

Webinar: A Proposed New Ministry Plan for Albany Presbytery September 6, 2016

Participants:

First Name	Last Name	Church/Worshipping Community/Organization
Lynn	Brown	Spencertown
Holly	Cameron	New Scotland PC
Terry	Diggory	Saratoga Springs
Denice	Gibson	Malta Presbyterian Church
David	Haase	First Presbyterian Albany
Lynne	Hardy	Presbyterian United Church of Schaghticoke, NY
Sandy	Smaldone	Presbyterian United Church of Schaghticoke, NY
Earl	Johnson	HR
Jerry	McKinney	United Church of Granville
Cara	Molyneaux	Trinity, Scotia
Carol	Plue	Christ's Church of the Hills
Paul	Randall	Westminster, Parish Associate
Dan	Rogers	Albany Presbytery / FUPC Troy
Laura	Rogers	FUPC Troy / COM
Leonard	Sponaule	First Presbyterian Church, Johnstown
Katy	Stenta	New covenant
Elaine	Woroby	Loudonville Presbyterian Church
Barbara	Wheeler	United Church of Granville

From the Team:

Thank you participating. The constructive comments have been heard and the documents in question have been modified.

Comments typed in during the Webinar:

David Hasse

First Presbyterian Albany

There's an Administrative Commission provision in the flowchart matrix, no?
Sounds coercive, at the bottom.

Earl Johnson

HR

Where do preaching, biblical and theological leadership fit in for pastoral leadership if not in the top five categories? The five listed could apply to any non-profit organization, not just a church. Obviously, you do not intend to leave these out but do you think they should be of primary importance on the list or are other things more critical now?

Jerry McKinney

United Church of Granville

A comment, not a question: I think Katy is on target--we need to develop the attitude of partnership & use the language of partnership. Presbyteries have a long-standing reputation of "regulators", not partners in ministry. I also think that Tim's suggestion for regional planning is a good one.

Post-webinar comments/questions/feedback

Barbara Wheeler

United Church of Granville

Earl makes an important point. Theology is not over and done with at seminary graduation. At one time Albany Presbytery was a fairly dynamic theological center (we even had a theology standing committee, joined with leadership development). We had both formal theological courses, lectures and events and some fine theological conversations on the floor of Presbytery in connection with exams and other matters. Since CRTC came into being, it has taken over some of those functions, but there is still a need for a Reformed conversation about what we say and do in our current context. I would like to see theological vibrancy and faithfulness to the demands of the Gospel as a theme of this document. Neither can be assumed--both take attention and on-going work.

Response to Barbara Wheeler from Tim Coombs

No doubt Barbara. After the webinar we discussed adding something like a prologue to the pastoral leadership portion that stated the ongoing importance of Biblical study and homiletics. The skills we listed we felt were of particular interest to our immediate context. Given the state of the church today I believe seminaries would do well to add a course or two on entrepreneurial ministry to their practical theology departments if they haven't already done so.

Terry Diggory

PNECC – Saratoga Springs

[Underlined topics are response form categories]

Despite good intentions, the proposal as written will further erode trust between congregations and presbytery. Congregations will see: 1) more forms to fill out; 2) arrogation of power to presbytery even beyond what is currently assumed.

- 1) The Stated Clerk currently faces an onerous task in getting congregations to file annual statistical forms. Is it reasonable to expect that congregations will welcome a request to complete yet more forms? Currently, an invitation to schedule a triennial visit is not eagerly embraced by many congregations. Will they be any more eager when a visit entails a lot of homework?
- 2) Current triennial visit task force process has COM “receiving” reports. Proposed plan has COM “approving” ministry plans. Power to approve implies power to disapprove, even if there is no intention of ever exercising that power. It places the congregation in a position of subordinate power rather than a position of partnership.

There is good language in the proposal to be emphasized and bad language to be weeded out;

Example of good language (in opening paragraph):

“Presbytery has a role as a conversation partner in the congregation’s discernment.”

