

**Minutes of the Trustees of  
the Presbytery of New Brunswick  
Meeting with the Central Leadership Team  
20 July 2020  
Meeting by Zoom**

Present: Elder Cherry Oakley, moderator; reverend Molly Dykstra, moderator of the Central Leadership Team; elder Hope Anderson of the Central Leadership Team; reverend Dave Davis; reverend Leslie Dobbs-Allsopp, Interim Presbytery Leader; elder Linda Gilmore, treasurer; elder Paul Neu of the Central Leadership Team; elder Angie Olsen; elder Gooitzen van der Wal of the Central Leadership Team; reverend John Williams of the Central Leadership Team; elder Jean Woodman; D. Paul La Montagne, stated clerk.

The meeting was convened with prayer at 7:15 pm.

From the draft agenda:

- PROCESS –partnering with Central Leadership Team; how do we do it better and where do we specifically need process inserted to make working together better?
- What is the picture of the Presbytery’s priorities? Where do we invest time, talent, and treasure and what do we base the investment strategy on (ie., values, approach, and intent)?
- What will we invest in Congregational Revitalization over the next 2 years so we can bring our “whole” selves to either the NJ Structures partnership OR to sustain ourselves as NBP?
- What money is available to invest in Presbytery priorities for the next 1-2 years? What projections can be provided to aid the leadership in understanding where resources can be concentrated and where resources need to be sought.
- How will we increase available money and resource to carry out the ministry and work of the Presbytery?

Moderator Oakley announced that this would be the first of several joint meetings of the Trustees and the Central Leadership Team, to take place two to four times a year.

Moderator Oakley then asked if there were any items to add to the agenda, and if anyone cared to suggest any priority among the items on the agenda.

The question was raised whether we are ready to vote on approving the application for the Presbyterian Mission Agency grant application. There was also a question of whether any action on the budget is required so that the PMA grant application can be submitted. It was agreed that further conversations could be carried out by email and a vote taken in that manner.

The conversation then turned to the question: How can we work together better, supplemented by the question: how can we tell whether we are working well together or not?

The body considered sharing their minutes with one another, and with the Committee on Ministry as well, also asking the CoM to share their minutes with the Trustees and the CLT. This raised the question of the confidentiality of the CoM minutes. There are several possible ways of dealing with this. The members of the Trustees and the CLT could be asked to sign the same confidentiality agreement that members of the CoM sign. Or a member of the CLT could sit as an observer at CoM meetings. Or the secretary of the CoM could be asked to prepare a digest of CoM minutes redacted for confidential issues. It was agreed to ask the CoM if they have any preference.

It was agreed that we should, after hearing from the CoM, move towards sharing among all three bodies. The trustees and the CLT will certainly share their minutes with one another no matter what the CoM decides. This sharing will be improved if these bodies also share their agendas with one another ahead of their meetings, in case the other bodies have any business that they would like to propose to one another.

The trustees and the Central Leadership Team will share their dropboxes with one another, not only for sharing documents, but so that documents will still be available for review as time goes by. Ilene will be directed to see that each member of the Trustees and the CLT are invited to share the other's dropbox.

It was agreed that the next joint meeting of the trustees and the Central Leadership Team will be Monday, 19 October 2020, at 7:00 pm.

This discussion led to a consideration of why the presbytery's decision making process is broken into so many different bodies.

The body reviewed the history of the development of the Plan of Presbytery. The key development in that history was the division of the unified Presbytery Council, of which the Trustees were a subset, into a separate Board of Trustees and Central Leadership Team in order to free the Central Leadership Team for more reflection and strategic planning than had been possible in years past. This appears not to have worked as well as had been hoped.

The body agreed that we need a new commitment to avoiding last minute communications, with an earlier publication of minutes and agendas.

There has been some recurring confusion as to the respective roles of the Trustees and the CLT. It was agreed that at the present time we should continue forward in our present roles and do a better job of working together. This is not a time to be revising the Plan of Presbytery.

The body then considered the question of the presbytery's priorities. What is our purpose? What do our present priorities need to be?

It was asserted by members of the Trustees that we are not going to exist in the form that we are in today much more than another year; that either we will join in the reorganization of the New Jersey presbyteries or we will have to reform ourselves significantly in order to carry on alone; and that either way our present structure will not last and it would be a wasted effort to try to change that structure at this time. Coping in the year to come will be

done by greater diligence in working together and by a clear understanding and execution of our priorities.

There was ready agreement that we need to prioritize the well being of our congregations. We need to help our congregations work together more. We need to help our congregations get ready for the change that is coming. We need to ask ourselves what our congregations want to spend their time on. And, what is actually going on in our congregations? We need to work on programs to help our congregations communicate with one another, and not merely have communication flow through the presbytery.

