

ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE PALO DURO PRESBYTERY PC(USA)

A Report to the Presbytery

Second Draft
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INTRODUCTION

"Behold, I am doing a new thing." Isaiah 43:19

How This Analysis Came Into Being

This diagnostic analysis of the organizational functioning of Palo Duro Presbytery PC(USA) was conducted as part of the *Presbytery Transformation Process* authorized by the Presbytery Council in the fall of 2005. Palo Duro Presbytery recognizes that the nature of its membership, its context for ministry, and the thrust of its ministry must take into consideration the challenges of a new day. An era in the history of the church has ended and a new era is beginning, causing a veritable sea of change in the identity, role, and mission of North American churches.

Social Transitions

Along with all other churches in North America, the Palo Duro Presbytery is making its way through several complex transitions, even upheavals, which are occurring in western society: changes in the role and status of women, immigration and its effects, new ethnic consciousness among minority groups, new emerging economic patterns, new patterns of religious expression, to name just a few.

The "Success" Model of Congregations

Part of our North American worldview has been an emphasis on expansion and growth. Bigness is equated with and a sign of "success" and "success" is defined in economic terms -- membership size. Small

congregations look with envy at larger congregations. Pastors of small congregations speak of "climbing up the ladder" to larger congregations.

The profile of congregations in the Palo Duro Presbytery reveals a different pattern -- not of bigness but of smallness. The Palo Duro Presbytery is a Presbytery primarily of small churches. Small membership congregations often have great difficulty surviving within the predominant "success" model of congregational life found in America. Other more appropriate and perhaps more faithful models are available and some small-membership congregations follow them, but most congregations regardless of size assume and attempt to manifest this predominant "success" model.

The "success" model works like this. A significant economic base is required in order to launch and sustain a church. To achieve this economic base, a congregation requires a certain critical mass of members (usually around 200 members) with the financial means to support (1) an ordained minister with a salary, pension, housing allowance, health insurance, car allowance, (2) a church building with worship space, an organ, education space, a modern office, ongoing maintenance, and a parking lot, and (3) a quality program designed to attract and serve the interests of a range of age groups. Small membership churches are, in most cases, unable to measure up to this model. Even though variations on this model occur, such as tent-making pastors or yoked churches who share a pastor, in their efforts to try to achieve this "success" model, many small-membership congregations lose sight of their calling to become God's new creation. Instead, they become survival-oriented -- economically driven. They devote themselves to raising money in order to maintain their buildings, pay their minister, and maintain some semblance of a meaningful program.

If their critical membership mass is too small, their building may begin to deteriorate, making them unattractive to newcomers, and their program may shrink making them less attractive in the church marketplace. They may not be able to call the kind of pastoral leadership they desire to help build them up. In most cases a few dedicated members carry the leadership responsibilities and can become discouraged and burned out. Often in desperation, they turn to their Presbytery for financial support.

Most churches assume this dominant capital-intensive "success" model of congregational life.

The Displacement of the Church

The Presbyterian Church along with other so-called "mainline" church bodies that once dominated European, Canadian, and American society, are facing similar patterns of change. What has been happening in Europe and across North America is happening in Texas: The religious institutions that helped to found communities and towns on the frontier and form the new American society have now been displaced to the margins of the culture.

There are those who consider this a tragedy. They bemoan the lack of influence within the dominant fundamentalist/evangelical religious context today.

Others believe that the church can have a very significant and faithful future. "But to have that future, we Christians must stop trying to have the kind of future that nearly sixteen centuries of official Christianity in the Western world have conditioned us to covet. The question we all have to ask ourselves is whether we can get over regarding this as a catastrophe and begin to experience it as a doorway into a future that is more in keeping with what our Lord first had in mind when he called disciples to accompany him on his mission to redeem the world through love, not power."¹

Transformation: A "Yeasty" Opportunity

The church's role is being redefined at this moment in history. A strategic question for the Palo Duro Presbytery is this: *Who will define the role of the Presbyterian Church in west and panhandle Texas as we look to the future?* Will its role be defined by default by forces within the cultural /social /denominational /religious context? Or will the Palo Duro Presbytery itself take the initiative to discern afresh its Divine calling, redefine its role and mission, and reshape itself for this new era?

