

CCSW Regional Council Statement on Restructure

God is at work in the Southwest Region! The Christian Church in the Southwest has eight Areas in it. Despite our best efforts to live in unity, sometimes we forget that we belong to each other. What happens in another Area affects all Areas, although it's not always so apparent that that's the case. When a few Areas are struggling, the entire Region struggles. It's our responsibility to listen to and work with our sisters and brothers across the whole Region because we are in covenant together to "be a source of vision, nurture, wholeness, and mutual accountability in order to serve and to strengthen congregations." (Mission Statement of the CCSW)

Over the years, there have been long and drawn out conversations about the structure and viability of the Region and Areas. Several efforts have been made to reorganize, but nothing has moved to or past the Regional Council in recent years until now.

May 5-6, the Regional Council met, discussed, and approved the conceptual framework that was brought forth by the Regional Restructure Dialogue Group and also empowered that group to meet again to work out more details. That framework places all administrative and staffing responsibilities in the Regional level, with Regional staffing consisting of a Regional Minister, Regional Executive, and Community Regional Ministers and support staff located across the entire Region. Areas would continue to provide valuable volunteer-led ministry.

There has been much prayer surrounding this process, and the Regional Council feels God's Spirit at work. As several members of the Council said this weekend – now is the time. Now is the time to boldly follow the Spirit's leading so that we might do God's will and work in this time and place that is the Southwest Region.

We'll share more details about the framework with you shortly; first, let's go over a little background.

- Some parts of our Region are doing pretty well overall; other parts of our Region are struggling in some way.
- We're the largest Region in our denomination, and our leadership staff is smaller than many other Regions.
- Last year, congregations throughout the Southwest Region responded to questions from the Regional Minister Search Committee about the leadership needs for our Region. Also, Area boards were asked to submit answers to several questions about Area and congregational needs and their thoughts on restructure that could benefit ministry at the local, Area, and Regional church. Based upon all these answers and conversations with people across the Region, the Search Committee determined the best way to move our Region forward was by calling both a Regional Minister and a Regional Executive and to begin a more serious conversation about the structure of the Region.
- At the October 2016 Regional Assembly, the assembly voted to allow the Regional Council to take whatever actions they deemed necessary to allow Regional Ministry to reorganize structurally and financially.

- One of those actions was taken during the January Regional Council meeting, when the Council approved the formation of a Dialogue Group to discuss and discern restructure for the Southwest Region.
- The Restructure Dialogue Group consisted of Area Moderators and Representatives, Regional Executive Committee members, and representatives from Texas Christian Missionary Fellowship and the Hispanic Convention.

As was shared in a Region-wide update, during their first meeting, the Dialogue Group members talked about the successes and struggles of ministry within individual Areas and the Region as a whole. Area Moderators shared reasons for celebration – reflecting on successful programming, meaningful education opportunities, commissioning and ordaining passionate clergy, and finding viable solutions within the changing landscape of ministry.

Each person was also able to identify areas of struggle, decline, and concern. Some common themes emerged:

- Geographical concerns. Some Areas struggle to create community between churches due to long distances between congregations.
- Physical distance also compounds the difficulty local congregations have connecting with their Area staff.
- Each Area expressed concerns about finances, recognizing that even those Areas currently in financial health are looking at decreased congregational giving. Some Areas have critically deficient financial viability; for others, financial viability is contingent on using accumulated resources or reducing staff.

Each of the problems outlined by Area representatives seemed to be a consequence of a Regional structure that is no longer meeting the needs of congregations. The Dialogue Group prayerfully discerned that we need a new structure that will renew the relationships between congregations and the larger church and make local ministry the priority for our future growth.

The group next worked to develop a sense of direction. Early on, two possibilities were excluded from further discussion. One was to continue on the way we've been going, in which the Region absorbs the duties of failing Areas as circumstances require. The group determined this model would result in further deterioration of resources and congregational service and connection. Another was to consolidate Area functions and administration with multiple Areas, forming something like "Super Areas." It was concluded that that model would kick the can down the road and not solve fundamental issues.

Two other models seemed to have more possibility for financial viability and increased connection between congregations. One was to divide the Region into 2-4 Regions. The other was to consolidate Area operations, employment, and administration into the Region, not to the exclusion of locally-based ministerial staff to support communities. The Group recognized that reducing multiple administrative layers and creating staffing with more local connections across the Region were critical to the success of a new model.

At the next meeting, the Dialogue Group reviewed a map of the distribution of churches that showed how re-drawing Area lines would be unlikely to solve problems of financial viability or provide necessary resources for ministry and local connection.

The two general directions discerned at the first meeting – The Single Region and the Multi-Region models – were analyzed in depth. The Dialogue Group unanimously determined that one model was more financially feasible, could provide the ministry needed with flexibility, and faced the least obstacles: The Single Region model.

What does the Single Region model look like?

- Placing all administrative and staffing responsibilities in the Regional level, but employing Community Regional Ministers located across the entire Region. Areas would continue to provide valuable volunteer-led ministry.

In more detail, that means:

- Regional Staff with greater accountability and flexibility
- There would be a Regional Minister and a Regional Executive, plus
- 5-10 Community Regional Ministers, including a mixture of part time and full time employment, where areas of expertise can be shared across the entire Region but local connections would be maintained
- Centrally managed support staff
- Areas would be relieved from financial and administrative management to pursue ministry directed by Area Boards, including volunteer-based local ministry and camp coordination.

Other points to keep in mind:

- This plan is NOT an attack on any individual, committee, group, or past decision; the Regional Council celebrates our past and future shared ministry.
- This does NOT mean that Area Ministers will be kicked to the curb. The Areas and Region are grateful for their gifts and ministries, and want these individuals to be a part of the new model.
- Area boards will still exist, but ministry will not be dictated by Area lines. Ministry can be more flexible and could be enlivened.
- The plan isn't perfect, and it's not yet complete. It's a roadmap for the best way forward to do ministry in the Southwest Region.

The tentative timeline will continue to be worked on at the next Dialogue Group meeting in early June. For now, the timeline includes:

- Complete implementation by January 1, 2019
- Current area financial support from the Region would stop by January 1, 2018 (or earlier) subject to placement of Community Regional Ministers prior to that date
- Current Area staff positions as they are now known would end by January 1, 2019. Again, this does not mean that current individuals on staff would not be included in the new model.

- Later this fall, the Region hopes to call a Regional Minister. After that, the Regional Executive, administrative support, and additional Community Regional Ministers will be called/hired.
- In October 2018, the Council will report actions taken to implement the process to the Regional Assembly.

In the meantime, the Regional Council has approved the calling of contract-basis Community Regional Ministers to provide coverage in Northeast Texas and South Texas.

The Restructure Dialogue Group will meet again June 2-3 to start working on more details. The Dialogue Group wants to hear from Areas and congregations, so we invite your input. Please share your comments, concerns, affirmations, and ideas about opportunities and challenges by contacting your Area Moderator or by e-mailing Restructure@ccsw.org.