

Frequently Asked Questions regarding Urban Congregations referenced in the report Defining “Urban Congregations” in Our Presbytery to be considered Sept 11.

What is our presbytery’s history regarding urban ministry?

A Brief History of Urban Ministry policies in New Brunswick Presbytery:

1. The 1981 General Assembly recommended presbyteries have a comprehensive metropolitan/urban mission. In response, New Brunswick Presbytery formed the Urban Ministry Task Force in 1984 and adopted an Urban Ministry Strategy in 1985 by creating the Urban Mission Cabinet.
2. An Urban Property Policy was developed in 1992 and revised in 2002. The definition of an Urban Church developed in 2002, and revised in 2007, used the demographic data tool Percept.
3. On June 14, 2016 presbytery suspended allocations from the Urban Property Policy until such time as the trustees of the presbytery:
 - 1) adopted a financial policy which will determine good financial practice, 2) evaluated and adopted appropriate tools for financial accounting and 3) evaluated through joint meetings with the Urban Working Group and central presbytery leadership the Urban Property Policy as a whole.
 - Presbytery adopted an Urban Property Policy on June 12, 2018
4. Presbytery formed an Urban Working Group June 14, 2016 to develop:
 - new and renewed vision regarding the purposes of an urban mission entity
 - see the “Report of the Urban Working Group - Urban Mission Network Committee: A Life Together in Christ” received by presbytery on June 13, 2017
 - see Section 9.07 Plan of Presbytery, adopted Nov 14, 2017, creating the Urban Mission Network Committee.
 - clarity of its evaluative definitions, including urban designation
 - proposed for presbytery consideration September 11, 2018
 - assessment of tools used to determine to which extent the presbytery’s communities qualify as urban
 - the June 13, 2017 report recommended the use of MissionInsite as the demographic tool. Trustees of the presbytery approved funding for MissionInsite in Dec 2017; use of the tool began in Feb 2018.

What congregations have been identified as urban over the years?

Urban Churches (2002)	Updated/Approved Urban Churches (2007)	Proposed Urban Churches (2018)
Imani – Trenton	Dissolved	
Bethany – Trenton	Bethany	Dissolved
Christ – Hamilton	Christ	Christ
First Trenton	First Trenton	First Trenton
Westminster – Trenton	Westminster	Westminster
Slackwood – Lawrence	Slackwood	Slackwood
Grace Taiwanese – Lawrence	Grace Taiwanese	Grace Taiwanese
Covenant – Trenton	Covenant	Covenant
Pilgrim – Trenton	Left presbytery merged with Yardville	
Iglesia Nueva Vida – Hamilton	Iglesia Nueva Vida	Iglesia Presbiteriana Nueva Vida – IPNV
New Brunswick	New Brunswick	New Brunswick
Taiwanese American Presbyterian Fellowship – TAFPC – New Brunswick	Taiwanese American Presbyterian Fellowship – TAFPC	Relocated to Hillsborough – no longer urban
Bayard St. – New Brunswick	Bayard St.	Bayard St.
Somerset	Not urban in accord with 2007 Percept data	Somerset
	Lawrence Rd. – Lawrence	Lawrence Rd
		Bound Brook
		Ewing
		Flemington
		Grace – South Brunswick
		Nassau – Princeton
		West Trenton
		Witherspoon St. – Princeton

Using standard criteria for the evaluation of urban poverty in formal studies carried out by researchers in the social sciences, we examined the list of our 39 congregations by taking into consideration: [From page 1, paragraph 3, Defining “Urban Congregations” ... 09.2018]

- (a) the proportion of households (above 7 percent) living in poverty within a one mile radius of each congregation’s physical location;
 - (b) population density (above 8,500 residents) in those locations; and
 - (c) the percentage of non-white/non-Hispanic residents in the same locations (above 30 percent).
- A total of 18 congregations in 16 locations meeting these criteria, are widely distributed throughout the Presbytery of New Brunswick and broadly representative of conditions associated with urban marginalization, disinvestment, and impoverishment.

Why use MissionInsite for demographic information?

After researching possible demographic tools, the Urban Working Group chose MissionInsite because it is known and used widely in our denomination for its functions and depth of information.

How were distinctions made regarding the criteria? Why were lines drawn where they were to create the list?

