

A note regarding TREC Study Papers

Over the next few months, TREC will be offering a series of study papers as a means by which to stimulate conversation and seek input from the larger church. We are working hard at the work the church has given us to do but also know that many of the insights and ideas that will help to “re-imagine the church” will come from stories and perspectives outside of our 25 members of our TREC team

We call these documents Study Papers, because they study an issue or offer a new approach to a particular dimension of the structure, governance or administration of the church. As such, we hope they are constructive and thought provoking.

We ask that the church community respond along several dimensions: provide clarity, where there may be factual mistakes; but more importantly, to provide perspectives, analysis, alternatives and action steps.

We ask you to respond in whatever way feels comfortable and constructive for you: email a TREC member privately, email TREC through our common address (reimagnetec@gmail.com), respond publicly by posting on our website, use your name or a pseudonym, write papers we can use and incorporate, or make comments on specific points. You might like to post on the website in which you are reading this, or go to our home website at www.reimagnetec.org.

We will read and listen to all of the input we receive. We will not and cannot be responding directly to you, simply because we are each personally limited by time and energy. (We are volunteers). But do know that whatever you say or contribute is received with gratitude. We view each person who responds to us as partnering with us. Thank you.

Engagement Questions we like for you to consider as you read our papers:

1. People have told us that there are serious problems in the church. There are also many signs of grace. In this paper, we attempt to address some of these. Where are we on target? What are we missing?
2. What resonates with you about the paper?
3. Please, would you respond to the questions we have posed in through the paper? You can email reimagnetec@gmail.com.
4. What stories, in support, or in contrast, would you like to share?



**Task Force for Reimagining the Episcopal Church
Study Paper on Episcopal Networks (February 2014)**

In the Network Study Paper, we observe that TEC has several kinds of networks operating in it (4 types, across network v.1.0 and v.2.0). Some are adapted for the challenges ahead of us, some of these networks are not. TEC has operated under a corporate network for the last 50 years and that model appears to be dying. New life is struggling to come about, and we sketch some possibilities.

The sub-group on networks, in presenting its ideas for the wider church community to consider, is looking at how the Episcopal Church(TEC) may best position itself for the future in order to participate faithfully in God’s mission of reconciliation, renewal and restoration. And this is indeed the challenge: how do we think about the future? And we might as well ask, how do we think about the present?

If we are to understand better the necessity, limits and potential of networks for ministry—that intermix of human connections, bolstered by technology, and focused on some purposeful outcomes—we will have to take a step back from merely advocating some recommendation or legislation. By stepping back, we can then articulate our assumptions and beliefs.

Without being more explicit about assumptions—and inviting others to think about underlying assumptions—we are liable to make abstract recommendations, or else misunderstand each other, or waste both time and treasure. We may disagree about assumptions—whether historical, theological or strategic—but at least we can be clear about the nature of those differences.

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Assumptions

Central/Local Tensions

We believe that in the cultural West, in which TEC operates for the most part, Christian institutional forms have diminished in both impact and visibility. A consequence of this diminishment is that the corporate model of doing work/ministry is no longer sustainable: the classic central (up)/local (down) relationship is changing, or has changed. The center for example, is no longer the source of strategy and programming, nor the networking hub. It simply does not have the resources or the knowledge to do so in a church community that is diverse, spanning geographies and theological perspectives, and experiencing all manner of challenges and opportunities.

Even if what the center prescribes might be the right thing, there is diminished legitimacy for the notion of centralization. There are strong trends in both TEC, the other Protestant denominations as well as in American society at large, that distrust what the center—any center—says or does, whether deserved or not, for better or ill.

We thus hold the assumption that a Church Center (dubbed by some as “815”, and by itself as Missionary Society), even if it had the answers, or the resources, or the ablest people, simply doesn’t have automatic legitimacy in these times. For example, for every \$1 an average Episcopal parishioner pledges, 18 cents goes to the diocese (18%) and 3 cents to the churchwide budget (18% of 18%). The final amount, 3 cents, is relatively miniscule, yet is a contested issue. This therefore cannot be just about money or accountability.

Without wading into details, we want to point out the tensions: In the future, should there be a central-anything? If not, where will strategy, program, coordination and networking emerge? Most likely, there will be a central something, if only because people abhor a vacuum. But then, what kind of strategy and programming and networking will the “center” now provide in these decentralized times?

This tension between central/local is inherent to any organization and community anywhere. In the Episcopal Church, this tension has been elevated: we split our many powers for decision making and accountability, and solidify them in orders, a vaunted democratic tradition, and the narrative of history. Because of our tradition of shared governance—which sometimes seems like a sacralization of division of powers—it can become hard to explore ideas or to experiment. For example, some ideas or experiments require a certain level of coordination, even centralization, but the resistance and skepticism that immediately arise appear as if one has advocated joining our Roman brethren. On the other hand, power-centers are defended tenaciously, even when what is presently required is a high level of autonomy and spontaneity.

