

October 29, 2016

To: The Council and the Presbytery  
From: The Transition Staffing Team

About: Transition Staffing Report, Part 1

Attached is the first part of the report of the Transition Staffing Team. It is based on interviews with leaders of a number of presbyteries of approximately our size about the various staffing patterns they are using. It summarizes what we learned: general advice we were given and the most common patterns of staffing, plus rough cost estimates.

**The report contains no recommendations. The Team has already begun the process of collecting feedback. We have had input about staffing needs from the Trustees and the Budget Committee and hope to obtain it from COM. We also shared a draft of the report with all current staff. We will report on the feedback we have received so far at the Council meeting. It is the Team's hope that Council and Presbytery will discuss the options we describe and give us direction about which one we should develop as a recommendation, with cost implications and basic job descriptions. We hope to complete part 2 of our report, with recommendations, by the end of the year.**

Note: The team consists of the members of the Personnel Committee. We worked jointly with the Structure Team, which is made up of the Presbytery's officers. Those who were moderators/vice moderators of the Presbytery during the time we worked joined us in our work and in shaping this report. Staff officers (Stated Clerk and Transitional Presbyter) joined us during the research phase but were excused as we prepared this report.

REPORT OF THE STAFFING TRANSITION TEAM: PART I  
November 8, 2016

Background

The Personnel Committee was asked to function as the Staffing Transition Team. Its task was to develop options for staffing that might align with the structure, activities and budget of the Presbytery as these emerge in the transitional planning process.

As a first step, the Committee contacted national and synod staff members in a position to observe staffing patterns in presbyteries. These conversations yielded both observations about overall trends and suggestions of presbyteries with some similarities to ours (especially number of churches and members) that might be contacted to learn about the patterns of staffing that presbyteries our size are using. Because staff and structure are closely related, the Presbytery officers (Transitional Presbyter, Stated Clerk, Moderator and Vice Moderator), who were assigned the task of proposing a presbytery structure, joined us in making calls to presbyteries. In total, we gathered information from about 20 presbyteries, either directly or from synod executives and national staff.

In the report that follows, we summarize advice we received in the course of our research. Then we summarize the staffing arrangements we learned about. Finally, we comment on the likely costs of various staffing arrangements.

General Observations

Middle governing body leaders and others whom we interviewed gave us several pieces of advice repeatedly.

- 1) **Set your own pattern.** The denomination's national staff person for middle governing bodies told us that there is no longer a single template for presbytery staffing. Well under half of all presbyteries can now support the "traditional" structure, a core staff of a full-time executive, a half- to full-time Stated Clerk, and an office manager, plus funds for additional part-time staff or contractors. Our survey confirmed this: presbyteries are experimenting with a wide range of staffing patterns. We were urged by those we consulted to develop a structure that works for us rather than to try to conform to some ideal or standard format—indeed, there is no standard pattern anymore for presbyteries our size.
- 2) **Staff at a level you can afford.** Several of the presbyteries we called had earlier hired more staff than they could support from their present budgets, in the hope that by providing more services to congregations, support at a higher level would be forthcoming. One, for instance, whose membership is just a little larger than ours, in 2013 hired three full-time and two part-time staff members, plus accounting outsourced to the synod. That presbytery is now running a large deficit, funded from reserves that will soon be depleted. The plan projected that churches would grow and income would rise to support the heavy staff structure. It hasn't happened, and the head of staff has had to tell all the other new staff members that the budget is not sustainable and their jobs are not secure. We heard of other examples of this "field of dreams" approach: Build it and the churches will fund it. In all these cases,

75 pressure on staff to generate revenue was extreme and morale when it wasn't forthcoming  
76 was very low.  
77

78 3) **Build the staff plan around positions, not people.** We heard accounts of presbyteries that  
79 had reshaped their staff arrangements under financial pressure with incorporation of some  
80 current staff as their primary criterion. The results were problematic. Current staff lacked  
81 some needed skills, and resources were not available for additional assistance. The current  
82 leadership of these presbyteries urged us first to describe the positions that would cover  
83 necessary functions, then to seek the persons who could best fill those positions.  
84

85 4) **Rethink the “executive” role.** We heard from several quarters that small and medium size  
86 presbyteries are questioning the need for an “executive” staff member who is higher in rank  
87 and salary than most members of the presbytery.<sup>1</sup> Now that many presbyteries have lower  
88 budgets and simpler structures, it makes more sense, we were told, to conceive of the  
89 presbytery’s professional staff members as equal partners with other presbyters and as  
90 coordinators of the increasingly active committees and congregations. Presbyteries that make  
91 this change count on committees and congregations, rather than a chief executive, to  
92 provide the theological and visionary leadership of the presbytery.  
93