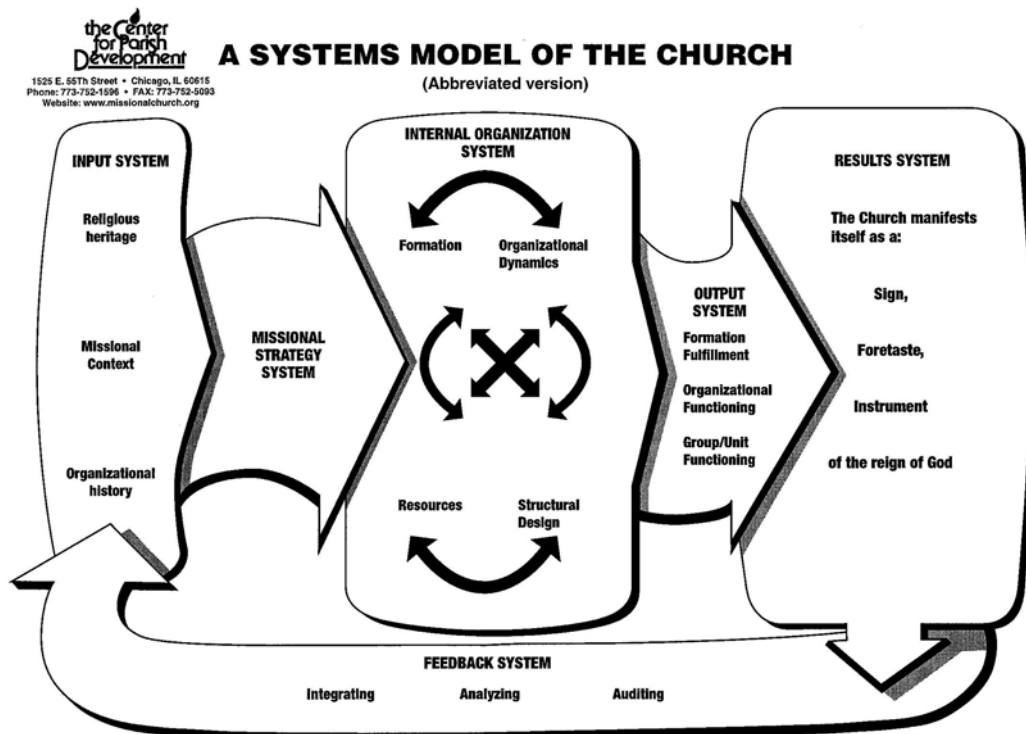
There is a growing body of knowledge to tell us that times like this can be a most valuable of times in the life of a church. Theologically, a time of transformation is a "time between the times," a time between the "already" and the "not yet," between the *resurrection* and the *eschaton*. It is a time between how the church once understood itself and its mission and how its identity needs to be redefined in a new

¹ Douglas John Hall, *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity*. Valley Forge: Trinity Press, 1997, p. ix.

era. A time of transformation provides a church body with an unusual opportunity to take stock of itself, to examine the direction it is currently heading, to discern God's call afresh, to choose a new direction or, perhaps, deliberately and with increased conviction, even to choose to continue on its present path, and to organize itself for the future. A time of transformation is therefore potentially a yeasty time, an exciting time, a time of unusual openness when something ends and something new can begin.

How the Diagnostic Analysis Process Works

The organizational analysis process uses a model, the *Systems Model of the Church*. This model is a diagnostic model based on general systems theory. It is used by the consultant to gather information about fifteen different factors in the life and work of the Presbytery. A depiction of the model is shown on the next page. Several data-gathering and data-analysis processes are used, including observation, specific dialogue opportunities, and a diagonal slice of interviews across the Presbytery organization.



The data from the diagonal slice interviews with key leaders and members, along with the consultant's own observations, plus additional information from records and documents of the Presbytery, are analyzed by the consultant. The consultant develops a series of hypotheses, testable but tentative statements of problems and their causes.

These hypotheses are shared in written form with the leaders and members of the Presbytery. The sharing occurs in an appropriate setting so that the results can be properly understood. The goal of the analysis along with all the work of building a strategic profile of the Presbytery is to enable leaders and members to have a common view of the major issues with long term implications the Palo Duro Presbytery must confront. When most of the people can see the same strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats from the same perspective, planning and decision-making are greatly facilitated and unnecessary destructive conflict can be avoided.

As the process unfolds, both long term and short-term challenges and their causes are identified and explored. A consensus is developed about which of these challenges have priority. The process of building this consensus is essential to the success of all future steps taken by the Presbytery.

The Persons Interviewed

Interviews were conducted in October – December of 2006 and were on average two hours in length. The following persons participated in the interview process.

Geanna Fox
 Janice Six
 Don Stribling
 Kathy Monroe
 Melissa Lowe
 Jon Sharpe
 Barbara Taylor
 James Story
 Richard Schempp
 Robert Donald
 Watt Casey
 Randy Branson

James Hodsdon
 Jean Fruge
 Kathryn Davis
 Peggy Martin
 Linda Shelly
 Andy Channer
 Davis Price
 Janne Brumbelow
 SarahLee Morris
 Tim Tam
 Fane Downs
 Sheila McCray

Joe Thompson

Interviews were conducted by:

Lucie Martin
Robert Beckley
Robert Fortney
Barbara Taylor
Dale Ziemer

Chuck Massey
James King
Luann Burleson
Gail Zoya

Interviewers received training for this task from Dale Ziemer of the Center for Parish Development. In each case, the interviewers gathered information and took notes on the conversation. Some quotations from the persons interviewed (without attribution) are found in subsequent parts of this report. The persons interviewed were, without exception, generous with their time and demonstrated deep commitment to Palo Duro Presbytery. They provided thoughtful and careful answers to the questions asked, sharing their experience of the Presbytery. Any misunderstandings or misinterpretations in this report are the consultant's and not those who provided the information.

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HOW THE PALO DURO PRESBYTERY ORGANIZATION FUNCTIONS

"The question which has to be put to every local congregation is the question whether it is a credible sign of God's reign in justice and mercy over the whole of life, whether it is an open fellowship whose concerns are as wide as the concerns of humanity, whether it cares for its neighbors in a way which reflects and springs out of God's care for them, whether its common life is recognizable as a foretaste of the blessing which God intends for the whole human family."

--Lesslie Newbigin²

Introduction

In this report we are concerned with organizational effectiveness and faithfulness. Most organizations want to be effective. Church communities are however concerned not only with effectiveness, but are also called to be "faithful" to God's purposes.

"Effectiveness," as used in this analysis process, is defined as the degree to which ministry, services and common life at individual, group, and congregational levels are similar to expected results as specified by the vision, mission and goals of the church.

² Lesslie Newbigin, *Sign of the Kingdom* (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), p. 64.