Example of bad language (in the section on “Definitions”):

“The goal is to have the Ministry Plan approved by the Committee on Ministry on behalf of the Presbytery to confirm the calling and to open the channel to the Presbytery’s support of the Ministry Plan.”

Note that this language specifically controverts the important distinction made by Katy Stenta in the webinar: assessment is a tool, not a goal in itself. The desire to listen pastorally to congregations has been muddled by the desire to connect the development of a ministry plan with the prospect of providing presbytery funds in support of the plan. These two processes should be kept separate. Presbytery has the right to “approve” allocation of presbytery funds; presbytery should only “receive” a ministry plan designed by a local congregation.

The “Congregational Life Cycle Figure” tilts toward the negative, implying “it’s all downhill from here.” If congregations in the “Revitalization” category are heading toward new vitality, as the term implies, shouldn’t that category appear on the uphill side, to the left of “Vitality”?

How will the COM functions proposed in the Ministry Plan map onto the division of COM tasks into separate committees that is being proposed by the “Structure” task force?

Further discussion between Tim and Terry

Terry,

You make some good points throughout this paper, but I should only address those concerning the webinar on Congregational Renewal and Pastoral Leadership. First, regarding the potential to further erode trust: I agree that the "approval" language needs to be softened. While saying that I need to clarify that COM (presbytery) isn't so much interested in the assessments as much as seeing a credible Ministry Plan, which is the end product. The Assessments are tools. They are not going to be approved. We will try to clarify that. Also, the Ministry Plan is more a narrative that would be written in conjunction with their COM assigned coach, so there are no forms that need to be filled out. In fact, the Assessment Toolbox doesn't have forms outside of the relatively easy one in the modified B.A.T.

The main reason behind the "approval" language was to encourage congregations to take the task seriously. I have worked with congregations that even have a single person write their MIF's without the help of others. These MIF's are usually shoddy and usually have to be re-written, because they would hinder the congregation finding viable candidates. Ergo, they did not get approved. Without an approval process, I am afraid many churches will not take the Snapshot and Ministry Plan process serious enough, and it is those very churches that desperately need to do so. I would love to get rid of the need to approve the Ministry Plans, thinking that all churches will take the process seriously. I know, however, that will not happen. If changing the language from "approve" to "agree" would make people feel better I will do that in a heartbeat.

I guess I'm saying that I care that churches develop a solid Ministry Plan than I care that they feel good about presbytery. I'm willing to bet that if churches start to improve because the presbytery made them create an honest and realistic Ministry Plan then they will feel better about the presbytery in the long run.

Second, regarding the congregational life cycle - the terms "revitalization" and "metamorphosis" appear on the downside of the slope, because they are not so much descriptors of the congregation's current state of being, but indicating what needs to happen to bring the congregation back to vitality. People who have worked with Congregational Life Cycle find that using these terms are far more useful than words like "stagnation" or "near death." Also, the emphasis on the back side of the curve is because every church in the presbytery, with the exception of Malta, is at least 50 years of age, and Malta, despite its relatively young age, has been on the back side of the graph for awhile. The only congregations that are on the formative side of the Congregational Lifecycle in this presbytery are the New Worshiping Communities.

I not trying to be obstinate, but realistic. Unless there is a consequence many churches will disregard the process. They may do so anyway, but then they will be cutting themselves off from a possible grant. If you can think of a better way that churches will actually do, I am open to it.

----- Further comment from Terry-----

Tim-- Thanks for listening and responding with such care. I fully trust-- to use that loaded term-- that you and your fellow team members are making every effort to do what is best for presbytery and its congregations. When I speak of distrust, I am trying to speak for those I have heard from in the course of many conversations around presbytery, including many triennial visits.

To my mind, to get a congregation to take a process seriously requires that they have a sense of ownership: that what they are doing is truly "for them." Threatening "consequences" from the outside only erodes the sense of ownership. I would note that having COM simply "receive" a ministry plan rather than "approve" it would not preclude the possibility of COM responding with comment. For instance, COM could simply advise the congregation that for aspects of their ministry plan to receive presbytery funding, the plan would need to be revised with respect to X, Y, Z. Such response preserves the spirit of "conversation" as opposed to "regulation."

