

CONTINUUM TOOL ANALYSIS

October 1, 2024

Crossroads developed the Continuum Tool to guide organizations to look both reflectively and critically at their commitment to antiracism and race equity. Using this tool, we can define where the Presbytery of San Francisco (PSF) is in our collective journey toward becoming a truly antiracist organization. While the Continuum ranges between Stages 1 and 6, we honed in on Stages 2 (Club), 3 (Symbolic), and 4 (Critically Aware). According to Crossroads, these are the stages that bracket most organizations they work with.

Stage 2, Club organizations see themselves as non-racist. They officially “welcome all” but rarely articulate who makes up the “all.” They may cite the number of BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Color) churches and/or BIPOC staff as evidence that they are not racist. This often obfuscates how the organization's primary function is the preservation of stability and comfort for its members. As a result, these organizations maintain white dominance and function through their systems, policies, and decision-making. While seldom intending to, Club organizations routinely harm their BIPOC members by asking them to assimilate into their ways of thinking and being.

Stage 3, Symbolic organizations have a growing awareness of systemic racism and the negative impact it has on their desire to be diverse, welcoming, and inclusive. They create and adopt official statements against racism, actively recruit BIPOC people into leadership positions, and offer educational workshops for everyone on racism. However, these organizations are not deeply committed to changing how they operate and the cultural norms they adhere to. Like Club organizations, Symbolic organizations ultimately operate to ensure the needs of their members are met. The symbolic actions they take serve to assure their members feel good which is why in stressful situations, they revert to stage 2 behaviors.

Stage 4, Critically Aware organizations are aware that they uphold white supremacy cultural values that are harmful to BIPOC members while benefitting white members. They have committed institutional resources to understanding and actively disrupting their patterns of white dominance.

Where is the PSF on this continuum?

Though there are perceived aspects of our presbytery that may seem (especially to white members and those who have unconsciously accepted white supremacy culture) to be at stage 3 or 4 and moving toward forward

progress, the club behavior of stage 2 is so strong that we are constantly pulled back to this stage.

Using the Continuum Tool, we reviewed five institutional functions of PSF: our mission/purpose/identity, our organizational structure, our constituency, our products/programs/services, and our personnel. Each of these institutional functions is discussed at length below.

Mission, Purpose & Identity

An organization's mission, purpose, and identity answer the question of why the organization exists as described in its identity documents (e.g., constitution, by-laws, etc.), its ideology, belief system, world view, and assumptions (e.g., Bible, Statement of Principles, etc.), its mission statement, goals, history, and traditions.

The Presbytery of San Francisco's mission statement is **to celebrate, nurture, and serve our communities by our life together in Christ**. This inwardly focused mission statement reveals how thoroughly **stage 2** and clubbish our presbytery identity is. We will take it word by word.

Celebrate, nurture, serve: These verbs are all status-quo – they do not challenge or move us in any direction. They are as positive as motherhood, baseball, and apple pie. There is nothing to object to here, nor is there anything great to aspire to. These verbs do not recognize nor address the trauma we have experienced or the deep needs of the world we live in.

Our: The possessive pronoun refers back to an "us" – but we know there are varying degrees of "our" belonging and ownership, as some communities are considered central, while others are marginal. White communities exhibit a greater sense of belonging and ownership in the presbytery, in general, and BIPOC communities, particularly immigrant communities and those that are fellowships or worshiping communities but not chartered congregations, exhibit less. What needs to be acknowledged is that the presbytery was founded by and for white communities, with BIPOC communities imperfectly grafted in over our 175-year history. The foundational system of white ownership, belonging, and entitlement continues today.

Communities: We must ask: Is it truly the wider community in which we live, or just the congregations? If congregations, are **all** intended here? If intending to speak to wider communities, what is our accountability to the

neighborhoods in which we live and worship? The vagueness here does not inspire vision or make the needs of the world real.

Life: Life constitutes an essential thing, but the presbytery does not always feel essential. Life should be powerful, natural, continuous, growing, nurturing, creative, changing, and developing. Our presbytery feels external and discontinuous, especially to those who have experienced presbytery as just "swooping in when in trouble." For example, an ethnic congregation verbalized that they felt if they invited the presbytery, it meant they were in trouble. There was no relationship beyond troubleshooting, imposing rules, and bringing deviants back to the norm, a place of enforcement and control. This regulatory nature can be viewed as "ordering" rather than "living."

Together: We hope for but do not live into this. We lack connection with one another, and our ties have been weakened even further during the age of Zoom, where meetings are quick and transactional. We do not have many opportunities for collaboration, connection, and fellowship. Those members who serve on many committees may feel (or hope for) a sense of shared togetherness, but it is not meaningful to the average membership, for whom presbytery is often viewed as an abstraction. Moreover, because of how our financial arrangements are made, there are fears of "disposability" where communities are seen as good or bad investments to be tested. Worshipping communities compete for money in a grant-based process. Needing to prove one's worth is hostile and not conducive to a sense of togetherness.