We also need to be aware of the difference between naming our priorities and doing the work necessary for those priorities to get done. Just answering the questions named here requires a lot of time and effort.

So, if there is such common agreement that prioritizing our congregations and their pastors is correct, then what is our action plan going to be?

There was much discussion of the Vital Congregations Initiative. The Vital Congregations Initiative is something that the presbytery decided to apply to participate in this past year. Congregations also decide individually whether to participate. The Central Leadership Team has been following up on this and on the Matthew 25 program steadily this past year.

There was general agreement that our priorities should be three:

- 1, Caring for our congregations,
- 2, Preparing our congregations for the re-organization of the New Jersey presbyteries, should NBP vote to do so, and
- 3, the Vital Congregations Initiative.

The question was raised and discussed at length whether the presbytery has the bandwidth for projects of this size and scope. Bandwidth here means the people with the necessary skills, who also have the time and energy for the work that needs to be done. Our resources are limited. Almost everything that we are trying to do or want to do is good. But the question remains, do we have the resources, mostly human resources, to do all of these things, or even to do just the biggest of these things. Concern was expressed that we don't even have enough people with enough time and energy to do all that would be required to do the work promised in the Presbyterian Mission Agency grant application.

The needs of the Committee on Ministry for people to do the work of the CoM was offered as an example of the problem of bandwidth in the presbytery. The CoM is supposed to have eighteen members. It has fourteen. In past years the CoM has had as many as twenty four members. Moreover, in years past many members of CoM had served several terms on the CoM over the course of the years and were very experienced and able to handle the needs of our congregations. The current CoM has little of that accumulated expertise.

The question was raised whether this was actually a problem of bandwidth, or might, rather, be a problem of the kinds of work we are asking people to do. It was also noted that we don't always do a very good job of preparing people for the roles they take on when they agree to serve the presbytery. In some ways we have failed to be a good connectional church. It was suggested that there was not a lot of energy left for the work of the Presbytery of New Brunswick and that people were using what strength they had for their

congregations. And this raises again the question of what we are ready and willing to do at the presbytery level and what we are ready and willing to do at the congregational level.

Having had a general discussion of the problem of bandwidth, of presbytery resources, some specific items of possible work that should be considered for the immediate future are:

- 1, A possible reorganization of the work of the Committee on Ministry,
  - 2, Convening the Urban Mission Network Committee,
  - 3, Review the work of the Stewardship of Property Committee and the Grants Committee to see if there might be better ways for them to work,
  - 4, Supporting the Vital Congregations Initiative,
- and 5, finding four people to serve on the support task force for our commissioners to the New Jersey Missional Communities Working Group.

The coming reorganization of the New Jersey presbyteries through the work of the New Jersey Missional Communities Working Group was discussed at some length. We were told that the working group is preparing to move forward as fast as it can, bringing a proposal to the presbyteries perhaps as soon as October, with a hope of starting to implement the proposal in the new year. Are we ready for this? It appears that most of the other New Jersey presbyteries are. Are people willing to wait for the overall large structure of the presbyteries to reorganize itself? Or do they prefer to wait for that reorganization and save their energy for the implementation of the reorganization and the start-up of the new presbyteries. If the plan goes through, the churches of the presbytery of New Brunswick will be distributed among two or three of the new presbyteries. How are congregations going to respond to that?

From the knowledge of the people present it seemed that some congregations are not worried about which presbytery they belong to. In part they simply want to get on with it. In part, they want to focus on self-care because that work will bear fruit no matter what happens to the presbyteries.

Concern was expressed that the new presbyteries might focus on executive staff and presbytery structures, rather than on congregations and the needs of congregations for staff support for new mission initiatives. Concern was expressed for what to do about staff for the presbytery of New Brunswick in the time between now and when new presbyteries might be organized. Do we have time to formulate new positions, new job descriptions, and conduct searches before the reorganization of the New Jersey presbyteries makes the question moot?

So, the body revisited the question of the Presbyterian Mission Agency Vital Congregations grant application. We reviewed our financial resources.

Income is down. This is no surprise given the pandemic. The income of our member congregations is down. It is expected that revenues are going to continue to drop, both for the presbytery and for our member congregations. If we get the grant, then we will probably be able to find \$25,000 of presbytery support for the programs the grant will partially fund in grants from our own grant funds, use of unrestricted reserves, and the value of staff support. The body was reminded that care will have to be taken when deciding what staff support is available from our present staff.

The body heard that an information session on the Lilly Grant applications was held on 14 July 2020, and recorded. That recording will be made available. It is expected that the grant proposal will be presented to the presbytery for action at the September meeting of the presbytery.

The body heard that there were several expressions of thankfulness for the statements and resources the presbytery provided for helping pastors deal with questions about reopening buildings during the pandemic.

