

Proposed Motions from the Urban Working Group providing for the definition of urban congregations as required in Section 9.07 of the Plan of Presbytery:

Motion 1:

To amend Section 9.07 of the Plan of Presbytery to read (changes underlined):
Membership shall include: one pastor and one elder of each congregation designated as a New Brunswick Presbytery urban church as defined by demographic data based on poverty, population density and diversity as derived from MissionInsite – to be reviewed, updated and approved by the presbytery every three (3) years;

Motion 2:

To receive the report “Defining ‘Urban Congregations’ in Our Presbytery” and to approve the list of New Brunswick presbytery urban congregations as of September 11, 2018:

New Brunswick	Bound Brook
Bayard St.- New Brunswick	Christ - Hamilton
First Trenton	Iglesia Presbiteriana Nueva Vida - Hamilton
Covenant - Trenton	Nassau - Princeton
Westminster - Trenton	West Trenton
Flemington	Witherspoon St. - Princeton
Slackwood - Lawrence	Ewing
Grace Taiwanese - Lawrence	Somerset
Lawrence Rd. - Lawrence	Grace - South Brunswick

Reference documents–

1. Plan of Presbytery Section 9.07 amended 09.14.2017 (see presbytery webpage Committees and Councils – Urban Working Group)
2. Final report of the Urban Working Group – URBAN MISSION NETWORK COMMITTEE: A LIFE TOGETHER IN CHRIST received by presbytery June 13, 2017 (see presbytery webpage Committees and Councils – Urban Working Group)
3. Report “Defining ‘Urban Congregations’ in Our Presbytery” and the list of New Brunswick presbytery urban congregations to be approved by presbytery September 11, 2018 (see presbytery webpage Presbytery Meeting Sept 11, meeting documents)

Prepared 09.10.2018.

Patricia Fernández-Kelly authored the narrative report and Molly Dykstra prepared all the data considered by the UWG.

URBAN WORKING GROUP REPORT: Defining “Urban Congregations” in Our Presbytery August 2018

Starting in 2017, the Urban Working Group of the Presbytery of New Brunswick has been meeting regularly to ascertain the best way to serve communities in need. The Working Group was formed as part of an effort within our presbytery to reconsider obligations derived from our commitment to the teachings of Jesus Christ, and consistent with principles of social justice, community enhancement and joyful service.

The initiation of a permanent group to continue to advance this work, the Urban Mission Network Committee, requires a definition of criteria by which congregations in our presbytery shall be known as “urban congregations,” and the subsequent identification of those congregations by name.

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 (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). The resulting attached grid contains a total of 18 congregations in 16 locations meeting these criteria, widely distributed throughout the Presbytery of New Brunswick and broadly representative of conditions associated with urban marginalization, disinvestment, and impoverishment.

The grid represents qualitative and quantitative variations among communities in need. For example, churches such as Westminster and Covenant are situated in high density locations where poverty is rampant and where large numbers of people of color, both African Americans and Latinos, live. By contrast, Nassau Presbyterian and Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church are located in areas of lower demographic density and high levels of affluence but they are surrounded by impoverished white and black residents as well as immigrants often rendered invisible by statistical data. We settled on a one-mile radius boundary for practical considerations, anticipating programs that can be realistically and thriftily managed by the congregations involved. In other words, the attached grid represents our best effort to identify locations where outreach and ministry are most pressingly needed and would be most effective.

Our deliberations have been informed by central principles of Christian morality but also by social and economic imperatives. In 2018, more than 40 million Americans (men, women and children; individuals as well as families) live in poverty--upwards of 13 percent of the population in the world’s wealthiest country. Although rural poverty is a dire reality, most impoverished people in our country live in inner cities and suburbs such as the ones represented by the 16 churches in the attached grid.

At its most elementary level, the word ‘urban’ designates geographical areas densely populated by groups sharing a plurality of services. Neighborhoods and tracts are markers of urban living, as are public transportation, streets and thoroughfares, parks, schools, hospitals and clinics,

commercial establishments, and government offices to administer and regulate collective life. Population scale and density differentiate urban areas from rural enclaves. '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 working group recognizes 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. To thoughtfully consider what we meant by 'urban' was part of an effort to attain precision and veracity.