"Faithfulness," as used here, is defined as the degree to which ministry, services and common life at individual, group, and Presbytery levels are similar to and manifest the vision and mission of the church as a "sign in and for the world of the new reality which God has made available to people in Jesus Christ."³ Whereas "effectiveness" is concerned with whether or not the church organization achieves the results established by its leaders and managers, "faithfulness" is concerned with whether or not the church organization achieves its divinely-given mission.

The analysis process used in Palo Duro Presbytery was designed to reveal people's expectations of organizational faithfulness and effectiveness, and to discover how the persons within the Presbytery experience the Presbytery as being faithful and effective.

Hypotheses to be Tested

Because of the recognition that the consultant undoubtedly has not seen the total picture, or may have drawn incorrect conclusions, the consultant's observations are put forth tentatively as hypotheses-to-be-tested rather than as judgments, final pronouncements, or unqualified assertions of fact. Each hypothesis, tentative as it may be, is supported by data from interviews, church documents and the surveys.

A hypothesis-to-be-tested is a statement made, supported by interview data, which summarizes one of the findings from the analysis process. The hypotheses-to-be-tested are stated in a declarative way, and sometimes in a provocative way, in order to stimulate a discussion. As part of the Presbytery Transformation Process, each hypothesis will be tested, argued with, explored, thought about, and if need re-cast to make it more accurate. As presented in this report, the hypotheses-to-be-tested should be thought of as part of an analytical process, not a final word on the subject. As the data are reviewed, the hypotheses tested and explored, additional data will be shared and undoubtedly the key issues that need to be addressed will be identified and accepted as the part of the Presbytery's operational and strategic agenda.

³ *Book of Order* G.3.0200 on "The Church and Its Mission"

Areas of Congruence

In this section several areas of strong congruence are identified. The objective of this part of the analysis is a limited one -- only to identify **some** of the strengths upon which Palo Duro Presbytery can build as it considers God's call for the future.

1. The spirit of caring for one another is a hallmark in the Presbytery of Palo Duro.

Extended church family. I feel a real unity with the presbytery. I feel connected to them and it has been a source of great encouragement and support for me. Stemming from my participation in Cursillo.

Caring group of people.

I like the support given by the Presbytery.

It's a caring Presbytery. This is a big change. It's been transformed greatly from when I moved into this area.

We have a spirit of trying to get along. I would rather go to a PDP meeting than any other. Spirit of fellowship is a treasure.

(People) do value relationships, crossing the lines of diversity and theological perspective, can enjoy one another. Even though I am not of the same worldview in west Texas, I respect their ways they take care of each other. There is a certain amount of trust. A little light went off in my Prius, and I didn't know what it was. I asked a strange man if he would check to see what was going on. No hesitancy on my part or his. Then he wanted to look under the hood to see what a Toyota Prius was like. Because of past hardship, people have had to take care of their neighbors in rural areas.

(We value) relationships. Not just among pastors, but among the lay people too.

PDP is here to help the people in the churches.

(WE value) connectionalism, networking, and lay leadership.

The collegial nature, the network of pastors and lay people.

Relationships, for those who took the time to drive the distances.

I have seen they are really into building up the body and in the past year a more pointed effort like the Bible study and some of the ways in which the committees try to keep everything focused on Christ and not just about business... if the business is not grounded in Christ we are like every other entity in the world.

The core belief is that Presbytery is a major source of support in building up the membership as the "body of Christ."

2. Cursillo engaged as a Presbytery is a unifying and ongoing ministry.

Cursillo brings people together in significant relationships that cross over other barriers between people. People drive far for this!

Cursillo provides opportunity for God to create unity – we meet face to face. Breaks down lines between congregations and individuals.

Cursillo has cast a net across a very diverse group of people across the presbytery. It has been a very unifying factor... humanizing people... dialogue with people who don't exactly agree theologically, seeing each other as Christian and it's OK not to see all things the same way. Real results here.

Cursillo here has been very inclusive.

Cursillo provides a learning community.

3. Leadership has stabilized, solid staff, bringing wisdom and gifts.

There was conflict before Rich came, quite a bit. People credit Rich, and Cursillo, in bringing the Presbytery together. But conflict now still because of what is going on in the denomination.

I am proud we are helpful – when churches have trouble and when they need to hear from PDP, Rich visits, preaches, and listens.

A lot has been done to mend some of the old hurts and resentments... trying to draw us together, in a very pastoral way, amid our differences. Especially when churches felt they were nobodies.

Have an absolutely wonderful staff of people.

4. Committee on Ministry and Committee on Preparation for Ministry provide a key ministry of the Presbytery.

COM and COPM illustrate effectiveness with focus, clear task, and team cohesion in the midst of differences.

COM has to do with the health of congregations and the relationship of pastors with their churches. This is critical for the health of the Presbytery. Thus I have been willing to stay on (this committee).

Now pastors and sessions will call the COM and ask for help. They are seeing us as a resource that has a pastoral nature to it.

I have dealt with the COPM and found it to be a wonderful process, and I was on the receiving end of that love and care of the PDP.

We have a lot of inquirers. They are from within this presbytery. And a majority come from conservative churches. 12-15 persons in the process (Inquirers and Candidates) currently.

We do a really good job of dealing with our inquirers and candidates... We deal really effectively, whether they are conservative or liberal, preparing people for ministry through COPM.

COM and COPM – we have been intentional that these committees represent the broad nature of the Presbytery, not everyone who thinks alike.

5. There are several strong, effective mission projects.

People know about these mission projects sponsored by the Presbytery and they participate in them.

Church camp... This is one of the best leadership opportunities for teenagers in the church.

I know that it has always been very mission minded in its work and that is a really good thing.

Currently the mission emphasis is positive, i.e. Romania, Belize.