The UWG examined the detailed listing of all churches under each criteria looking for places with a significant gap in the numbers, as places to draw a line in the data. We also considered how many congregations were included when lines were drawn, and if that distinction reflected our communities. We did this with each of the criteria, and then compiled the table in the report.

What does it mean to do ministry in an urban context?

From page 5, Section V. "Why Urban Ministry" of the report "Urban Mission Network Committee: A Life Together in Christ" adopted by presbytery June 13, 2017

Population scale and density differentiate urban areas from rural enclaves. But there is more—'urban' is also a coded term referring to low-income and marginal populations in cities, many of whom are racial or ethnic minorities; the aged and infirm, and minors in need of assistance. Our committee assessed the dual meaning of the term 'urban' as used by specialists and the public at large. Both usages are important because they compel us to identify physical locations as well as the characteristics of residents in those locations whose needs we aim to address. ...

We see **connection** as the basis of a true urban ministry aimed at enhancing collective life. A major reason why poverty endures in the land of abundance is the tendency for people with status, education and wealth to be far removed from those who lack such assets. ... **A top purpose of a responsible urban ministry should be to create meaningful and consistent bridges between mainstream and vulnerable Americans.** Such connections should take the form of collaboration, a horizontal and cooperative alliance rather than a vertical, top-down dispensation of charity. ... In other words, we affirm that **the success of a proactive urban ministry hinges on the capacity for collaboration among and between churches.**

As important as connection is **coherence**. We recommend a logical and consistent approach enabling churches and their congregations to collaborate harmoniously in urban ministry. Coherence is the opposite of fragmentation. ...

Finally, we see **courage** as a necessary element buttressing a viable urban ministry. Courage must be explicitly named because it takes nerve to draw the attention of parishioners, religious authorities, public officials, and the public at large to the factors that cause and perpetuate poverty in American cities.

What does it mean to be identified as an "urban" congregation?

From Section 9.07 of the Plan of Presbytery, approved 11.14.2018

1. Designation as an urban congregation means one pastor and one elder from each designated congregation is a member of the Urban Mission Network Committee (UMNC). [Consistent with past history – not all designated urban congregations choose to participate in the urban ministry of the presbytery.]
2. The UMNC has responsibility for

- recommending use of Urban Property Policy funds to the appropriate presbytery team with funding oversight for approval [*the Urban Property Policy on June 12, 2018: specifies the Grants Committee, if functioning, or else the Trustees.*]
- supporting the formation and work of Urban Task Forces and/or Working Groups, which may seek to do ministry such as but not limited to:
 - 1) *crisis intervention* (i.e. alleviate immediate ongoing basic needs i.e. housing, food, clothing, utilities);
 - 2) *advocacy* for greater governmental services/funding on various issues;
 - 3) *grass-roots organizing*;
 - 4) *equipping and empowering leaders/pastors* to serve in an urban context – one focus being racial/ethnic leaders seeking theological education;
 - 5) *support/resource group(s)* for congregations/ pastors serving urban congregations and
 - 6) *education* – ongoing and across the presbytery on issues of injustice i.e. poverty, racism, quality public school education, mass incarceration, etc.

What is the purpose of the Urban Ministry Network Committee?

From Section 9.07 of the Plan of Presbytery, approved 11.14.2018

1. strengthen and equip current and future congregational leaders who seek to engage their congregations in ministry in their particular contexts,
2. including intentional support for non-Anglo seminarians and pastors, and seminarians and pastors who are considering other forms of ministry. This shall include but not be limited to seeking and supporting seminary field education placements;
3. convening annual presbytery anti-racist training;
4. convening meetings of Sessions of Urban Mission Network Churches to share in planning of ministry; resourcing of congregational leaders as they understand and act on information from the MissionInsite demographic tool.

How does our congregation access our information on MissionInsite? What can we learn?

MissionInsite can help all New Brunswick presbytery congregations gain deeper insight into their ministry context. All of our churches have already been entered into the MissionInsite database. All churches need to select a Church Administrator. When you have done so, please email Ilene, our Regional Agency Administrator [iblack@pnb.com] to let her know the name and email address of your chosen Church Administrator, and she will register your congregation. Once you are registered, you can enter the website and generate many different reports, even to the extent of drawing boundaries around areas in your community to better understand the people who live there. If your congregation would be interested in further training in the use of MissionInsite, please contact a member of the Urban Working Group or Ilene at the presbytery office.