Church Organization is Contextual

- Incarnation means church always enfleshed in specific cultures
- Anglicanism has national, vernacular character
- Dynamic—culture always changing
- Requires faithful adaptation over time
Thinking Theologically about Polity

- What image of God is embedded in different forms of church organization?
- What assumptions are made about creation, humanity, evil, agency, power, etc?

Episcopal Denominational Paradigms

- **State church legacy (1607-1789)**
  - Establishment: Christian culture/society
  - Geographical domain/control
  - Monarchical leadership (monarchical view of God)
  - Primary challenges: governance; moral improvement of society
Denominational Paradigms, cont.

- **Democratic Federalism** (1789-c.1900)
  - Embrace of American representative democracy
  - Functional establishment (still basically Christian culture)
  - Constitutional confederacy of autonomous dioceses
  - Organization of Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society (1835): strand of missional DNA
  - Unresolved tensions: clerical vs. lay authority
  - Primary challenges: unity; governance; mission as expansion of church across frontier and overseas

Denominational Paradigms, cont.

- **Modern Corporate Bureaucracy** (c. 1900-60s)
  - Peak of Episcopal Church’s self-confidence, ‘national church’ ideal
  - Industrial age: standardization, command-and-control, rationalization of work
  - Era of rising multi-national corporations
  - Centralization of program, administration
  - Primary challenge: programmatic/franchise approach to mission (domestic and foreign)
Denominational Paradigms, cont.

- **Regulatory Agency (1960s-present)**
  - Collapse of ‘national church’ ideal
  - Rise of postcolonialism
  - Cultural upheavals, challenge to patriarchal white authority
  - Disconnect between denominational staff/assemblies and grass roots
  - Loss of resources, culture wars, shrinking church
  - Primary challenges: sustaining structures; unity; diversity

Floods of Cultural and Social Change
A Dislocated Church

- Cultural disestablishment of Christianity
  - Church cannot reshape nation from center
- Previous paradigms of denominational structure assume mission is somewhere else, not here
- If mission is primarily local, context is critical
  - Standardization doesn’t serve diverse America well

Renewing Identity in God’s Mission

- Episcopal Church faces post-establishment identity crisis
- Invites us deeper:
  - Mission is aspect of triune God, not just activity of church
  - Church’s identity lies in participating in triune God’s life and love for world (“restoring all people to unity with God and one another in Christ,” BCP p. 855)
  - Every member is missionary in daily life, spheres of influence
  - Mission from everywhere to everywhere
Cultivating Christian Community

- Primary challenge facing church: *cultivation of Christian community*
  - Within existing congregations
  - With new neighbors, generations, populations
- “Mixed economy” church (Rowan Williams)

A Key Question to Ask

- What does a missionary Episcopal Church need from its national organization?
  - Networking for grass roots mission
  - Sharing of learning/innovation
  - Identity cultivation (theological reflection)
  - Governance (tending catholicity)
  - What else?
Limitations of ‘Resourcing’ Model

- From regulatory to resourcing
- Yet assumes problems are largely technical, answers are with denominational ‘experts,’ not at grass roots
- Typically relies on modern managerial methods
- Economically unsustainable in most places

Cultural Shift: A Network Age

- Rise of participatory culture
- Internet: primary cultural metaphor for 21st c. world
- Cultural co-creation
- New forms of collaboration
- Peer-to-peer communication
Network Denominations: A Vision

- If mission is from everywhere to everywhere and primarily local, how is God calling us to collaborate at the regional, national, international levels?
- Need for highly participatory, flexible structure
- Minimal institutional footprint
- Embracing freedom for difference
- Challenge of networks is *identity*
  - Must be cultivated through interpretive leadership, not regulatory control

Bureaucracies vs. Networks

- **Bureaucracies:**
  - Centrally planned, coordinated
  - Hierarchical authority
  - Center/margin dynamic
  - Expertise: at top

- **Networks:**
  - Decentralized
  - Distributed authority
  - Emergent/self-organizing
  - Expertise: at grass roots

![Bureaucracy vs. Network Diagram](image-url)
Episcopal Church in a Web 2.0 World

- **Web 1.0**
  - Server (provider of resources/info) → client (passive consumer)

- **Web 2.0**
  - Co-creative, mutually participatory (← →)
  - Adaptable from grass roots
  - Flexible, decentralized
  - Peer-to-peer

Thinking Theologically about Networks

- **Trinity**
  - Shared, distributed authority
  - Interdependent
  - Reciprocal/mutual

- **Holy Spirit**
  - Personal, public presence who makes God’s power knowable
  - Unifies, reconciles, empowers
  - Alive among God’s ordinary people
Reimagining General Convention

- What does TEC need from its national assembly?
  - Primary purpose is governance (democratic authority, deliberation)
  - What kind of public voice?
  - Could GC be a place for…
    - Sharing of innovation/learnings from grass roots
    - Spiritual formation—revival!
    - Theological interpretation/teaching/vision
    - Networking for collaboration?

Discussion