I guess I would have to say that the emphasis that I have seen is on mission and missional spending and I think that is where the concerns are and the money.

High budget to mission beyond the walls.

The Good Samaritan story is well suited to the Presbytery and we portray being very good neighbors, open to help, ministry here and in other areas of the world. NORAC, Belize, tooth savers... being a good neighbor and love of God.

Mission to Romania... There is a special emphasis down in the Abilene area, one lady, Mary Ferris who is a missionary there.

6. Processes and practices that enable the Body of Christ to be visible and active.

There is evidence across the life of the Presbytery of concrete processes and practices that both manifest and build up the Body of Christ here.

Supporting small churches is one of the ways we are being the body of Christ together.

Overnight meetings...have given people as sense of belonging, with worship at the center, giving an identity. This very much forms us. It is intentional.

Hospitality and commitment of the Presbytery meetings helps to realize ourselves as the Body of Christ.

Meeting on a regular basis – provides opportunities for people to come together to worship, seek direction and purpose, and to experience the Holy Spirit.

We emphasize discernment... it enhances our ability to listen for God

One of the processes we have used recently of sitting down and hearing both sides and listening is maybe teaching the whole church to talk – to agree and disagree – but be able to go out and be God's people and serve God and others.

Each one lifts up Christ.

People who wouldn't ordinarily speak to each other, the Bible studies congregations are engaging in are one avenue for people who don't even know each other, are beginning to talk.... They are sharing their hopes, dreams, frustrations, and provides a sense that we are all in this together.

The only way to express unity in Christ is to work together to become a community. One (person) cannot do it. Presbytery is a true community when this is recognized.

I believe PDP does exhibit Christian community and the example I think of is the fires in Cross Plans burning half the town... PDP was on top of that in a heartbeat.

People try to respect differing views during discussions on the floor of presbytery.

We come out of differences and hang together. We are still talking.

Not too many instances of people who won't talk to other people. But they may vehemently disagree. People do not collect their marbles and go home.

The Presbytery was founded around the issue of union presbyteries in the early 1970s. We were one of the 10 presbyteries who voted to become a union presbytery. They came to the conclusion long before the national merger.

When we gather as presbytery, there has been over the last couple of years, a more established pattern or formula that we will spend more time talking with each other around substantive issues... We know we're going to eat, worship, and do Bible study together.

It was foundational for this presbytery that it would have overnight meetings.

We have a group of clergy in the northern part of the presbytery who met to talk through issues together... those unplanned groups that begin with a vision and focus of what they want to do... They make a tremendous difference when they happen.

Everyone has opportunity to prayerfully participate in discussion and decisions.

Areas of Incongruence

This section describes areas of incongruence in the organizational functioning of Palo Duro Presbytery. The objective of this section is to discover points where developmental steps will be needed in order to strengthen church faithfulness and effectiveness. These areas of incongruence are stated as hypotheses-to-be-tested and are supported with quotations drawn from the interviews as well as other data provided by the Presbytery. It is these points of incongruence where the energy can be found to participate more fruitfully in God's mission through the Palo Duro Presbytery.

Several areas of incongruence exist within Palo Duro Presbytery. How could it be otherwise! The self-understanding, practices, and structures of Palo Duro Presbytery were formed in another era of the church's history. Palo Duro Presbytery finds itself today in a missionary environment of a different kind. But it has not yet fully recognized and reoriented itself to ministry and mission in this new context.

All of the hypotheses-to-be-tested that follow are based on this fundamental interpretation of the context in which Palo Duro

Presbytery is operating today, and in which it must learn to operate faithfully and effectively tomorrow.

Hypothesis #1: Changing Circumstances – Destabilizing Effects.

The social, cultural, denominational, and religious environment for the Palo Duro Presbytery and its congregations is changing dramatically. To be faithful in ministry given its context requires that the Palo Duro Presbytery and its congregations be adventurous and open to rethinking assumptions it has held about its context, and what it will mean to be the church with a minority witness in this context.

Today churches in the Palo Duro Presbytery are functioning in a religious and cultural context where their influence is marginalized. This has had a destabilizing effect on the Presbytery and its congregations. This Presbytery has not yet fully recognized and accepted this context, discerned how to assess and engage this context with the Gospel, and reorient itself for ministry-from-the-margins for the future.

The culture is not only recognizable “out there,” it also exists “in here,” among us, in our congregations, in the committees and groups of the Palo Duro Presbytery. Becoming aware of the cultural context and its impact on us is an essential skill for the Christian community. Reading the “signs of the times” is a condition of discipleship. It is within today’s and tomorrow’s changed and changing context that the Palo Duro Presbytery as a community of congregations must learn to bear faithful and effective witness.

The following comments indicate a variety of perceptions about the destabilizing effect of the changing context for ministry in the Palo Duro Presbytery.

The culture is conservative, fundamentalist, me-ism.

Depopulation of the rural areas. That is a huge factor. That means majority of our churches are in dying towns.

Very slow growth of our urban areas.

We are shaped by the cultural struggle around homosexuality.

(Forces in our context) cause us to be fearful and not carry out the work of the church.

Influences include immigration, racial ethnic changes, broad changes in religion as a whole. Also, changing roles of women. Loyalties to the denomination are not the same as the parents.

Quite concerned about the actions of General Assembly.

Afraid it is dividing the Presbytery.

Other churches are growing but we are not.

The community is more cosmopolitan than the Presbytery.

Ultra-conservative and mega-churches is a major influence and issue in our urban areas.

People do not bring up Catholicism but it is the other large Christian group out there around us.