94 5) **Maintain neutrality.** Several informants emphasized a critical quality for presbytery staff: a  
95 willingness to set aside personal theological and political preferences in order to serve the  
96 full range of members and congregations in the presbytery. A presbytery staff member, one  
97 said, has to focus not on outcomes, not on what the presbytery decides and does, but on  
98 process, on how it makes decisions and whether the process is inclusive and fair to all. This  
99 is especially important these days, we were told, when a relatively few staff have to serve the  
100 whole presbytery.  
101

## 102 Staffing Options

103  
104 Few of the presbyteries we surveyed, most of which resemble Albany Presbytery in size and  
105 budget strength (a few were marginally smaller or larger), have the “traditional” staff pattern in  
106 place. Those that do, with two full-time equivalent professional staff plus administrative support  
107 staff, are financially stressed and considering alternatives. Most of the surveyed presbyteries have  
108 already put alternative plans in place, most often with a single full-time equivalent professional  
109 staff member. Three arrangements predominate. **All of them anticipate a lower level of  
110 staffing, necessitated by budget constraints. Presbyteries with these arrangement  
111 prioritize the services that they really need from staff; at the same time, elected officers  
112 and committee chairs and members play enhanced leadership roles.**  
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<sup>1</sup> The executive role is a relatively recent development, dating from the mainline “boom” of the mid-twentieth century, when denominations grew in membership, income and program and began to think of themselves as corporations. Presbyteries—the branch offices—hired sizeable staffs (Albany Presbytery at one time had five full-time staff), and high-level managers to oversee their work.

115 **1. PART-TIME STAFF**

116  
117 One way that a number of presbyteries that have limited funds for staff have tried to cover  
118 multiple functional bases is to engage both professional and support staff part-time.

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120 We heard about several arrangements for part-time professional staff:

- 121 • Two half-time professional staff, one of whom is Stated Clerk, or
- 122 • A three-quarter time administrator/missional presbyter and a one-quarter time Clerk.
- 123 • Three one-third time staff, one to function as clerk, one as administrator, one as
- 124 “missional” presbyter working with congregations and COM

125  
126 Usually in these arrangements there is a skilled administrative assistant, sometimes full-time  
127 but often part-time, complemented by a bookkeeper and an IT/communications part-time  
128 staff member. Most often the part-time positions add up to one full-time equivalent  
129 professional and one full-time equivalent support staff member, plus some assistance from  
130 contractors.

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132 **ADVANTAGES:**

133 +Several persons working part-time may have a wider range of skills than a single person  
134 performing all professional functions on a full-time basis.

135 +Some of the part-time professional staff may be teaching elders who with the other part of  
136 their work time would be available to serve smaller congregations that cannot afford a full-  
137 time pastor.

138  
139 **DRAWBACKS:**

140 -If a part-time staff position is vacated for any reason (to take another position, or because  
141 the presbytery or other job doesn't work out), it may be difficult to find a replacement with  
142 the needed skills who is willing to work part-time and who can locate additional  
143 employment, whether it is in a congregation or not.

144 -Persons who work two part-time jobs may have difficulty dividing their time between them.

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147 **2. SHARED STAFF**

148  
149 A few presbyteries have worked out staff-sharing arrangements with other presbyteries. Usually  
150 it is adjacent presbyteries that share. (One adviser suggested that “mission alignment” might be a  
151 better basis for sharing, provided that the partners were not too distant geographically, but we  
152 did not find an instance of this.) We heard about shared staff, current or in the past, in several  
153 roles:

- 154 • Executive or missional presbyter shared between two presbyteries
- 155 • Stated Clerk shared between two presbyteries
- 156 • Accountant on synod staff shared among several presbyteries
- 157 • Accountant hired by one presbytery and used by several others on an outsourcing basis

158  
159 **ADVANTAGES**

160 +If these arrangements can be worked out, presbyteries that cannot afford multiple full-time  
161 professional and specialized support staff can have the benefit of more skilled staff than they  
162 could afford on their own.

163 +The staff in these arrangements do not need to find a second position in order to have full-  
164 time employment.

165  
166 **DRAWBACKS**

167 -These arrangements are difficult to negotiate, especially between presbyteries of unequal  
168 size or with very different cultures and expectations of staff. Such arrangement have also  
169 proved difficult to sustain in several settings. We heard, for instance, about a shared staff  
170 member who worked well with one presbytery but did not fit comfortably in the other, a  
171 situation that created time-consuming difficulties for both employers.

172 -Time spent in travel between two presbyteries subtracts from the amount of time available  
173 to both.