With regard to the congregational life cycle graph, I think presbytery needs to consider how much the present distrust among congregations is a response to a sense of distrust that

presbytery conveys toward the congregations. Placing most congregations on the "downside" of the graph implies that we do not trust congregations to recover. That is not what you mean to say, but how will it be heard?

Peace!

Terry

Google Feedback for A Proposed New Ministry Plan for Albany Presbytery

I am a:
Teaching Elder, Active
Teaching Elder

I am associated with the following ministry in the Presbytery:
Presbyterian Church of Schaghticoke
Hamilton Union

My name is:
Lynne Hardy
Stewart Pattison

What feedback, questions for clarification do you have about General Recommendations for Congregational Renewal?
What are the marks of a vital church? Is part of the tools spoke of- or is this another tool? I am all for structure and organization but the reality is to reach the churches in the trenches- hands on resourcing is needed. Here is my thought- Paul sent his followers to the churches he started to help support them- to grow them- to answer questions, feed the hungry- support those trying to hold down the edges of a new faith. To help us in this new mission field I have these thoughts: BAT- once a building is assessed for needs- draw on the churches for bodies- people who can do the work- who may be a mission team to come out with supplies bought by the presbytery- grant monies and work on those churches until they are transformed to the needs of the community. Keep a list of those with talents to bring together to serve in this way. We

send groups all over the world for disasters- we stand in the midst of a slowly eroding disaster and building programs and ways of doing things is not going to get it done.

Leadership and Church revitalization: A church with a choir of hundred singers or musicians- ask them to come as missionaries of music to the smaller churches who do not have that ability. Young people who are musically or artistically inclined- ask them to come to the smaller churches to do vacation school for the community on values and community building. A small church may not be able to afford a full time pastoral leader to take on the five rolls mentioned as well as lead a church- mostly because they are already holding down a job to pay the bills- look into ways to supplement them in their roles financially- so they can dedicate their time and energy to the work of evangelism, community organizing- serving the community etc.

Tech- here is another place where the mission technique can work- does a small church need a web site, face book page, electronic equipment- audio equipment- build a mission team that can come to a small church and help to put together their particular needs- most small church budgets cannot afford a website building fee- or to buy equipment- etc- and are using antiquated tools for a different world.

What feedback, questions for clarification do you have about General Recommendations for Pastoral Leadership?

What feedback, questions for clarification do you have about General Recommendations for Staffing ideas?

What feedback, questions for clarification do you have about the Congregational Ministry and Snapshot Plan?

What feedback, questions for clarification do you have about the Assessment Toolbox?

Do you have anything additional you would want to add?

Build sister churches- within the presbytery- I learned in seminary that Paul built churches to be sisters to each other along the route he traveled- supporting each other and the larger church. He built trust by sending hands to each church as needed- and came himself as often as he could. Do you want to build trust with the people of the communities of the churches in the presbytery- my suggestion is to be metamorphised yourselves - come out with hands and hearts- bodies and goods- build in the communities- actions build trust- presence builds trust. I do not ever ask the small body of worshippers to do anything- that I would not do myself- something breaks- I help fix it- something needs to be done- I do it with whomever is doing it- a dinner needs to be cooked- I am cooking and serving and cleaning up. Things need to be purchased- I purchase them and gift the church with them. Why- because it is my way of standing with these folks who love their church. Worship is happening- everyone has a piece and participates- no one asks to be left out. We as a community of faith are visible in the community- active in building up life- but we lack enough hands to fix things- repair things- make things new- we lack a choir to ring out Glory to God- we lack youth to carry the story forward. But we will not give up.

This translate into-: if Presbytery is looking still to build trust which in my mind is still needed- then come and find out what each of the churches of the Presbytery need and bring it to them- as the Presbytery's gift to the churches.