

# LAYING A VISION FOR DOING PRESBYTERY IN A TIME OF LEARNING AND DISCOVERY

## REGIONAL PRESBYTER AND STATED CLERK REPORT

### VISION

Our vision, as adopted last September, is to be “a bold community of congregations and other ministries engaging in the transforming work of Jesus Christ in a dynamic world.” In order to fully step into that vision, we believe we need to radically rest from the ways we have been “doing presbytery” and to boldly enter into a season of learning and discovery, encouraging what arises as new ways of doing all that God is calling us to. Our intention is to shift our understanding of presbytery to be the sum of what our congregations and specialized ministries are doing together rather than as a regulatory entity at a higher level. We envision a structure that is lean, yet flexible. To this end, we propose that we ...

- 1) **suspend the Plan of Presbytery until September of 2016.** In parliamentary terms, this would be an amendment to the Plan of Presbytery.
- 2) **do things in the following manner** until then, or until we change the Plan of Presbytery or lift the suspension.

### MISSION

The Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304) are the mission of the presbytery; more specifically, we adopted the following last fall:

- Nurture and equip leaders and congregations, challenging them to take Spirit-led risks as we faithfully and continually discern our call.
- Identify and disciple emerging leaders & emerging communities of faith.
- Become a spiritual community for each other as we connect all clergy and congregations in mission, witness, worship, and prayer.
- Encourage congregations, members, and their ministries to partner in the work and witness of the broader Church.
- Live out ordination vows as we serve with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love.

- Embrace the permission-giving spirit of our polity.

This suggested way forward will allow us to set aside structural and regulatory constraints as we discover and develop ways to make these statements more than words, but tangible realities in our work and life as a presbytery.

## BASIC STRATEGY

The presbytery will use the following priorities to determine its strategic effort to fulfill this mission:

- 1) to serve its member congregations and its specialized ministries.
- 2) to serve the wider church and the wider world through its congregations and specialized ministries.
- 3) to encourage and enable cooperative ministries and programs among its member congregations.

These priorities are best served by simplifying the presbytery's operations, structure, and administrative overhead as much as is strategically expedient, making sure that the minimum that is constitutionally necessary gets done.

## OUR WORK AS PRESBYTERY

First, let us acknowledge that any activity, ministry, or mission in which two or more congregations, or congregations and specialized ministries, or individuals from at least three congregations work and act together is the work of the presbytery.

Our work as a presbytery will be done through *Working Teams*, *Congregational Liaisons*, the *Committee on Ministry (COM)* and its teams of counselors and care providers, the *Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM)*, the *Presbytery Coordination and Communication Committee (PCCC)*, and the *Presbytery Administrative Commission (PAC)*. We are also constitutionally required to have a *Nominating Committee*, *Committee on Representation (COR)* and *Permanent Judicial Commission (PJC)*.

## WORKING TEAMS

Any group of people, providing it has at least one teaching elder in parish ministry, one teaching elder in specialized ministry, and ruling elders from at least two congregations, may meet together at their own initiative, either ad hoc or semi-permanently, to form a *Working Team* of the presbytery. Working teams may take on **any** work that they discern to be the work of the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Any *Working Team* may meet to consider the mission and ministry of the presbytery and make proposals to the *Presbytery Administrative*

*Commission* for action or for business to be brought to the floor of presbytery.

Any *Working Team* may meet together to do the work and perform the mission of the presbytery as they see it. If it needs to use the name of the presbytery, or to act for the presbytery in cooperation with other bodies either within or without the presbytery, it may apply for recognition to the *Presbytery Coordinating Committee*.

*The Concept:*

*The Presbytery of New Brunswick is blessed to have an abundance of excellent leaders and experts in many areas of ministry. Therefore we need to encourage the formation of teams of people who do not need to be led. The presbytery should think of itself as if it were one church all together, and thus recognize itself in any cooperative action, ministry, or mission. Working teams should arise and work together spontaneously, at the direction of the Holy Spirit, in great profusion and variety. They don't need permission. Any present standing committee of the presbytery may constitute itself as a working team of the presbytery, and many of them should (such as the Urban Mission Cabinet and the Financial Oversight Team). There are already all kinds of work and ministry being done together by people in the presbytery, independently of the present Plan of Presbytery, that should now be recognized as working teams of the presbytery. There should be dozens, if not hundreds, of new activities, ministries, and missions of the presbytery as working teams arise without having to be created or instigated from above. We should learn how to be the church in a new way not by study, strategy, planning, and instigation from above, but by groups of people as moved by the spirit at their own initiative bubbling up within the presbytery and simply proceeding to be church and do the work of the reign of Christ.*

## CONGREGATIONAL LIAISONS

Every congregation of the presbytery shall provide two ruling elders to be *Congregational Liaisons*. The Committee on Ministry shall arrange for annual training for congregational liaisons and oversee their partnerships. The COM will assure that the liaisons are paired with congregations that are both alike and different from their own congregations.