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176 **3. FULL-TIME STAFF**

177  
178 The most common arrangement, when presbyteries cannot afford multiple professional staff,  
179 seems to be the creation of a single full-time position that combines the constitutional and  
180 judicial oversight functions of the Stated Clerk with basic administration, coordination and  
181 resourcing of the work of councils, committees and communication with congregations. (A list  
182 of functions of the full-time Missional Presbyter/Stated Clerk in one of the presbyteries we  
183 surveyed is attached to this report as Appendix B.)

184  
185 Often the full-time professional is complemented by a highly skilled, full-time executive assistant  
186 who is responsible for running the presbytery office, posting communications to a website and  
187 social media, and clerical functions in the domain of the Stated Clerk (collecting statistics from  
188 churches, acting as recording clerk at meetings, keeping records of the rolls of the presbytery,  
189 etc.). There may be additional part-time staff for accounting, communications and grant-funded  
190 mission projects.

191  
192 **ADVANTAGES**

193 +Full-time professional and support staff are easier to recruit and retain than part-time staff.

194 +Full-time staff can focus all their attention on the presbytery and its needs, without a  
195 second responsibility—another job or another presbytery—competing for time and  
196 attention.

197  
198 **DRAWBACKS**

199 -Finding professional and support staff with the range of skills their jobs require can be a  
200 challenge.

201 -If the presbytery’s members do not step up and take significant leadership roles, staff  
202 responsibilities can become burdensome.

203  
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205 Feasibility and cost

206

207 All three of the models just described anticipate one full-time equivalent salary for a professional  
 208 staff member. Reducing professional staff to this level, in the experience of presbyteries that have  
 209 tried it, usually requires a skilled full-time administrative assistant. In addition, most presbyteries  
 210 have some funds budgeted for contractors to provide services that they do not; these may include IT  
 211 assistance, accounting, and communications, or congregational intervention.  
 212  
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214 The cost of Model 3 is easiest to compute. Here are possible costs, based on these assumptions:  
 215

- 216 • The professional staff member would function as Stated Clerk/Ministry Coordinator.<sup>2</sup>
- 217 • The salary would be set in the middle of the range of full-time teaching elder salaries in  
 218 Albany Presbytery, plus full Board of Pensions benefits for clergy or 25% benefits for non-  
 219 clergy.<sup>3</sup>
- 220 • The salary for the administrative assistant would be set at the average for a higher level  
 221 administrative assistant in the Capital District, plus 25% benefits as provided by the  
 222 Presbytery’s policies  
 223

224	Stated Clerk/Ministry Coordinator	
225	Salary	\$ 59,160 (2016 average plus 2% COLA)
226	BOP benefits	22,480 <sup>4</sup>
227	Social security offset (est.)	4,000
228	Local travel	4,000
229	National travel	3,000
230	Continuing education	<u>2,000</u>
231		
232	SUB-TOTAL	94,640
233		
234	Administrative Assistant	42,000
235	Benefits (25%)	<u>10,500</u>
236		
237	SUB-TOTAL	52, 500
238		
239	STATUTORY BENEFITS	4,000
240		
241	<b>TOTAL CORE STAFF</b>	<b>\$151, 140</b>
242		

243 To the core staff costs computed above could be added \$50,000 for other staff expense. Depending  
 244 on the expertise of the full-time staff, these might include accounting (current cost is about \$19,000),  
 245 communications (\$15,300 with COLA), and congregational coaching. The total staff budget for

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<sup>2</sup> Other combinations of functions might be possible.

<sup>3</sup> Currently, the Transitional Presbyter’s salary is close to the top of range and the Stated Clerk’s salary is below the minimum. Ranges for 2015 and 2016 were prepared for the Transition Staffing Team by Sam Jackling and are attached to this report as Appendix A.

<sup>4</sup> If the Stated Clerk/Ministry Coordinator were not a Teaching Elder, the cost of benefits would be lower, but the social security offset line below would be replaced by a higher figure for FICA.

246 staffing for this model would be about **\$200,000** if the professional staff member is clergy, less if  
247 non-clergy.<sup>5</sup>

248  
249 If these expenditure levels are not sustainable, one or both core positions could be reduced to three-  
250 quarters time.

251  
252 The costs for Model 3 are approximately those of the other models, though costs could be higher  
253 for Models 1 and 2 if multiple staff are eligible for Board of Pensions benefits; or lower if one or  
254 more of them is not clergy or if any of the part-time staff works less than 20 hours and is not eligible  
255 for pension and health insurance benefits.

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<sup>5</sup> Albany Presbytery's 2016 staff budget, omitting in-and-out salary expenses for a new church development, is about **\$240,000**.