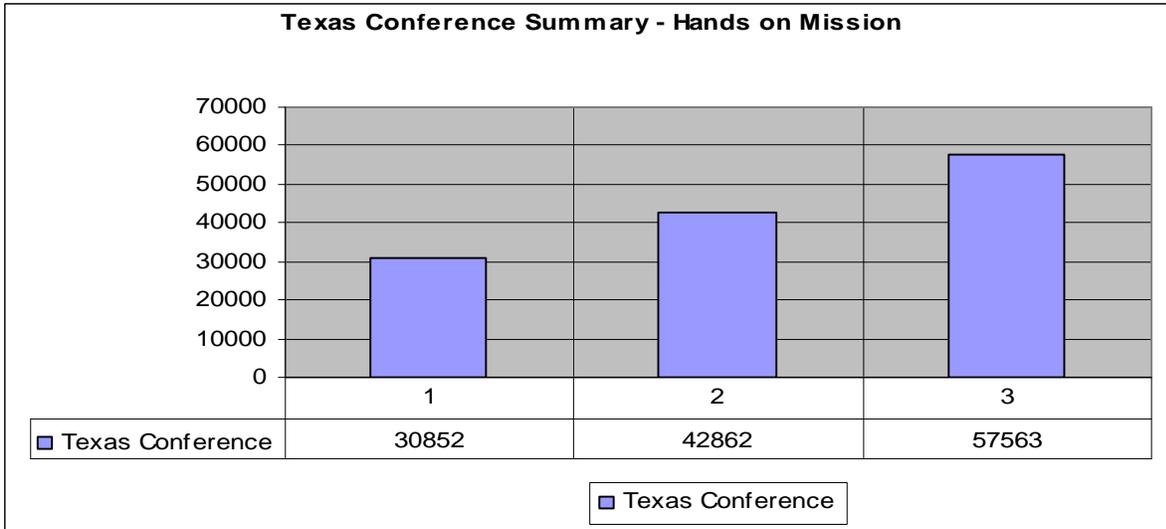
## **G. Findings- Fruitfulness Indicators**