In Christ: This is our hope. We desire to be together in Christ, and we know looking to Christ is where we find our saving grace, not just individually but as a presbytery. We doubt that we live into this, but we still have hope.

In summary, our mission statement is self-referential and circular. **It is clubbish because the mission of the club is the maintenance of itself for the purpose of its own life.** We are reminded of how we have meetings for the purpose of having meetings – because our polity requires them. To move toward transformation we would need to have a driving and motivating sense of collective purpose, mission, and vision.

Organizational Structure

The question of organizational structure addresses how the organization works, how its policies and practices (explicit or implicit) govern access to the organization, control of its resources, and the organization's accountability.

Our organizational structure functions like a club. The organization is set up in an intentionally slow-moving and self-preserving way to maintain equilibrium and avoid change; this results in continuance of the patterns of power that have served white people well for the past 175 years. Despite myriad attempts to restructure and rethink elements such as committees and staffing plans, the presbytery continues to function in a way that creates ranks of “insiders” and “outsiders” who function in informal ways mediated by friendships, insider knowledge, and relationships of proximity. In order to make change in the presbytery, or even to create an ordinary item of new business, it is necessary to understand the way the presbytery functions, including our committee structure, Robert’s Rules, and obtuse elements of presbyterian polity. Many new participants may “not know what they don’t know.” So, despite best intentions they may find themselves unable to make the changes for justice that they feel called to. Knowingly or unknowingly, they become complicit in maintaining the power structure.

We will focus on one case study here: the Committee on Representation (COR) case. COR was added to the Book of Order (BOO) in the ‘80s as a way to police the white dominance of church structures in the wake of reunification. The Book of Order specifically tasked each presbytery to have a COR and not to merge it with another committee (as merging is a way to undermine the work). Yet that is precisely what our presbytery has done.

According to our research, we had an actual COR as late as 2010, but due to insufficient membership, disempowerment, and member frustration, it succumbed to inactivity. No effort was made to redress this concern until 2018 when the functions of the COR were assumed by the Nominating Committee (NOM). This was formalized with a presbytery vote, despite the knowledge that this is against the BOO.

In 2023, a small effort was made to correct the situation by giving the combined NOM/COR two co-chairs, one for NOM and one for COR. Yet, the work of nominations is so significant that the work of representation must still take a back seat. Neither NOM nor COR are equipped to disrupt this club behavior and change the way we function.

Constituency

Constituency answers the question: for whom does this organization exist? Constituency includes official members (ministers, congregation members, participants in programming, and recipients of service) as well as unofficial

members (potential members, neighbors, people who may wish to participate and/or receive.).

We are a diverse presbytery compared to others in the 92% white PC(USA). Based on the 2022 statical report our presbytery membership is 73% white, 15% Asian, 6% African American, 3% Hispanic or Latina/Latino/Latinx, 3% multi-racial.

We are located in a much more diverse Bay Area; according to the Bay Area Equity Atlas, our neighborhoods are 36% white, 27% Asian, 23% Hispanic/or Latina/Latino/Latinx, 7% African American, and 6% multi-racial.

Our presbytery worships in nine languages. We celebrate the vibrance of our communities. We display many of the characteristics of a symbolic (stage 3) institution where we celebrate our diversity as if it were evidence of the anti-racist virtue of the institution. There is a tendency to invite the BIPOC churches from the margins toward the center for specific and highly performative tasks: worship leadership, music, and cultural sharing, especially when a diversity of languages and musical forms are used. However, this appears to function as cultural entertainment for the white-dominant center. White people rely on people of color to bring "inspired" and "spirit-led worship" without taking ownership of how their own worship may feel "boring" or "uninspired." Because BIPOC people produce for white consumption, this behavior knowingly and unknowingly benefits white people.

We have difficult club behavior dynamics that have led to churches of color intentionally disconnecting from the presbytery. One case study is the disconnection of Black churches.

The Presbytery includes six Black-majority churches. We intentionally engaged in church-planting for Sojourner Truth Presbyterian Church with the aim of providing appropriate ministry to the Black community. Yet, we do not have wider accountability to the Black community. There is a significant theme of gentrification and dispersal as the Black community is pushed out of its historic neighborhoods, which the presbytery has not and is not addressing. Black-majority congregation Hillside Church closed several years ago, and according to our research the presbytery did not offer meaningful support that could have prevented closure. Following its closure and the sale of the building the presbytery decided to disperse its funds to the remaining Black churches, but the dispersal was delayed for thirteen years. This disrespectful delay created distrust and disconnection in the remaining Black churches.

