

URBAN MISSION NETWORK COMMITTEE: A LIFE TOGETHER IN CHRIST

REPORT OF URBAN WORKING GROUP TO THE PRESBYTERY OF NEW BRUNSWICK April 10, 2017, revised June 12, 2017

Formed by a motion of Presbytery June 14, 2016 the Urban Working Group in this report recommends:

1. The formation of an Urban Mission Network Committee as the best model for sustainable urban mission within the presbytery structure.
2. The use of MissionInsite as the tool to identify and clarify the term “urban” for our presbytery’s purposes.
3. The Urban Working Group together with the Central Leadership Team and Trustees revise and redevelop the Urban Property Policy for presbytery approval.
4. Upon approval of a new Urban Property Policy, the Urban Mission Network Committee will be responsible for making recommendations regarding funding requests to the appropriate body within our presbytery structure.

Next Steps The Urban Working Group continues its partnership with various presbytery groups in order to fulfill the recommendations of this report:

1. Amend section 9.07 of the Plan of-Presbytery creating the Urban Mission Network Committee –at the September meeting of Presbytery.
2. Identify funds and purchase MissionInsite (a demographic tool), in the summer of 2017 to inform and empower the ministries of our congregations and specialized ministries through but not limited to the work of COM, the Trustees and the Stewardship of Property Committee.
3. The Urban Working Group, the Central Leadership Team, and Trustees using MissionInsite, will develop a list of “urban mission network congregations.”
4. The Nominating Committee nominates and presbytery elects candidates to serve on the Urban Mission Network Committee. (see III. PROPOSAL for details)

Please note: The Presbytery is now in the process of forming a group of representatives from the Central Leadership Team, Trustees and Urban Working Group to work collaboratively on a revised Urban Property Policy.

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I. THE URBAN WORKING GROUP. Commissioned in June and convened in August, 2016, the Urban Working Group met 11 times over 6 months to fulfill its charge by the presbytery.

The group identified the following common affirmations:

1. We embrace Christ's call to love neighbor as self (cf. Luke 10:27), and to "seek the peace and prosperity [shalom] of the City..." (Jeremiah 29:7, NIV).
2. We celebrate the Presbytery's decision to incorporate non-urban membership in the Urban Working Group was prescient. If Presbyterian urban mission is to thrive in its myriad of forms, it will require partnerships of all congregations involving Connection, Coherence and Courage. (Please read Section IV. Why Urban Ministry.)
3. We affirm our own call to this work beyond our mandate, as we understand ourselves to be sent in the power of the God's Spirit to thrive together in Christ. To that end, the majority of our nominated and elected membership has pledged to serve, if again nominated and elected, on the Urban Mission Network Committee (UMNC).

Commissioned in June and convened in August, 2016, the Urban Working Group met 11 times over 6 months to fulfill its charge by the presbytery.

Participants included:

Greg Albert TE- Christ PC

John Allen TE- First-Trenton

Helen Burd RE- New Brunswick

David Byers TE- Westminster

Molly Dykstra TE- Covenant

*Patricia Fernandez-Kelly RE- Witherspoon

Karen Hernandez-Granzen TE- Westminster

Jim Huang TE- TAFPC

*Ken Good TE- Stockton/Titusville

Ryan Irmer TE- Slackwood

Roberta Kearney TE- New Brunswick

Stephanie Merryfield, MDiv

Nina Reeder TE- Lawrence Road

George Self RE- Covenant

*Ralph Sims RE- Ewing

*Bill Stoltzfus RE- Nassau

Bob Tomlinson, PNB Ex Dir, ex officio

* non-urban teaching/ruling elder with demonstrated passion for urban ministry, elected by the presbytery.

II. Why an Urban Mission Network Committee in New Brunswick Presbytery.

1. Our presbytery's mission statement, together with its interpretive statements, makes essential the work that the Urban Mission Network Committee proposes to do. Our presbytery's Mission Statement is:
 - 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.
2. The fulfillment of our presbytery's mission and our engagement in vital urban ministry is the work of the entire presbytery. The proposed Urban Mission Network Committee is

designed to embody this work in our communities of faith through connection, coherence and courage. Please see Section II: Why Urban Ministry.