Each congregational liaison should, at a minimum, read the minutes of every session meeting and every congregational meeting of the congregation with which they are forming a relationship. They should attend worship there at least once a year. They should attend a session meeting at least once a year. They should have a conversation with someone from that congregation at least once a quarter.

*The Concept:*

*The congregational liaisons will essentially function as our COM liaisons function now. They are identified and partnered, however, in a way that demonstrates mutuality among the larger church as opposed to a hierarchy of control and influence. The ideal outcome will be that liaisons will be the heart of the presbytery's listening and communications arm. The training for liaisons will include a specific job description, but also in the art of listening for 1) the ways the larger church can partner in the mission and ministry of that congregation, 2) the ways that congregation may be a blessing to other congregations, and 3) when the congregation is asking for help in larger matters (questions about their future, training in areas like Stewardship or Evangelism, Officer Training, Fund Raising, the buying and selling of property, the transition of pastoral leadership, or other crisis or conflict in the congregation). The liaisons will not normally be trained in providing these services to the congregation, but will be able to communicate these needs to the COM; the Congregational liaisons may be a part of a support team that would be deployed to a specific congregation for a specific need.*

*We are aware that it will take some time to develop this liaison network, to train our liaisons, and to tweak it to work as imagined. It may be that we start with a "beta" run by asking congregations to appoint two people to visit congregations and sessions like we used to do triennial visits.*

*Teaching elders will not typically be a congregational liaison, so that they can have the time to serve on particular support teams, to be trained and called upon among the "cadres" of experts and other specific work the presbytery needs, to moderate sessions, to help in the training of other volunteers, and to serve on the COM and to help develop other working teams and/or new worshipping communities.*

## **THE OFFICERS OF THE PRESBYTERY**

The officers of the presbytery shall be a vice moderator, a moderator, and a past moderator (serving sequential one year terms), a treasurer (elected for a five year term), and a stated clerk (elected for a five year term).

## **PRESBYTERY ADMINISTRATIVE COMMISSION**

There will be a Presbytery Administrative Commission (PAC) consisting of the officers of the presbytery, save the past moderator, the professional (exempt) staff of the presbytery, and one teaching and one ruling elder elected at large and serving the duration of this simplified plan. It will be an administrative commission of the presbytery. The Presbytery Administrative Commission shall be charged with taking care of all the ordinary administrative and organizational work that needs to be done in order for the presbytery to function. It will be responsible for seeing that those things required by the constitution get done. It may be guided in its understanding of what those duties and responsibilities are by the duties and responsibilities of Council in the present Plan of Presbytery and the list of constitutionally required duties and responsibilities of a presbytery

prepared by the stated clerk. The Presbytery Administrative Commission shall have the full power to act for the presbytery between meetings and to prepare all business coming before the presbytery, save for that prepared by the Committee on Preparation for Ministry and the Committee on Ministry, or brought to presbytery by sessions of member congregations.

#### *The Concept*

*The Presbytery Administrative Commission is a small group being handed the routine and administratively necessary work of the presbytery in order to free all others for ministry and mission. In a sense, they are sacrificial lambs. They do not have the authority to direct the working teams of the presbytery, nor is it their job. They exist to do the constitutionally required work so that the working teams may be free. The Presbytery Administrative Commission will ordinarily do a lot of its work by co-opting individuals for particular tasks, such as property issues. They will also partner with any other working groups in the presbytery that would/could have an interest in the business.*

#### **PRESBYTERY COORDINATION AND COMMUNICATION COMMITTEE**

There will be a Presbytery Coordination and Communication Committee (PCCC) consisting of the past moderator of presbytery and six elders, three teaching elders and three ruling elders nominated and elected for the duration of this plan. (In a long-term plan they would be divided into classes.) It shall be staffed by the Regional Presbyter.

The Presbytery Coordinating and Communication Committee shall create and foster forms of communication so that the whole presbytery may know or be able to find out all that the presbytery is doing. The PCCC shall review requests and, at its discretion, recognize working teams of the presbytery as properly using the name of the presbytery and/or acting as or for the presbytery in cooperation with other bodies both within and without the presbytery. It shall encourage and enable the working teams of the presbytery and when necessary coordinate their activities.

The Presbytery Coordination and Communication Committee shall foster ongoing reflection and evaluation of the ministry and mission of the presbytery and shall foster ongoing strategic thinking and planning by the presbytery for the presbytery. It shall initiate and foster an assessment of the health and welfare of our member congregations. It shall initiate and foster an assessment of the relationship of the specialized ministers and their work to our congregations. (Any response to a particular individual congregational or pastoral issue would ordinarily be coordinated through the COM)

The Presbytery Coordination and Communication Committee may co-opt individuals for particular tasks. It may call upon the Presbytery Administrative Commission for administrative support.