The Hispanic population is growing rapidly, and we have no contact with them at all. A lot of our folks are afraid of “the Mexicans.”

“We have a progressive educated faith perspective that is not shared by our community.” That’s what this whole presbytery is like. We can’t help but be permeated by the culture. It applies to everything – environment, biblical interpretation.

We have been impacted as the whole nation by a more fundamental approach to being part of a faith community. It’s hard to maintain a vital witness that is not that.

This is a region that is culturally Baptist. The default position of most people is Religious, Conservative, and Baptist. Public discourse, including religious discourse is most often in ‘sound bytes,’ not sustained discussion.

We comprise middle class and upper middle class. Presbyterians do not leave our brains at the door. We engage our whole selves – mind, heart, and will. Demography is not our friend.

The culture here is not doing all these secular, bad things. This is a religious culture. Do we accommodate to this culture or not?

This part of the world needs us. We have a more welcoming Christian alternative to offer. Regardless of where we are on the political/theological spectrum.

In many of the communities, the Presbyterian church would have been the first or second church established. There was pride in that the Presbyterians did it. Now there’s more a sense of exile.

Dairy farms moving into the northern part of this presbytery. 150 dairy farms in the panhandle. Buying land. Mexican workers. Churches will be getting kids who are Spanish speaking.

Hypothesis #2: Confusion about vision, purpose, and goals

Most persons do not know what vision is guiding the Palo Duro Presbytery. There is lack of clarity about the purpose, or reason for being, of the Presbytery (what work it should do and why). This leads to unrealistic and competing expectations and haphazard participation in its life.

Lack of a compelling and shared guiding vision.

The interview process underscored that at the present time, the Palo Duro Presbytery has a vision gap. There is currently no clearly

articulated, compelling, and broadly accepted vision to guide and unite the members of the Palo Duro Presbytery as they move into the future.

Palo Duro Presbytery cannot afford to be without a vision for its ministry in the future. To be without a vision is to be without a direction. A church that lacks a vision will be a *reactive* organization rather than a *proactive* organization. It will drift without a sense of purpose. It will allow forces outside of itself to determine what it is and what it becomes. God is always calling the church into the future--out of the "already" and toward the "not yet." Vision is a gift from God that provides focus, energy, and the willingness to risk. Vision draws us forward into a creative and faithful future. The Presbytery Transformation Process is a focused and proactive initiative to discern God's vision for the Palo Duro Presbytery.

The following comments reveal the vision "gap."

I have no idea.

Hopefully growth, but not just numbers... whatever would bring the people back to their theology, their Christianity, their walk with the Lord.

It's a vision of survival.

Underlying vision is of bringing people into relationship with each other... Serve the congregations as they seek to do ministry and mission...

I don't know. Hope we will find it. Hope we try to discern God's vision for us.

Enigma is the first word about what it is and what it aspires to be. I don't yet know what the Presbytery values other than friendliness and getting along.

Until this focus on transformation, I don't think there was any (vision) guiding it.

Unity – Cursillo. Sharing God's love and teachings.

Looking beyond ourselves and stepping out way beyond our borders to serve others in the name of Christ, i.e. Romania, Mexico, Katrina victims, etc.

There is not one.

I can't come up with anything.

Don't know.

To be faithful to God's word and hold Him up. Reach out to this community, the nation, and in foreign lands.

Reflect Christ to all people.

I honestly don't see a vision – no coherent one.

At this point, what we are looking at are some common missions.

If there is a guiding vision right now it would be survival.

The focus in our denomination on discernment, and the basic missional question, “What does God want of us?”

We have a lot of very bright, committed people who understand the call to discipleship... the lack of the vision, the task to set them on is missing.

Unclear Mission or Purpose

While the Palo Duro Presbytery follows the Book of Order, it also suffers from a high degree of ambiguity about its purpose. Coupled with the lack of consensus around its guiding vision, this creates a powerful and potentially destructive vacuum as persons and key groups attempt to provide leadership. One result of this vacuum is that untested assumptions are made about the purpose of the Presbytery, unrealistic and competing expectations are formed, and then the Presbytery is criticized for failing to live up to the unexamined expectations.

The following quotations depict the confusion that exists in the Presbytery about its role and mission – its purpose:

On the congregational level the purpose (of the presbytery) is mostly invisible.

Hopefully it is to provide leadership.... Provide camps and things that local churches cannot do.

It is bureaucratic and regulatory – it is not seen as an expression of the church – PDP is not the church! It’s job is to make sure churches have educated pastors... to provide oversight and regulation.

It is to keep us connected.

Mission statement on the front of documents. People even forget that that is there and that we have engaged in any discussion about who we were or wanted to be. We have amnesia. It’s as though we have to start over.

Connectionalism... Providing help for smaller churches... Mission emphasis in Romania... children’s home in Amarillo.

To be an example of Christ to us.

To sustain, organize, support and uphold the congregations and their mission.

The Presbytery represents PDP to the Synod and G.A. within PC(USA).

I do think the Presbytery is in turmoil about this. There is no broadly agreed upon reason – or even two or three – for existence.

I don’t recall the last time we looked at this mission statement since we adopted it. I don’t even remember when that was, several years ago.

When (the presbytery) first formed, our vision was to help this church become united. We worked hard to make reunion happen in 1983. Then some would say, when that was accomplished, we no longer had a purpose.

Unclear goals:

The Presbytery currently has no clear consensus about its overarching goals. The lack of agreement about the goals of the Presbytery weakens it as a vital and dynamic body, de-motivates its members, inhibits generous gifts of time and money, increases competition, and leads to distrust of one another and of leaders.

The following quotations reveal the range of assumptions people across the Presbytery have about its goals.