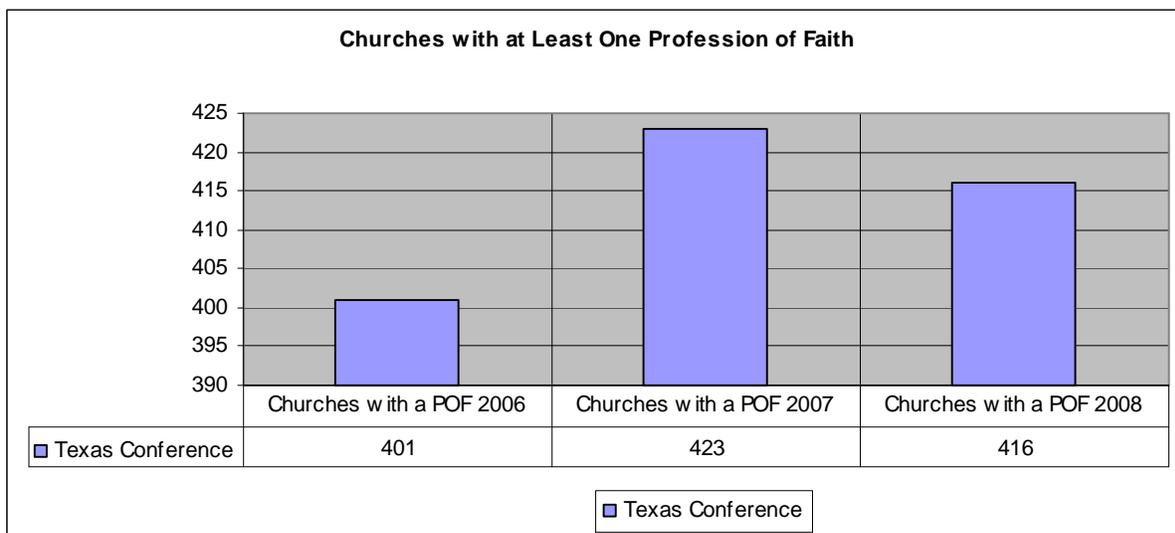
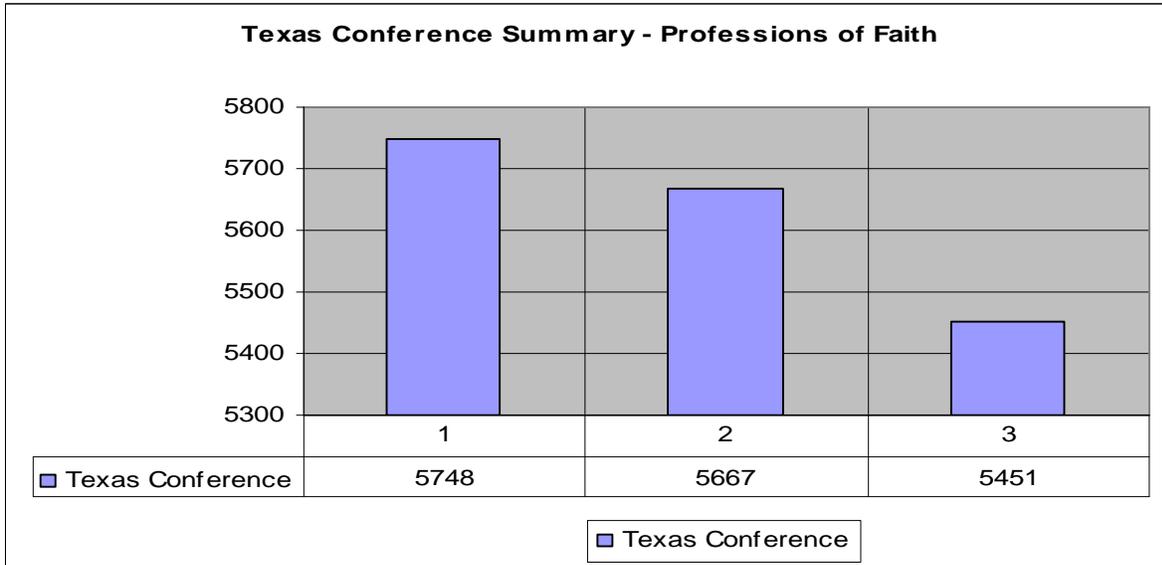
When the new model for ministry was introduced the conference began requiring all churches to regularly report on five measures of fruitfulness: church membership, worship attendance, hands on mission, connectional generosity and professions of faith. Data is now available for comparison over a three year time span. The Conference staff provided the consultant with 3 years of fruitfulness indicators for each congregation, every district, and the Conference as a whole. For purposes of this assessment, only the Conference totals were analyzed. It should be noted that the consultant did not audit any of the data provided for accuracy.

The three year self-reported trends reveal:

- Very modest (less than 1%) Increases in church membership
- A 1.2% increase in worship attendance in 2007; followed by a 1.3% loss in worship attendance in 2008.