### *The Concept*

*This committee should exemplify the way the presbytery truly works and be the presbytery at its best. Not by leading or directing the presbytery from above, but by recognizing, communicating, and, when necessary, coordinating what the congregations and working teams of the presbytery are doing. Instead of forming some one particular discernment team, reflection and evaluation of the ministry and mission of the presbytery should be done by many working teams arising at their own initiative and only brought together periodically by the Coordination and Communication Committee. Instead of forming some one particular strategic planning team, strategic possibilities and proposals should be created by many working teams arising at their own initiative and only brought together periodically by the Coordination and Communication Committee. Assessment of congregational health and of the relationships of specialized ministers and their work to congregations should be done by many working teams of the presbytery brought together periodically by the Coordination and Communication Committee. The Coordination and Communication Committee should recognize, foster, and support dozens of new ways to be the church together as a presbytery.*

### COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY

There will be a Committee on Ministry consisting of six members, three teaching and three ruling, elected for the term of this simplified plan of presbytery. (In a longer plan they would serve in three classes.) The COM shall be charged with all the duties and responsibilities that it has under the present Plan of Presbytery. It will ordinarily co-opt individuals on an ad hoc basis for particular tasks such as the examination of candidates or moderators of sessions. The COM shall maintain a cadre of pastoral transition counselors available to be co-opted on an ad hoc basis when congregations are in a pastoral transition. COM shall train and direct this cadre. COM shall maintain a cadre of Counselors for Congregations in Difficulties available to be co-opted on an ad hoc basis when congregations need special help. COM shall train and direct this cadre. The COM shall train and coordinate the congregational liaisons.

The COM shall be staffed by the Regional Presbyter and the Stated Clerk.

### *The Concept*

*This COM should operate primarily by co-opting individuals on an ad hoc basis for particular tasks. Its six members should be primarily trainers and coordinators. The members of the cadre of pastoral transition counselors and counselors for congregations in difficulties should have a once a year training, and then rest until they are deployed for particular tasks. The COM should foster working teams of the presbytery to provide pastoral care for ministers. COM should treat the congregational liaisons as the primary connection by which congregations help one another and hold one another accountable.*

*These liaisons should often be the people co-opted for particular tasks with the congregations with which they have relationships. The COM should strive to find a way of working that embodies the vision that the work of the COM is the work of the presbytery's congregations helping one another, and holding one another accountable, not the work of the presbytery through the COM from above. In the course of time, having learned from its work, the COM may propose a different way of working to the presbytery.*

## COMMITTEE ON PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY

The CPM works just fine and should continue working according to the present provisions of the Plan of Presbytery.

## OUR FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Congregations should support missions directly, rather than by shared mission giving to the presbytery, except where the presbytery acts as a sluice through which the money flows. There may be a very few exceptions to this, but they should *be* very few. The budget as well as accounting should clearly separate both mission giving and mission spending.

The administrative functions of the presbytery should be covered by its non-mission income, mostly per capita, rentals of presbytery property, and income on investments. It shall identify all administrative income and expenses clearly and separately from mission giving and expenditures. The presbytery will strive to keep per capita down by strategic reductions in the administrative overhead of the presbytery.

The Urban Mission Cabinet and its relationship to the Urban Property Policy and the Urban Mission Fund is explicitly recognized and will continue to function as it does. The relationship of this Working Group (UMC) will be to both the PAC and the PCCC relating to the former on matters of finance and property and to the latter on matters of mission and ministry. Note: Neither the PAC nor the PCCC should function as a higher level from which the UMC needs to seek "approval", but as a relational and administrative arm of the presbytery supporting the UMC in its work and holding it accountable to its own mission.

The Presbytery Administrative Commission, with the help of the Financial Oversight team, must keep good records and exert excellent control of the presbytery's finances. It is a fiduciary responsibility that does not bear sloppiness.

### *The Concept*

*One of the best things that the presbytery can do for its member congregations is **not** take their money. Presbytery should strive to spend as little of the money of its congregations as is compatible with getting the work done well. It is to be hoped that a clear separation between mission giving and spending, and all other administrative income and spending, coupled with*

*transparency and honesty in the use of mission giving and a reduction in administrative expenses making possible some (even if small) restraint in the setting of per capita, will result in a good faith effort on the part of congregations to complete a higher percentage of their per capita giving than at present.*

## OUR GATHERING AS PRESBYTERY

While the work of the presbytery happens whenever two or three are gathered, there are times when the presbytery gathers in larger groups or as a whole. The fiduciary and governmental functions of the body are important, but ought not to be the primary reason or the most time-consuming business of our gatherings.