Uncertainty and the Future: Sin and Metanoia

These tensions lead to uncertainty about the future.(Or, is it uncertainty about the future which leads to these tensions?) In any case, networks are viewed as some kind of solution for the future of ministry—for sharing of information and resources; for self-organizing, self-empowered emergent groups or persons to find

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each other. One may point to secular or corporate examples, and certainly a fair bit of research and theory are available to bolster the hope that networks—whether planned by some central agency, or emergent from among the local—are the future.

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much about networks as a feature of the future, but about the future itself? What shapes the future?

Theologically and scripturally, God shapes the future: God’s enormous love for us, God’s plans for us “for good and not for evil,” God’s promise for regeneration and renewal (in the Abrahamic, Noahic and Davidic covenants, in the Passion of Christ, and in Pentecost). That much is promised the church.

But Jesus himself also said that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from stones, and the early churches were warned that they could be spat out for being lukewarm. In other words, our futures are uncertain because each of us responds to God’s call to choose “life over death” rather differently. Sometimes—many times—we turn away from God. The word that our tradition gives us is sin: “in thought word and deed, through ignorance, weakness and our own deliberate fault.” (BCP). Sin—both individual and group—operates to thwart God’s purpose. We simply miss the mark and fall short. Offered forgiveness, and opportunities for new life, we may not choose it. (The rich young man walks away, the invited guests do not go to the Feast.)

Both the grace of God and the presence of sin have operated in the life of God’s people throughout millennia, and, we assume, are both present in TEC. TEC is both filled with grace and sinful. Some parts of this Christian community called TEC will participate more fully in God’s mission, and other parts will not. All parts are being pruned: some will find new life and others will not.

We must be cognizant, that even as we focus on organizational issues—constructing a more elegant legislative process, or creating centers of excellence, or revising the canons (which our colleagues are doing), or building a more connected network, that we are cognizant of sin. Most organizations do not talk about sin; they talk about dysfunction, bureaucracy, silos, governance, etc. For us, there is an opportunity to look at organizational life through the theological lens of sin and repentance.

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What then is sin for the church as an organization and community? It appears that the early church leaders were dealing with forms of communal sin: Ananias and Sapphira’s lies about their intentions on behalf of the community (Acts 4:32-5:11); competition among followers of Apollos and Paul (1 Corinthians 1:12); and those who took advantage of other’s generosity and hunger at the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:17).

With respect to ineffective networks, sin might be viewed as the tendency for being mired, knotted, and entangled, the propensity to chain ourselves rather than free ourselves to faithfully participate in God’s mission of reconciliation, renewal and restoration. These knots and chains may be habitual, emotional, procedural,

informational, relationship, generational, etc. While it may be the case that the solution rests in some better technology platform or some other secularly-derived organizational intervention to optimize networking and networks, our spiritual tradition invites us to consider something else: change our hearts and minds. *Metanoia*.

It is easy in our times to banish, blandish or banter notions of sin and repentance. But our Anglican tradition is rather upfront and matter of fact about them, and invites us to a fruitful exploration of their organizational implications and applications.

Legislation and Bonds of Affection

TREC's output is expected to be a set of legislation for the General Convention to consider, including perhaps legislation for how to go about building (central doing), or encouraging (central helping local) networks. The problem is that if the only tool one has is a hammer, one is likely to see everything as a nail. As such, if the tool one has recourse to most is legislation, then what does one see? Positions that require advocacy. Everything becomes, "do you support this or oppose this?"

But this, is not legislation or a thing. This, at least when it comes to networks, is always a person. To help another person does not require legislation or structure; it simply requires one person to act generously towards another person.

Networks form around some invisible invaluable core. Commercial networks—which are dominant in our times—form around self interest and pecuniary gains. Political networks around power. Self-help networks (AA, immigrant communities), around some deep pain and/or present need. Alumni networks around affiliation.

If Episcopal networks are to come more fully alive, it requires us to activate our Anglican "bonds of affection." Given their recent history of use, these words may provoke skepticism. Nevertheless, it is affection (or charity, as Paul reminds us), which brings our work alive; it is the electricity running our networks, absent which they are hollow.

How then does love form the energizing, instigating, creative fecundity of our networks? We ask the church to let us know.

A Framework to Think about Networks

We posit four types of networks:

1. Personal networks—both intimate and social
2. Issue/lobby/political networks—most active in legislative events
3. Project/missional networks—centered around missional acts, including networks of those who experience great need and pain.
4. Knowledge sharing or co-learning networks

Cross cutting these networks are degrees of depth, breadth and diversity.

To illustrate graphically:

	Simple/Local/Same/organized	←	→	Complex/global/diverse/emergent
1. Personal and Social	Race/Gender/Class			Cosmopolitan, mixed identity
2. Political	Parish	Diocese	TEC	Anglican
3. Missional	City	County	Country	Global
4. Knowledge and Learning	Episcopalian focused (organized by Diocese or 815)	Ecumenical (part organized)	Interfaith (more spontaneity)	Eclectic (emergent, self-organized)

For people engaged in missional and knowledge networks, we observe these behaviors:

- identification and response to missional need
- building of a community centered around common action
- presence of self-motivated persons acting as connectors to other persons, ideas or resources
- a willingness to mix formal and informal roles, up/down, central/margins.
- operating through, and also transcending boundaries of identities (e.g. In TEC, people coalesce into an identity group (high/low church, gay/straight, ethnic etc.), for better or for worse. We believe future productive work requires reaching beyond these identity groups, which are too simplistic and convenient.)