I don't know about any goals. Maybe that's why we are doing this process. Other than trying to keep everyone talking across differences, I don't know of any other goal we have.

I really don't know. I haven't been on a presbytery committee or to a presbytery meeting for awhile.

Sense of community and belonging... Provide effective pastoral leadership to our churches... wise stewardship of resources... be more effective for our witness to Christ in the world.

Need serious goal setting.

Listening to each other, loving each other, and allowing God to be in charge. Not being "know it alls."

Key goals? There has not been much clarity on this at all. For me, that our churches have a clear sense of vision and that they can articulate that, and that they do it in a way that distinguishes them from the predominant culture.

I think that the areas the Presbytery is trying to achieve results is inclusiveness, social justice areas.

PDP is keyed to mission abroad and maybe we could look internally to help small churches.

Evangelism, social witness, mission, Christian education.

COM is what the Presbytery does.

We do the things the Book of Order says.

Offering resources, primarily monetary, but also personnel, to help congregations realize their call in their individual communities.

Whom Do We Serve?

When asked about the key groups the Presbytery is in ministry with there is a wide variation of responses. This indicates that there is some confusion, perhaps a gap requiring clarification and strategic choice in this part of the planning for ministry.

That's always the ministers.... The power of the presbytery is in the hands of the ministers.... The small church pastors have had equal voice (as larger church pastors).

Our churches.

We serve – the least among us... The ones we attract – educated people are attracted to this church.

Higher governing bodies – Synod of the Sun, GA.

Who gets voice? It depends on what group... There are two camps. If you are in a certain camp, you listen to those in your camp and discount those that are not.... Both camps get voice... the influence is pretty balanced between these two camps.

Who gets voice? The loudest and the needy.

The Presbytery needs to reach the unchurched.

Small churches... because they need the most help.

Officers and committee heads have greatest voice.

Often the older people are ignored.

Hypothesis #3: Losing a Sense of Community.

While historically valuing collegiality and a rich connectional life, the sense and practice of community within the Palo Duro Presbytery seems to be disappearing. We are losing the spirit of our Presbytery family. Churches and pastors are going their separate ways and are no longer a community of congregations who know each other and seek to be in fellowship with each other.

There is built into the structure of a connectional church like the PC(USA) a dichotomy between the notion of pastors, congregations and presbyteries being in a connectional relationship with each other, and the idea of individual or congregational autonomy. In the Palo Duro Presbytery this dichotomy raises questions today about what it means to be church, what it means to be church together, and what holds congregations in relationship with each other. This dichotomy plays itself out in confusion over what we are to expect of ourselves and others “as presbytery” while loyalty and stronger allegiance is given to the local church or other causes.

The Presbyterian connectional vision and practice is suffering in the Palo Duro Presbytery. Scarcer resources, busier lives, less sense of identity and purpose as a presbytery, holding meetings that are not life-giving, competing loyalties, all is symptomatic of lack of vision, purpose, and commitment to a compelling connectional life. While Me-ism – for each to go one’s own way – is a powerful force in wider cultural context and in our church, individualism and independence are overrated. People long for a life together. People in west Texas know they will not survive in isolation. This is illustrated in Cursillo, where

people across the presbytery willingly drive hours and spend days together.

We have opportunity to recover a fresh understanding and practice of being church together as a presbytery in a new day. We can clarify and strengthen our identity and the purpose of a connectional life to be the Body of Christ in the Palo Duro Presbytery.

If we don't claim this issue and address it our churches will become even more separated and isolated. We will look even more like the culture of individualism that surrounds us. We will miss opportunities for mission and ministry together, no longer celebrating oneness in Christ and Christ's mission that transcends local congregations and personal loyalties.

Many have lost the idea of what it means to be a connectional church.

This presbytery is huge. It takes a big effort to stay in communication with each other.

In the past, pastors of large congregations in Palo Duro were committed to Presbytery functioning. In recent years they are no longer being denominational leaders.

In the past every elder in Lamesa church knew every pastor in PDP. We are not as involved in PDP as a Session. The past and individualism of our times contribute to that.

Presbytery doesn't make a difference. There are probably good programs, but I am not familiar with the current ones.

"In the good old days" we could have fifty committees, with twenty people on each, and everyone would show up to do their work.... The transition has not been made to what the presbytery's realities are now.

In the last few years we're seeing churches that are less loyal to the denomination, and are taking an independent track. We have churches that want to leave the PC church. That is one thing that bothers me. But others have no problem leaving.

In our history, Presbyterians have tended to stick together just because we are few and far between. We are losing that.

Congregations often look at Presbytery as big brother, and resent them. If you're on a committee, you see your role to help and support.

Congregations no longer relate to one another as congregations.

Attempts to get committees together have been canceled in recent months. People call in and say "I can't make that." It seems to be getting worse in the last years. Presbytery is clearly not priority.

Our largest difference these days is theological.... It is theological and ecclesiological – the understanding and practice of church.

The only way to express unity in Christ is to work together to become a community. One (person) cannot do it.

Loyalties more to PFR than Presbyterian Church.

There has not been as much reaching out across lines when conflict arises.

The binding ties of pastor who could keep a congregation connected to the Presbytery have diminished... Local supply and non-Presbyterians are filling our pulpits. This serves to weaken our Presbyterian identity. We have lost touch with some churches this way.

The small churches would suffer the most if the Presbytery were to end today. The large churches already see themselves as more independent. The connective nature is particularly with the small churches.