This case study resonates with other communities to show a theme of disrespect, distrust, and disconnection in PSF. The central structure of the white-dominant presbytery (FPOC in particular) sometimes has suspicion and mistrust about BIPOC churches being able to make "wise financial decisions," which is a judgment due to white cultural expectations. This advantages white congregations who meet FPOC's expectations, and it is a pattern that is overlooked until it comes out in painful cases like this.

Some BIPOC churches have distanced themselves from the presbytery because of this distrust and disillusionment. Now, they may choose to function outside the purview of the presbytery without their decision-making and choices being judged or questioned. When this dynamic is discussed, deep emotions are shared, but the dynamics have not changed, leading to cynicism and withdrawal.

Products, Programs, and Services

An organization's products, programs, and services answer the question of what the organization does, what it provides for its constituency.

Our presbytery supports our congregations and New Worshiping Communities (NWCs), as well as minister members and Commissioned Lay Pastors /Commissioned Ruling Elders (CLPs/CREs) through a variety of products, programs and services. Some examples include:

- Scholarship funds for seminary students
- Low-cost in-house education for CRE/CLP students
- Budgeted support for NWCs
- Budgeted support in 2024 for Latinos Unidos en Cristo , Igreja Presbiteriana Brasileira, San Mateo; Mission Bay Community Church; and Igreja Presbiteriana Brasileira Concord.
- Grant-based support available up to \$50,000 at a time, the grants being evaluated and disbursed by our Regions. ¹

¹ Our presbytery is in the unusual position of having an abundance of funds received at the departure of large congregations from the denomination. The presbytery decided to create different "bucket" funds, one of which is a grant fund. The rationale for funding in a grant-based manner was that it would

Much of this support positively benefits BIPOC persons and communities. The congregations and worshipping communities receive project-based or ongoing financial support, as well as guidance from leadership.

However, the pathway to access these kinds of support can be problematic. It can be personality-driven, meaning that the congregations and persons who have strong relationships with PSF leadership end up receiving increased support because of their proximity to decision-making power. Other individuals may be assured that the presbytery is "here for you," but may not know whom or how to ask for support.

And in another line of thinking, we can ask why the presbytery chose to distribute resources through grant applications. The grant-based method relies on techniques from the non-profit sector that can be used as tools of dominance and control; granting is a formalized "gatekeeping process" that relies on education, experience, cultural fluency, and more to come up with the results desired by those who designed the process. Rather than making communities perform and compete for funds, the presbytery could have gone through a needs analysis and found different ways to distribute available resources. However, PSF decided that a grantmaking process would be a motivating way to spur a certain kind of creative missional action among the congregations and build regional connections. This may be true. But the process is problematic. There are formal obstacles and hurdles to overcome, as well as informal proximity-based advantages to those who know the process well. The grantmaking process reinforces the club behavior of the presbytery and gives further advantages to those who are already comfortable as "insiders." Grant recipients are asked to prove whether they are a "good investment" or not, leaving the decision-making power in the hands of those who hold the purse-strings.

The congregations and communities of the presbytery are not equal in many ways. The presbytery supports New Worshipping Communities (NWCs), most of which are BIPOC majority and BIPOC-led. Collectively, we celebrate their innovation, creativity, and passion. Yet, the very status of NWCs as compared to congregations can be perceived as a racial issue. They have lesser status in the presbytery, not receiving votes, being dependent on grants, and often not having their leaders ordained. The vision for this is that they remain at this status while they are new and experimental, and then if the community is

inspire and generate "entrepreneurial" creative ministry and that the granting process would help regional churches learn to work together, building local connections. Money was used as an incentive to further this specific vision.

vibrant and demonstrates good ministry they would proceed toward establishment as a full-fledged congregation with ordination and votes. However, this vision does not come to play for most NWCs. The Presbyterian Church in its polity has thresholds for transforming from NWC to congregation. These are biased toward white normative ways of assessing what a “viable” congregation is, such as significant financial independence. The impact of this is to keep a NWC which may be quite sizable and vibrant, but lacks financial independence because of systemic economic barriers, stuck in the “lesser” status of NWC when by other metrics they could be judged as more active and doing better ministry than some of our white congregations. It could be said that our NWCs are often underfunded, overlooked, and neglected, compared to the worshiping communities that have “congregation” status. **The disparities between congregations and NWCs reveals our club (stage 2) behavior.**

Similarly, we may be proud of how we train and commission many Commissioned Ruling Elders or Lay Pastors (CRE/CLPs). Many are BIPOC individuals and/or work in predominantly BIPOC congregations. We provide excellent in-house education and support to these leaders. All of the scholarship money available to CRE students currently goes to BIPOC students.