When the presbytery meets together as a whole, the gatherings shall include intentional learning and inspiration (through keynote address, workshops, or open space conversations, for instance).

Presbytery gatherings shall recognize that the relational work of the presbytery is as important as its docketed business; therefore attention shall be given to increased time for table or small group discussion and open space conversations.

We will continue to encourage the use of multiple rooms and gatherings for work such as examination of candidates or the reception of new minister members.

We will encourage smaller, regional or interest-based gatherings of the Presbytery on months the whole presbytery does not gather. These gatherings can have a variety of agendas, but can include training, peer learning, discussion of issues facing our congregations, the larger church, and society, or prayer and spiritual/personal support.

Every meeting of the presbytery (including working teams, committees and commissions) shall include time to be the body of Christ in hearing the Word and praying together.

### *The Concept*

*The goal is that the presbytery gathering becomes something that we look forward to; both because of the relationships we have established and because of the inspiration and information we gain by attending. The current business meeting agenda does little to foster this kind of experience. We will do business in a variety of ways, including putting more items on the consent agenda and delegating some business to commissions. We will encourage more discussion and less debate in our attention to major issues by using table groups or by assigning business to smaller simultaneously working groups. We will encourage the use of prayer and engagement of scripture in all of our gatherings.*

## OUR ONGOING VISION

As a presbytery we need to give permission to ourselves to stop doing the things that no longer need to be done and to step up to the ministries that God is blessing in our midst. The problem is many of us have different ideas about what needs to be done. If we try to discern these things as a “higher governing body” we often meet resistance and immobility. This approach allows us to discern together not from the top down, but in a more fluid way.

By minimizing the structure necessary for our “required” work, we can allow the imagination and the creative energy of the people of God to “bubble up” and lead us to make room for and foster the growth of a great many new activities, new works and programs, new ministries and missions. These initiatives need no permission, but will get leadership and cooperation from one another, from congregations and specialized ministers.

The other important goal is that no one should be doing work to which they are not called and that we are all involved in the work of the larger church in a way that correlates with our own giftedness and passions.

The bottom line is that we will not discover what the church needs to be in the present by letting our past study the situation, plan a strategy, and then tell people what to do. We will discover it by stepping back and letting each other step into our future. We do not need to be led by a presbytery structure, but by the Holy Spirit. This plan is an attempt to make that into more than a pious platitude.

## WHAT WE NEED FOR THIS TO WORK

### COMMUNICATION

This process needs a lot of communication, even if much of that communication is passive, making information available to be looked up by those who are interested. It will require us to be active in sharing our stories and interests and ministries and in receiving the communication of others. We will need to take initiative in reading, talking, listening, and networking with each other.

### TRUST IN OUR LEADERS

With a minimum number of people at the core of the coordination of our work together, it is imperative that we have the most trustworthy and committed elders (ruling and teaching) nominated and leading our work. That means that all of us need to be asking, “who?” “Who is God calling to do this work?” And it means that we should prayerfully consider our own involvement in the work of the presbytery.

### PEOPLE

While the committee structure is lean and simplified, it relies on many others of us to step forward and volunteer in the areas we are most gifted and passionate. We will need ruling and teaching elders to be trained in the “cadres” the COM will use in deployment to congregations in need; we will need leaders to volunteer to be liaisons to congregations; we will need those passionate and motivated around particular ministries to take initiative to start new working groups and ministries of the presbytery.

### COMPETENT STAFF TEAM

A reduced number of elected positions will require excellent, knowledgeable and competent leadership among the professional and administrative staff. In a decentralized system that we are creating through the working teams, congregational liaisons, and our other cadres, it is essential that the staff be the skeleton for the body. This is so that 1) the day to day administrative tasks can be accomplished in timely and uniform ways, 2) records and files can be managed and maintained, 3) technology and newsletter/social media communication can be managed, and 4) a common core of communication and accountability to the vision will be manifest in the working of the larger body.

### FLEXIBILITY AND EXPERIMENTATION

Clearly, this drastic simplification of the current structure and functions of the presbytery will probably result in some things that *do* need to be done going undone until we recognize the need. That is all right. That is how we find out what really needs to be done. Midcourse corrections, “tweaking” as we go along, and, yes, even failures, are a normal and anticipated part this kind of process.

### PRAYER AND DISCERNMENT

Let’s pray about this. Let’s discuss it. Let’s make suggestions. This plan needs for dozens of people to consider it, discuss it, and offer advice and counsel. If this is going to work, we have to WANT to make it work. That is, as a presbytery we must own it together. The whole premise here is that our future is not to be imposed “from above” but discovered together.

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