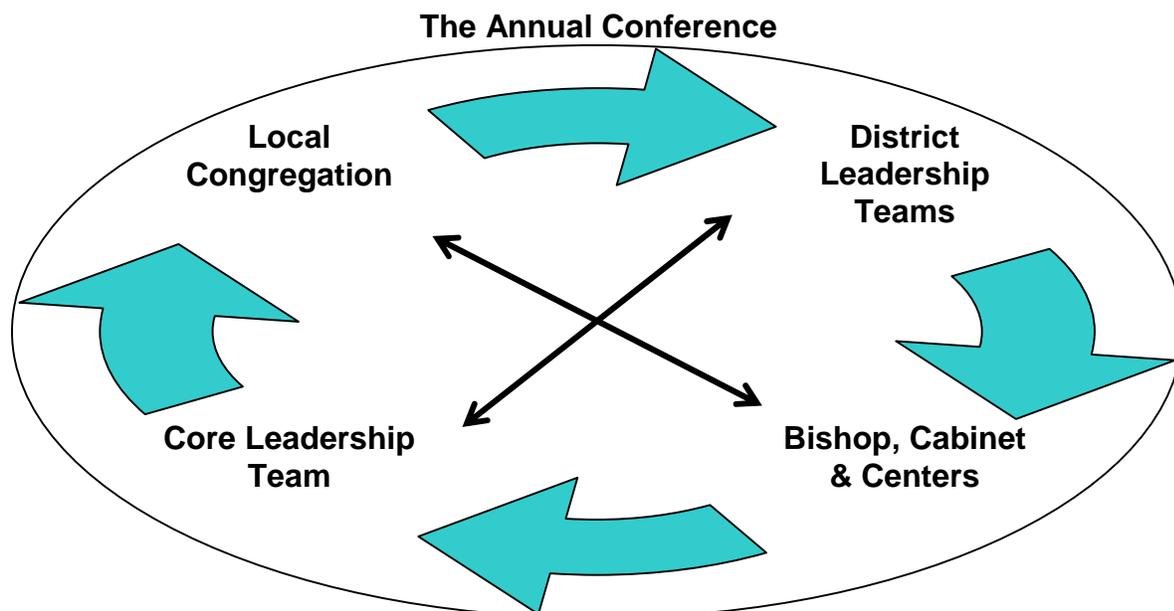
Overall, the fruitfulness indicators reflect the considerable challenge that the Conference faces in its renewal efforts. Early enthusiasm in the first year of the new model likely produced a spike in energy in the local congregation, resulting in a worship attendance increase. This progress was lost in year 2 as congregations learned how difficult it is to sustain change. Hands on mission, which has always been a strength of the Conference is either growing in emphasis, or congregations are becoming more effective at tracking mission participation. It is difficult to draw a conclusion with regard to the drop in apportionment participation. The very slight decline in 2008 may be a

function of an overall troubled economic climate, as opposed to an indicator of dissatisfaction with Conference performance. The increase in membership may represent a genuine increase in participation in congregations, but it may also represent a lack of attention to cleaning up membership records.

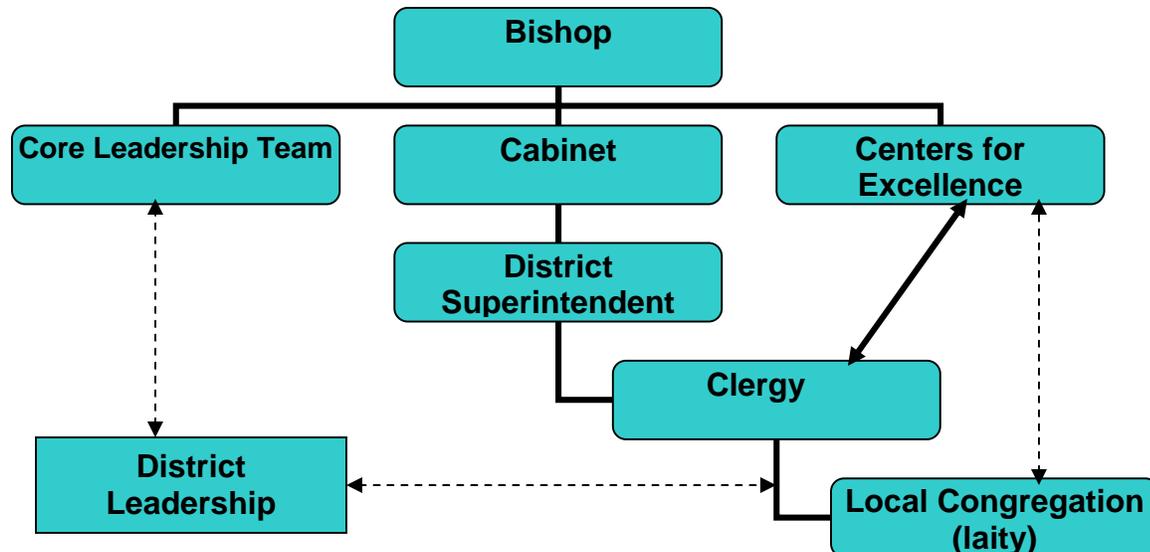
The purest measure of sustained success in the new model for ministry will ultimately be reflected in professions of faith. This will probably be the last of the fruitfulness indicators to respond to Conference revitalization efforts, as it requires increased effectiveness in multiple areas of congregational life to produce a measurable impact. At present the Conference is not reporting success in increased professions of faith. The consultant would not have expected to see an increase in professions of faith at this early stage of the change process.