III. MOTION CHARGING THE URBAN WORKING GROUP- JUNE 14, 2016.

That the Urban Working Group strive to develop:

- 1) new and renewed vision regarding the purposes of an urban mission entity,
- 2) clarity of its evaluative definitions, including urban designation and
- 3) assessment of tools used to determine to which extent the presbytery's communities qualify as urban.

The UWG must either amend or adopt the language found in the former plan of presbytery in reference to the identity and plan of the Urban Mission Cabinet or redefine its mission. This shall be shared with the Task Force in October, brought before the presbytery for consideration at its stated meeting in November and adopted into the new plan of presbytery.

IV. PROPOSAL: The UWG proposes that the Presbytery of New Brunswick:

- A. Create a new in Section 9.07 of the Plan of Presbytery with the following mission statement: The Urban Mission Network Committee of the Presbytery of New Brunswick exists to advance the gospel mandate of equitable urban community living educationally, economically, racially, socially, and spiritually through vital congregations, and their non-profits, and their current and developing leaders.

1. **Committee members.** We propose two membership phases for the new committee, based on which congregations come to be considered "New Brunswick Presbytery Urban Churches" with the use of our new demographic tool (see #3 below).
 - a. "New Brunswick Presbytery Urban Churches."
 - i. One pastor and one elder of each congregation which exists in current or projected (5 years) geographic areas of high diversity and high density described objectively by demographic data derived from MissionInsite. These will be considered "New Brunswick Presbytery Urban Churches."
 - b. Congregations not designated as "New Brunswick Presbytery Urban Churches":
2-3 TEs/REs nominated and elected by presbytery
 - c. Non-Anglo majority/racial/ethnic/intercultural congregations not designated as "New Brunswick Presbytery Urban Churches":
2-3 Res/TEs nominated and elected by presbytery
 - d. PNB Executive Director ex officio
2. **Purpose.** The Urban Mission Network Committee's purpose shall be to:
 - a. Strengthen and equip current and future congregational leaders who seek to engage their congregations in ministry in their particular contexts, including intentional support for non-Anglo seminarians and pastors, and seminarians and pastors who are considering other forms of ministry. Examples include:
 - i. Seek and support seminary field education placements
 - ii. Convene annual presbytery anti-racist training event
 - iii. Convene meetings of Sessions of Urban Mission Network Churches to share in planning of ministry

- iv. Resource congregational leaders as they understand and act on information from the MissionInsite demographic tool
 - b. Within the framework of a new Urban Property Policy, make recommendations for the appropriate administration of existing Urban Funds and the development of future sources for additions to those Funds, being accountable to PNB for expenditures of Urban Funds and other monies allocated to “New Brunswick Presbytery Urban Churches” for the purpose of engaging in vital urban ministry. Such as:
 - i. seed money for new urban initiatives
 - ii. funds for urban leadership training
 - iii. funds for existing urban “mission critical” ministries.
 - b. Support the formation and work of Urban Task Forces and/or Working Groups, which may seek to do ministry in any one of the following, or other approaches:
 - i. Crisis intervention: alleviate immediate ongoing basic needs i.e. housing, food, clothing, utilities, etc.
 - ii. Advocate for greater governmental services/funding on various issues, does not necessarily involve direct contact with those impacted by the system.
 - iii. Grass-roots organizing – working directly with local leaders and people in a community to learn critical needs – working to address needs as determined by the community
 - iv. Equip and empower leaders/pastors to serve in an urban context – one focus being on racial/ethnic leaders seeking theological education
 - v. Support/resource group for congregations/ pastors serving urban congregations
 - vi. Education – ongoing and across the presbytery on issues of injustice i.e. poverty, racism, quality public school education, mass incarceration, etc.
3. After consulting with PCUSA national and regional offices, and completing a two-hour webinar, we determined that MissionInsite is currently the most effective demographic tool for our purposes. We also concluded that all New Brunswick Presbytery member churches will benefit greatly from this tool. We support the use of the Presbytery Causes portion of the Urban Fund for the purpose of purchasing this tool. Please see Appendix: MissionInsite: 10 Effective Ministry Applications.