Thus, embedded in our selection of sites, as represented in the attached grid, is recognition of quantitative and qualitative differences in the experience of poverty. To be poor in America is more than lacking material benefits such as a living wage, adequate shelter, and access to health and quality education. Poverty is also about the paucity of connections to vital human and social resources. High levels of residential segregation represent an enduring scourge in the United States, the result of slavery, racial and ethnic prejudice, and lack of meaningful government investments. Most poor people live in neighborhoods where they interact almost exclusively with other impoverished people, lacking means to relate in significant and continuing ways with populations more affluent and educated, whose members control substantial information and know-how about normative institutions. Locational isolation makes it difficult for impoverished Americans to achieve true citizenship. Foundational Christian scriptures identify human separation as a violation of God's covenant. In our days willful separation creates suffering, retards social integration, and produces fear and misconceptions among both poor and comparatively prosperous people. Such divisions strengthen stereotypes and discourage cooperation. For that reason we see the 18 congregations in our grid as resources of extraordinary potential in that they contain individuals and families that could, under the proper circumstances, become a bountiful source of friendship, social support, legal and social referrals, mentorship and other similar facilitations for people living in poverty.

Our conversations have led us to an affirmation of life in community and service, envisioned not as burdens but as gifts founded in communion. We propose a radical approach to urban ministry based not solely on charity or obligation but on the identification of opportunity. We profess a vision where God's people see themselves in others regardless of differences in background, race, status and age. This we propose in the spirit of fellowship, knowing that by giving we are receiving gifts of immeasurable worth.

Submitted by the Urban Working Group

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1 Mile Radius Around New Brunswick Presbytery Congregations - 2017

CHURCH NAME/S Bolded if they appear in two columns; ✓ if all three columns	POVERTY BY % OF HOUSEHOLDS (above 7%: 16 locations, 18 congregations)	POPULATION (above 8,500: 14 locations, 16 congregations)	NON-WHITE/-NON-HISPANIC POPULATION PERCENTAGE (above 30%: 18 locations, 20 congregations)
New Brunswick ✓	1 = 33.62%	1 = 50,363	4 = 72.7%
Bayard St.--New Brunswick ✓	2 = 33.45%	2 = 48,160	5 = 70.4%
First Trenton ✓	3 = 32.52%	3 = 26,957	1 = 91.2%
Covenant--Trenton ✓	4 = 25.18%	5 = 21,415	3 = 81.5%
Westminster--Trenton ✓	5 = 18.05%	4 = 23,744	2 = 81.8%
Flemington	6 = 13.31%		14 = 35.3%
Slackwood & Grace Taiwanese -- Lawrenceville ✓	7 = 12.8%	12 = 9,499	12 = 39.1%
Lawrence Rd. --Lawrence ✓	8 = 9.24%	14 = 8,540	16 = 34.3%
Frenchtown	9 = 8.61%		
Bound Brook ✓	10 = 7.98%	6 = 15,284	10 = 46.1%
Christ & Iglesia Presbiteriana Nueva Vida -- Hamilton ✓	11 = 7.89%	15 = 8,513	18 = 34.0%
Titusville	12/13 = 7.56%		
Nassau -- Princeton ✓	12/13 = 7.56%	8 = 14,296	17 = 34.1%
West Trenton	14 = 7.26%		20 = 31.1%
Witherspoon St. --Princeton ✓	15 = 7.25%	7 = 14,534	19 = 32.6%
Ewing	16 = 7.1%		15 = 34.4%
Somerset		9 = 12,129	7/8 = 61.3%
Hamilton Square		10 = 11,078	
Grace --S. Brunswick		11 = 10,706	9 = 50.8%
Hillsborough & TAFPC		13 = 8,845	
Dayton			7/8 = 61.3%
Plainsboro			6 = 64.3%
Dutch Neck			11 = 45.3%
Kingston			13 = 35.5%