Hypothesis #4: Keeping Congregations Vital

Congregations are the most important resources of a Presbytery. The mission of the presbytery is essentially carried out in its congregations. This is where the ministry of the Gospel is most clearly proclaimed and embodied for the watching and wanting world. There exists a great and growing concern for the vitality of witness of congregations in the Palo Duro Presbytery.

“The particular church carries a vital responsibility in the mission of the church... Without (its) basic ministry to persons, neighborhoods, and communities, and the support given at the congregational level through prayer, personnel, and money, any other significant ministry of the church becomes impossible. Congregations serve as essential mission arms of the presbytery and the larger church.” (*Book of Order*, G-7.0100).

The compelling mission of the church as described in *The Book of Order*, is to be the provisional demonstration of what God intends for all of humanity. Paraphrased from *The Book of Order* (G-3.0200-G-3.0401), the church of Jesus Christ is called to –

- Be a sign in and for the world of the new reality which God has made available.
- Be the Body of Christ, both in its corporate life and in the lives of its members.
- Tell the good news of salvation by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.
- Present the claims of Jesus Christ.
- Be Christ’s faithful evangelist
- To undertake this mission even at the risk of losing its life, trusting in God alone.
- More fundamental obedience
- be a community of diversity

- openness to God's continuing reformation of the church... that it might be a more effective instrument of mission in the world.

Concerns for the vitality of congregational witness and mission include the following:

Most of our churches have a problem with vision. They have lost that vision that created the church. That has not been passed down... Very little sense of mission and vision. I find that very frustrating. They just go into survival mode, and that is death.... Many of our small town churches are in very serious trouble.

I don't see much growth in many of our Presbyterian churches in this presbytery. Also in the denomination as a whole.

Depopulation in the rural areas. That is a huge factor. That means the majority of our churches are in dying towns.

Concerned that PDP has churches shrinking in membership and closing. PDP has lost mission and is dying.

We are unable to offer pastoral leadership as congregations get smaller. Population decline. PDP had 66 churches when I first came on staff. Now we are down to 54. There have been a number of closures, and with each there is grief, despair, what are we doing wrong.

Small churches – they need to continue to be presence in their communities... the only reformed presence in their communities.

Up until the last five years (PDP valued) small and rural churches ministry, educated pastors and laity. Today – survival! ... Is the structure, committees, and function of presbytery to the good of the “church”?

Churches are still trying to figure out their vision locally.

We have the theological background. But a lot of our folks can't articulate who we are and what we believe.

In most of our churches the goal is survival.

...I came away excited. This is one church who we only heard from them “we are dying,” begin to say, “maybe there is something we can do.”

If Presbytery is to help churches develop, it is not doing so.

Hypothesis #5: Stalled by our Differences.

We get hung up on hot button issues which divide and frustrate us. Given the theological diversity reflected across the presbytery it is challenging to realize unity in Palo Duro Presbytery. Differences appear larger than any particular shared commitment we have.

Theological differences within the Palo Duro Presbytery are real and won't go away. The opportunity before us is to discover afresh what the Gospel is, and what the Gospel is calling us to be and do because of

one another, not in spite of each other. By not naming and claiming the heart of our unity and mission in the face of and enriched by our differences, division will increase, the connectional experience will be further diminished, energy for vital mission and witness will be drained, and the fear of further alienation, conflict and decline will become a reality.

I have noticed quite a bit in the last year that people have become a lot more vocal at presbytery as regard to standings on social issues particularly along ultraconservative and ultraliberal lines. I see more diversity in PDP than I would have thought existed, and I think it is a good thing that people feel comfortable to voice, but at the same time it upsets me that people throw walls up when people voice their opinions.

People feel grilled on the floor of Presbytery because of questions of biblical authority – people form groups.

PDP has changed so much. It is divided.

Quite concerned about the actions of the General Assembly.

We are shaped by cultural struggle around homosexuality.

It seems we are pushed by social consciousness rather than the Biblical way. For example, the homosexual issue does not go away. We need to get on to something more important like mission programs.

Liberals want to do social witness kind of things. The conservatives are more focused inside. We've begun to make a good case for the importance of both of those things happening. That is exciting to see.

I don't think that (people) are very open to learning from each other. Most people will say they are open. But when you observe them in interaction... they are much more ready to declare the rightness of their position or try to persuade to their point of view than they are to hear, ask questions, converse, (and believe) that that person may have an aspect I have not considered. That is more rare than common.

Some folks come with agendas, and their agendas determine their relationships.

Sometimes when someone presents one face in a public meeting, you see emails after the meeting that say something different.

Because of geography people are not together on a very frequent basis... Knowing the people you are dealing with would contribute to functionality.

People with such strong emotionally invested opinions on contentious issues make it hard to be civil. Distance within the presbytery poses a problem. Seeing more "us and them" mentality.

All groups have functioned well particularly when own opinions were set aside to see the overall mission.

Distance and the irregularity of being together.

The response from some was that "you can tell me that all day long and I don't believe it, that's not my understanding."

Hypothesis #6: Developing and Allocating our Resources

Significant cultural forces at work combined with lack of a shared compelling vision for our connectional life has an impact on resources development in the Palo Duro Presbytery. This is especially true in the areas of Leadership development and Financial development. Without effective development of these resources the future of a viable and effective Presbytery organization is in question.

Leadership resources:

We have some tremendously talented people who have so much to offer. There is no lack of people resources... Pastors and elders – many are highly experienced people. I have learned to treasure the gifts they bring... Problem is we don't use lay leadership as much as we should.

We have a lot of gifted people in this presbytery. But they are highly scheduled, busy.

Our greatest strength is our people resources.