V. WHY URBAN MINISTRY.

A. Our call to Urban Ministry in the Presbytery of New Brunswick.

In 2017, nearly 50 million men, women, and children still endure poverty in the United States, the world’s richest country. Most poor people live in cities—they are low-income African Americans; immigrants in fear of deportation; Latinos and Latinas holding jobs that do not convey financial independence; and white folks residing in urban areas destructively affected by the closure of factories in the wake of globalization. Contrary to a damning stereotype portraying the poor as idle and irresponsible, most poor people work for pay and, perhaps more tellingly, one in five impoverished Americans is a child imperiled by the absence of vital resources. The aged, the disabled, and those on fixed incomes represent yet other vulnerable

segments in our society. Those groups must stand at the center of a conscientious and viable urban ministry.

The Urban Working Group was formed as part of an effort within the Presbytery of New Brunswick 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. This report is the result of more than six months of intense deliberations about the best way to address the conditions surrounding urban populations.

At its most elementary, the word ‘urban’ designates geographical circumscriptions 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. 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. To thoughtfully consider what we meant by ‘urban’ was part of an effort to attain precision and veracity. For that reason, this report provides information about both place and life; about physical setting and people.

Our conversations led us to an affirmation of life in community and service, envisioned not as burdens but as gifts founded on communion. We propose a radical approach to urban ministry based not solely on charity or obligation but on the recognition 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. Our approach highlights three dimensions: Connection, Coherence, and Courage.

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. As income inequality rises in the United States more and more live in segregated spaces—the rich in gated communities and posh neighborhoods; the poor in resource-deprived tracts with limited access to good schools, effective transportation and well-paying jobs. ***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.

Churches, especially their congregations, are ideally suited to achieve that goal by taking purposeful steps to establish ongoing relationships with grassroots organizations serving deprived populations, but also by directly joining forces with needy individuals and families. Mentoring and training programs, as well as advocacy, are important but so is simple sociability in spaces that enable families and persons of unequal backgrounds to know each other, share information, and discuss common aspirations. Churches and their members can

be extraordinary tools to achieve that simple but elusive objective. We call for an urban ministry in the image of the Wedding of Cana, where all are invited to the table of the Lord in celebration; and where limited resources are multiplied by virtue of generous sharing and imaginative design.

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. All too frequently, efforts to address the needs of urban populations end in failure because resources available for that purpose are stretched thin and scattered across a multiplicity of piecemeal programs. A coherent approach joining complementary programs and meant to maximize shared resources in the pursuit of common priorities may yield more successful and enduring results. This will require dialogue, persuasion, negotiation, and willingness on the part of churches to support one another in common and mutually reinforcing endeavors. In other words, we affirm that ***the success of a proactive urban ministry hinges on the capacity for collaboration among and between churches***. For that reason we call for support to reinforce ties among participating congregations. Institutional partnerships are consistent with a vision of service based on consensus and cooperation.

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. Our country has strong Christian traditions and democratic practices that have been the world's envy. Tolerating need in a nation as wealthy as ours without exposing its institutional causes is unacceptable. Too many believe penury to be the inevitable result of bad luck or misbehavior on the part of those afflicted. Altruism has become an industry to address the needs of people seen as defective by virtue of ill fortune or obduracy. This obscures the way in which public and private institutions as well as market forces contribute to the perpetuation of destitution. Racial and ethnic discrimination in the job market; declining wages, the lack of affordable housing, the substitution of automation for human labor, the exportation of jobs to overseas locations where workers toil for a pittance, the greed of employers, and the misguided priorities of politicians, all have contributed to the elevation of poverty levels in recent decades.

There are thousands of programs for the poor with varying levels of success in this country. They have accomplished meagre results because, for the most part, their aim has been to change the behavior of poor individuals and families not to confront the private and public institutions that perpetuate poverty and inequality. It is up to us as whether to impose clarity where hypocrisy has prevailed, or to join the legion of well-meaning persons who see the need for change but are paralyzed for lack of courage and transparency of speech. ***We cannot envision a coherent, fruitful urban ministry that does not speak truth to power by challenging misdirected goals and exposing failures in service provision.***

This is all the more important at this time when government makes credible efforts to reduce public expenditures in safety-net programs and when large numbers of Americans face diminished standards of living. In like vein, the ongoing assault on immigrants and refugees demands a renewed commitment on the part of God's people to protect the weak, welcome the stranger, and join forces with those who hunger for justice.