## H. Consultant Observations

There is an apparent disconnect between Conference leadership and membership in the perception of how decision making and communication operate within the new model for ministry. Conference leadership promotes and desires an organic model for decision making and communication that looks something like this:



Having completed this assessment, it is apparent that the lived experience of the new model for ministry is more like this:



- The experience of ministry in the Conference is very top down. This model is seen as being initiated and imposed from the Bishop downward. The local congregation does not see itself as a decision partner in the leadership equation.
- The Core Leadership Team (CLT) has not yet found its full voice in the leadership structure. The potential of the CLT as a strategic direction setting body and its' function as a communicative body between the districts and the Conference is underdeveloped. This means that the CLT is not playing the critical role it needs to play in connecting lay and clergy leadership in the model for ministry. Most Conference members still have no idea what the CLT does. Consequently, they distrust it as a leadership voice.
- The District Leadership Teams are not playing a meaningful role in the Conference. Each district has been left to design the structure of the team to meet its own needs. Some districts are farther along in forming their teams than others. However, the lack of attention to the formation of the DLT means that the critical connective link between the district teams and the core leadership team has been lost, resulting in congregations (particularly the laity) feeling that they have no voice.
- The role of the District Superintendent is under great strain in the present organizational configuration. The congregation still regards the D.S. as the only face of the Conference at the District level. Most of the districts are larger under the new model for ministry, placing intense pressure on the role of the D.S. to serve as the sole connection between congregation and Conference.

- The Cabinet sits at the center of the “power equation” in the Conference, even though the new model calls for more shared power between the Conference Centers, the Cabinet and the CLT. There is some notable tension between the District Superintendent role and the Center Conference Leaders, as each tries to live into greater shared decision making.
- All of the efforts of Conference leadership are inspired by a concern for the effectiveness of the local congregation. However, the present system of decision making and communication tends to keep the Conference Center and Staff at the center of the decision making equation and marginalizes the voice and participation of the congregation. That may have been appropriate to initiate the change process, but the timing is right to engage the local congregation as a more equal decision making partner, through the voice of the district leadership teams.
- The metrics of effectiveness, used to promote accountability, are almost purely quantitative at the congregation level and purely qualitative at the Conference staff level. This imbalance results in congregational clergy feeling that they are the only ones being held accountable in the model.
- Use of the *new model for ministry* label is actually creating confusion in the Conference as people try to figure out how the model has changed, again. It’s time to stop thinking about this as a new way of being and begin accepting this as the adopted status quo, a status quo that needs to be continually enhanced and refined.

## I. Recommendations- What next?

1. Eliminate use of the terminology, “New Model for Ministry”. This operational way of being, first introduced in 2005, has become firmly entrenched in Conference life. It is no longer the new model for ministry, it is simply the way that ministry is done in the Texas Annual Conference.
2. Develop the strategic decision making role of the Core Leadership Team and expand its understanding of self as the primary communicative body between clergy and laity. Consider reducing the size of the CLT to accomplish this purpose.
3. More fully develop the role of the District Leadership Team as the primary vehicle through which congregational feedback to the Conference, and lay leadership development happens.
4. Continue to evolve the role of the District Superintendent, away from a “face of the conference” role and towards an empowering/resourcing role.
5. Enhance the metrics currently used to measure the fruitfulness of Conference ministry. Introduce more qualitative measures at the congregation level and more quantitative measures at the Conference Center level.
6. Offer greater customization of church transformation tools to accommodate the unique needs of smaller, larger and more diverse congregations.
7. Adopt technological advances that will allow greater connectionalism and leadership development in the Conference, without travel.
8. Clarify the Conference's stance with regard to youth, campus and young adult ministry. Communicate more clearly with congregations about efforts in these ministry areas and the role of the local church in those initiatives.
9. Focus communication efforts with congregations. Reduce the frequency of communication, strengthen coordination of messages and sharpen the delivery mechanism for the target audience.