If there is a lack, it is in the people area – committed, knowledgeable leaders. The willingness to learn and use the Presbyterian system is decreased. And so the same folks keep getting recycled, and there are fewer and fewer of them to recycle... There are newer people who haven't served, but unless there is intentional leadership training on committees, it is not helpful.

It's been a problem to get people to agree to serve after they've been identified.

Lack of younger people.

We beg people to serve.

Sometimes we operate as if "no good deed goes unpunished: do a good job on something and get asked to do another job."

I am not sure we identify all the talent out there.

Nominating committee really struggles.

Financial Resources:

It's not that we lack resources or that our congregations lack resources – people have resources, but it has to do with the extent that they are willing to be given... whether we want to hold on to those or be generous.

Financial resources are continuing to shrink. But that is not to say we are poor.... We do not have financial resources for new church beginnings, as a presbytery... individual churches may have resources for this, though.

We spend more than we bring in.

I think PDP are good stewards... when they set the budget they try not to go over... but they are strong about spending on mission.

We are lacking money – maybe we have failed to teach congregations that we are a connectional church and the churches need to give to presbytery programs.

Finances come through head tax and donations.

Mission funds allocation needs work. Our resources may be wasted.

Financial resources in most congregations are lacking.

We have a number of congregations in good shape financially. Even some of our smaller congregations have large endowments and they could have resources to help each other. We do have congregations who are hanging on barely...

Where the money goes is more an issue than that there is a lack. When congregations designate, the income to Presbytery dries up... I think we have the resources we need, but it's how we allocate them that doesn't work out.

(Churches) have the misconception that when they pay their per capita, they think part of it stays here in this Presbytery. But it does not. It is a G.A. per capita. Some churches who give money through the Presbytery designate all of it, so that none of it stays with us. It goes straight through... If they stop giving undesignated they think they are hurting G.A., but it is really hurting the Presbytery, because they are still giving their per capita to G.A.

The deficit on Presbytery budget is growing.

Presbytery Income & Expenses			
	Income	Expenses	Difference
2002	\$400,769	\$389,274	\$11,495
2003	\$449,006	\$412,708	\$36,034
2004	\$329,443	\$388,351	-\$58,908
2005	\$342,376	\$421,734	-\$79,358
2006	\$326,160	\$408,518	-\$82,358

App. 72,000 bequest received late in the year

Hypothesis # 7: Structure to facilitate ministry.

The partial collapse and varying effectiveness of the current Palo Duro Presbytery organizational structure leads to frustration with how ministry gets done, dissatisfaction as people seek to participate in Presbytery life, and an unsettling sense that things are not working as they should.

How things should be done in a Presbytery is known by fewer people as those who carry forward the history step away from participation in the

structure. “Order” continues, but participation is becoming more haphazard, and imaginative and generative conversation is lacking. Some structures do not function at all, while others are quite vital. To identify further where there is a mis-fit between structures and Presbytery vision and mission and to address these concerns will provide opportunity for more focused and satisfying participation. A compelling shared vision, purpose, and goals of the Presbytery will provide direction for what ministries are needed and what structures will be required to support them.

We made major changes five years ago. Eliminated the huge number of people. Most committees are now 8 people instead of 17-18. Even now, with smaller number, we struggle to get a quorum.

Where people feel their opinions are welcomed and valued, they are there, and their committees function well.

Some stuff that committees do is just plain routine. Routine does not inspire people to participate.

It is helpful that we have identified four Areas.

Some committees are more functional than others. Committee on Representation does not meet.

People on the Coordinating Council need to be involved or made to become involved, so they feel they are contributing to something.

The heads of all committees are to be on Coordinating Council. Many times we’ll have a council meeting and they don’t all come, and they don’t make reports.

The only place for coordination is at Presbytery meetings. And there, only commissioners come. But committee members may not be present. If the chair of the committee doesn’t show, and no report is given, and no one else from the committee comes, no one else will know what they are doing.

Connection through staff and Coordinating Council.

Are roles clear? Not sure.

Outside of the committees (roles and responsibilities) are less clear. Education is needed.

The structure of the Presbytery does support ministry. Sometimes they help out small or new churches financially.

Committee meetings are part of where things work least well. We have committees no larger than 8-10, thinking it would be easier to get fewer people more regularly. But that has not worked. Sometimes only 2-3 come. One Coordinating Council meeting, four came, and two were staff. I just couldn’t believe that....

Almost every committee, when it came to budget submission, “we’re just going to submit the same budget that we have before.” Budget in turn drives what they do. A cycle that isn’t broken into yet.

Good working relationship between COM and COPM. These committees work particularly well.

(Ministry is coordinated) only really through staff.

Presbytery meeting is limited to reporting. Energy does not get built up by that... There is no information flow unit to unit. Groups don't bring information back. No reinforcement of the work of the whole.... Information doesn't move well.

There is less decision-making to be done on the floor of the Presbytery than what there used to be. Most of the decisionmaking is what is coming down to us from G.P, and wrestling and wrangling about that... Enormous energy because we're making a decision around these big issues... Lack of feedback back and forth among us: 15 minutes on the agenda for conversation in the pews seems like a very limited way to share motivation or excitement about transformation. It can't carry the freight.

We're great with procedures. We have the structure, it's the imagination we are missing.

Not sure (how various work groups link or coordinate their efforts).

Summary

These then are the major hypotheses to be tested. They are not the only significant challenges that are facing the Palo Duro Presbytery today and that will continue to face it tomorrow, but they are certainly among the most significant.

Each of these challenges requires prayerful thought, careful examination, and creative planning. Each will require important changes in the ways the leaders and members of Palo Duro Presbytery think and act.