This report is the first step in a series of actions that can invigorate the Church's enduring commitment to those in need. By working in the spirit of connection, coherence, and courage, we will realize the true purpose of Christian teachings. Rather than seeing service as an obligation, a millstone, we think of it as an opportunity to fly, to rejoice, and to breathe free.

Patricia Fernández-Kelly, Elder, Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church
Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Princeton University
Elected member of Urban Working Group

- B. We state and reaffirm the rationale for revision of Urban Property Policy of New Brunswick Presbytery in 2002. Fifteen years later, these reasons for intentional urban ministry continue to be valid.

A Resolution Regarding the Presbytery of New Brunswick's Urban Property Policy
AS AMENDED ON FEBRUARY 12, 2002

Whereas, the Presbytery of New Brunswick currently has a policy for the disposition of the property and endowments of urban churches that have been dissolved, namely the Urban Property Policy adopted, November 10, 1992; and

Whereas, the needs and opportunities in the urban churches as well as our call to minister there have not changed since the adoption of that policy; and

Whereas, the situation in our inner cities continues to be of crisis proportions, with our church losing not only individual members but congregations as well; and

Whereas, the further continuation of this situation could soon leave little or no effective Presbyterian presence in many inner cities, and

Whereas, when one of our city churches suffers a decline in membership as it struggles to minister to minister to a changing neighborhood, then the presbytery suffers and the denomination suffers; and

Whereas, almost all of us depend in many ways of the livelihood of the city; and

Whereas, the city is the site of tremendous power and affluence in proximity to tremendous poverty, powerlessness, and pain; and

Whereas, we are instructed by the Gospels to provide a ministry of presence and reconciliation to men, women and children, and to peoples of all economic, education and social situations, and to people of diverse and alternative lifestyles; and

Whereas, we must come to see ourselves as a body in partnership with Jesus of Nazareth in ministry and mission in the city and in the world, continuing to support the ministry of city churches as a part of our ministry to the whole world; and

Whereas, we are a people with a vision for the future and an awareness of the past, who choose to remain in our cities – regardless of racial, cultural and economic differences – to be participants in the reconstruction of urban life, in accordance with our faith, our baptism, and our experience of Jesus Christ.

Whereas, the PCUSA at the 208th General Assembly in 1996 affirmed the goal of increasing racial ethnic membership to 10% by the year 2005 and 20% by the year 2010; and

Whereas, the majority of racial ethnic persons reside in the city; and

Whereas, there is a need to update the Urban Property Policy

because there has been a growing understanding of the need to train lay leaders as well as pastors

because there is a need to clarify the process by which funds for training are to be distributed

because a national urban ministry endowment fund has not been established, and

because we recognize the connectional nature of our church;

therefore, be it resolved, ...

C. Recent PC(USA) denominational anti-racism efforts.

1. Newly Adopted PCUSA Antiracism Policy: Facing Racism: *A Vision of the Intercultural Community Churchwide Antiracism Policy*. (<https://facing-racism.pcusa.org/>)
2. Article: March 21, 2017 <http://www.presbyterianmission.org/story/pcusa-six-agency-effort-share-facing-racism-resources-denomination/>
3. Article: May 17, 2016 <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2016/5/17/facing-racism-churchwide-antiracism-policy-team-re/>
4. [PCUSA's 1001 Worshipping Communities Initiative](http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/1001-2/about-1001/)
<http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/1001-2/about-1001/>

VI. APPENDIX

A. 2007 List of Urban Churches

1. Bethany*
2. Bayard Street*
2. Christ*
3. Covenant*
4. Grace Taiwanese
5. Iglesia Nueva Vida*
6. Lawrence Road*
7. New Brunswick*
8. Old First
9. Slackwood
10. Taiwanese American Fellowship
11. Westminster*

*Urban Churches that received Urban Funds 2003-2016.

B. MissionInsite document