However, there is a significant status and pay differential between those ordained and those commissioned. Ministers of Word and Sacrament (MWS) get jobs with better pay, are subject to the presbytery minimum compensation and receive Board of Pension benefits. When between jobs or working non-ministry roles, they can still be members at large of the presbytery and can still vote. CRE/CLPs receive votes at the discretion of the presbytery when they are acting as pastors, but they do not have lasting membership, privileges, or rights in the same way. Many CRE/CLPs are volunteers.

To achieve ordination status as a minister, one must go through a time-consuming, expensive gatekeeping process run not just by the church but also containing external obstacles like obtaining a graduate degree. Those who embark on these vocational journeys may be challenged by these barriers, and some people who are quite called and qualified end up giving up. **The disparities between ordination and commission status reveals the club nature of the organization, where some belong more than others, and where there are high barriers to full participation.**

The presbytery may be proud of the support we can offer, both to the churches and NWCs and, in turn, the support the churches and NWCs offer to their

communities. But we may not be looking at the big picture. We rarely deeply analyze the sources of need and inequity, i.e., immigration, redlining, food insecurity, poverty wages, and discrimination. Because we are satisfied with meeting needs in the moment but have not challenged the root causes, we fall short of our Matthew 25 commitments and show that **the help we offer is symbolic** rather than truly transformational. Sometimes, the recipients of such support believe this symbolic help is the best they can hope to receive and stop dreaming or hoping for something better.

In terms of our antiracist programming, some might hope that we are a transformational organization because we are engaged in this T-CARE process. Moreover, we have had presbytery-sponsored educational offerings in the past to help us understand systemic racism through education, reflection, and conversation. We voted in 2020 that we would create an antiracism policy and have antiracism training for all our members. These initiatives bring us hope for positive transformational action.

Yet, while some of us are committed to these things and find them helpful and inspiring, we are not all committed to them as a body. Many of these things are available for those who want to opt in, but there is no accountability or incentive to encourage everyone to participate. The antiracism trainings we offer are optional and there is no policy requiring participation. When it comes to participation in optional programming members may cite a lack of communication, lack of access (time, language, technology, etc.), or simply may not care to be part of the conversations. Even when participation in training and education is high, education does not necessarily lead to accountable action. Because of this dynamic, our programming is symbolic. It is something we may feel proud of, but which may not truly transform us yet. To become transformational, we are aware that we must dig deeper and wider.

Moreover, when it comes to this report itself, we do not yet know how it will be received and acted upon. Many of us may feel hopeful and appreciative. Others may feel cynical and expect the report to be received in the line of many reports, not just in our presbytery but across the denomination: shelved with gratitude. If this report is put on the shelf with gratitude (or relief, or congratulations) while the entrenched patterns go on as usual, it will show the intractable nature of our club organization.

Personnel

Personnel includes hired staff, elected leaders, and those who volunteer or are nominated to fill committees and committee leadership. More broadly,

personnel includes anyone authorized to speak, act, or implement programs on behalf of the organization. In our structure the leaders change frequently, through rotation of service. Please take this section as commentary on leadership in general and not on any particular person(s).

As a Presbytery, our volunteer roles are led by white people broadly and a small group of overworked and burned-out BIPOC who believe that they must conform to white people's expectations. Because of a combination of factors, which may include economic status, work flexibility, language access, comfort/discomfort in the white-dominant culture of the presbytery, and more, BIPOC presbyters may find it more challenging (and white presbyters may find it easier) to engage at central leadership levels such as chairing committees. Our staff have been predominantly BIPOC in recent years. Furthermore, our BIPOC staff. Our presbytery is committed to representation, but we remain committed to white institutional values simultaneously. Having BIPOC in positions of power does not necessarily interrupt or transform the structures that continue to benefit white people and harm people of color. **This is a classic indication of symbolic institutions.**

The nomination process feels clubbish – in order to be invited to the table, one has to befriend people. Those who fit in the white-dominant center easily invite their known and trusted friends to join them. Even the nominations committee is hampered by its language access and lack of relationships with BIPOC churches. This issue creates tokenization when trying to identify candidates of color to serve on committees.

Our presbytery meetings are open to all, include leaders of color in visible positions, and offer interpretation in several languages. We try to model inclusion in a symbolic performative way. Yet, "all are welcome" does not mean that all can participate comfortably. We state that "all are welcome," yet certain voices dominate and get heard over and over. New participants must learn how to use Roberts' Rules, navigate committee structures and gatekeepers, and submit new business in our particular system. Efforts to make the presbytery more inclusive have not changed the cumbersome and inaccessible way business gets done. The symbolic efforts have not changed the underlying club nature of our organization.

This continuum has helped us hold a mirror to ourselves as a presbytery and see what kind of reflection we project. Some of this we see with regret and grief, and other pieces we can see with hope, faith, and willingness to continue pushing

*forward into the work of transformation. It is important to see clearly because we do not want to be naive or to make the work seem easier than it is.
(Talitha and Rochelle, lead writers)*