All these four different types of networks are present in TEC. As we think about the future of TEC, we are interested in how #1 and #2 are harnessed to serve #3 and #4.

In terms of the movement horizontally, we can posit that what is towards the left and top, is what might be called network version 1.0 (in blue), which was constituted during a time of Christian cultural ascendancy, is corporatist with a hub/spoke mindset. This has been our past for the last five to six decades, and many of us who joined the church in this period valued the ethos (e.g. of order, hierarchy and formality of process) and were shaped by it.

We now face a different world, in which risk-taking, innovation, spontaneity and self-organization are defining aspects, thus requiring network 2.0. 1.0 and 2.0 are therefore a shorthand to talk about two different paradigms. The transition from 1.0 to 2.0 is not a technical challenge (defined by doing something better with existing skills), but an adaptive one (defined by having a new mindset). Sometimes trying to

change the old is like “patching a new cloth on the old, with the tear becoming worse” (as a Gospel passage puts it).

We hear from others that this tension—chasm?—exists, between the network that the church (e.g.815, diocese, and sometimes even parishes) offers, and the networks that actually sustain those who work for justice among the poor, the marginalized and those considered “others.” Ironically they are strengthened sometimes for mission by networks that are not Christian (leave alone Episcopalian). What then can we learn from such networks that are not explicitly Christian and yet equip our saints for mission?

Our Understanding of Change

A key driver of change anywhere is demographics. Steve Jobs was initially stumped by how to get people to use computer keyboards when he first came up with the personal computer. It then dawned on him that getting people to change was a

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problem that didn’t need his solving. A younger generation would naturally adopt new technology. Those who were resistant to the new could be safely ignored as they would pass away in time. All he needed to do was to cater to the young and the eager.

This positive demographic dynamic of a natural renewal due to younger people coming in, **is not** available to TEC. However much we may want to change or talk about changing, especially with adopting new network models that are visible in

the non-church world, we are, unfortunately, prone to stick to practices and habits that have conditioned our median generation, who are Baby Boomer and older. We must not assume we will be saved by those other natural renewing forces that obtain elsewhere, such as in marketing consumer products. Conversely: the treasures of an older generation will have a hard time finding continuity and heirs.

Our areas of research in the next 2-3 months.

We have been researching network 1.0 and network 2.0 and would like to enlist the help of the church in understanding them.

1. We plan to examine bodies established under the 1.0 paradigm, and ask: how can they be improved for better networking?

1.1 House of Bishops, House of Deputies, Executive Council

General Convention, our highest legislative body, is made up of the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies, and includes an interim body, Executive Council. Among their roles and duties are that of legislation, consultation and governance. Some members have known each other for years, others are new to each other. We want to understand:

- to what extent do they go beyond their prescribed roles and positions, to act spontaneously in the service of missional networking (#3) and co-learning (#4)?
- an email list exists in each body, and it appears these have been used, sometimes in the rehashing of culture wars. Is there any way for this list to serve less partisan ends?
- these bodies represent a form of “center”—how can they additionally help in a networked church?

1.2 Seminaries

TEC currently has 11 seminaries, and the future of these seminaries, if they are to survive, will depend on their ability to provide value to students, alumni and society at large.

- We know that our seminaries compete against each other. But how do they collaborate?
- And what kinds of platforms will help them with improved networking?
- Would a combined email directory be useful?

1.3 The Episcopal Church Center (“815”). The network that “815” created in the mid-20th century operated on the spoke-and-hub model, with missions desks providing expert advice and support (and in the past financial resources).

- We seek to find out 815’s perspective and experience in working with change and transition, and how it views its role in networking. What could be improved? What would it do differently?

We note that the skepticism directed towards church-wide structures appears to be deep, and while not complete, affects a sizeable portion of TEC’s membership such that even if a majority were to agree to forms of centrally sponsored networks, the vigor and focus will inevitably be deficient—in other words, unloved and hence illegitimate.

1.4 Provincial structures. These are our regional structures, some of which work well and have the support of their members, others of which don’t.

- Why the difference?
- What are the essential factors which make some of these networks work and others not?

2. We seek to identify functioning 2.0 networks and ask them to tell their stories.

2.1 An example we have received of an emergent self-organized network is that of the Episcopal Service Corps. We want to hear its story of networking. We invite other such emergent networks to share their stories, if they choose to.

There is a paucity of qualitative data and candid anecdotes that describe how networks work or don't work currently in TEC. While we have been asked to be bold and visionary in our recommendations, we think that the most visionary thing is to ask people to boldly describe what they see going on, and how they would turn what currently exists of network 1 (personal/social) and network 2 (political/issue), into network 3 (missional) and network 4 (co-learning.)