The group heard that there is research being done on the question of insurance coverage for liability that might arise relative to claims arising from participants in worship and other church activities contracting COVID-19. Linda Gilmore reported that, so far, it seems that Brotherhood will cover congregations in such claims, but that Mercer Fire, which most of our congregations have their insurance with, will not. She has only just begun investigating this question and will report to the trustees and Central Leadership Team as she finds more out.

The question was raised as to what the liability of the presbytery is in a suit against an individual congregation. It was noted that it was possible, and perhaps likely, that any suit against a member congregation of the presbytery would name the presbytery as well. And even if a claim in a suit is unsustainable, the cost of defending against it can be considerable.

It was noted that we do have three congregations known to have reopened and to be meeting for worship, and a couple more with dates already named to reopen.

It was agreed that we need to advise sessions to talk to their insurers about liability for COVID-19 claims. The presbytery will also ask sessions about their plans for reopening their buildings, if they have any yet, and for a copy of their insurance coverage.

The meeting was adjourned with prayer at 9:09 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
D. Paul La Montagne  
Stated Clerk

**Minutes of the Trustees of  
the Presbytery of New Brunswick**

19 August 2020

Meeting by Zoom

Present: Elder Cherry Oakley, moderator; reverend Dave Davis, reverend Leslie Dobbs-Allsopp, interim presbytery leader; elder Linda Gilmore, treasurer; elder Angie Olsen; elder Joe Tully; elder Jean Woodman; reverend Molly Dykstra, moderator of the Central Leadership Team; D. Paul La Montagne, stated clerk.

The meeting was convened with prayer at 11:10 am.

It was reported that there have been some delays in writing thank you notes for per capita payments.

**Lawrence Road Presbyterian Church**

The trustees welcomed guests from the Lawrence Road Presbyterian Church: elder Pat Beaber, elder Sandra Phillips, elder Pam Wayne, reverend Marianne Rhebergen.

Lawrence Road is seeking the permission of the presbytery to sell their property at 1069 Lawrenceville Road, Lawrence Township, New Jersey. This building is a house, currently used for the Lawrence Road House of Hospitality. They also ask that the presbytery co-sign a loan for \$ 50,000 that they are seeking from the Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program.

The trustees noted that the checklist for property sales that we recently prepared for our own use does not fit this situation well. It presumes that the property being sold is a building used for worship.

Lawrence Road intends to use the money from this sale to make the congregation sustainable. Its immediate use will be to remodel another nearby house that the church owns so that it can serve as a manse. The PILP loan is intended as a bridge loan while they wait for the sale of the house. The bridge loan will be paid back immediately from the proceeds of the sale of the house. They want the bridge loan in order to get started as soon as possible.

Lawrence Road reports that they expect a list price in the neighborhood of \$230,000. They expect to use \$50,000 to repay the bridge loan, spend \$75,000 on remodeling and repairing the manse, and to put \$100,000 into their general fund. The house will be sold as is, they will not spend money preparing it for sale. The price named is an as is price.

The residents of the house have already been given notice that it is going to be sold at some point.

Selling the building will require the permission of the presbytery, and the presbytery expects a recommendation from the trustees before it acts. Co-signing the PILP loan can be done by the trustees under powers delegated to them by the presbytery.

The trustees asked Lawrence Road to meet with the Committee on Ministry. The CoM will advise the trustees with respect to the effect upon the spiritual health and welfare of the congregation that selling this building will have. The trustees also asked Lawrence Road to supply the trustees with two years worth of financial reports and with their current budget.

Lawrence Road expects to be able to begin searching for a new pastor sometime in the spring of 2021.

The visitors were excused. The trustees will wait for financial information and a report from the CoM before they act.

## **Plainsboro**

The trustees reviewed the status of the request by the Plainsboro Presbyterian Church that they be permitted to sell their church building and property. The trustees had previously arranged for elder Sam Bonner and elder Peter Godinez to work with the session in this matter. They are meeting the evening of 19 August 2020, the day of the Trustees meeting that these minutes report.

Plainsboro, with our previous permission, is preparing a memorandum of understanding with the Cornerstone Church, with the clear understanding that permission to sell has not yet been received.

It was noted that the estimate of value that we were given by Rich Gittleman was based upon an external viewing of the building and a look at similar transactions in the general area, and not an actual inspection of the premises.

The trustees agreed that, when everything has been completed and reported to them, they are ready to vote on this question by email.

## **Presbytery Finances**

Linda Gilmore then reported on the presbytery's finances.

Our income is down 16% year to date over last year. No surprise under pandemic conditions. Our expenses are in line with last year's expenses.

The treasurer is trying to streamline the presbytery's finances. She has closed two checking accounts. She will keep different accounts in our books rather than by having separate bank accounts for them.

In answer to a question, the presbytery does not receive donations from individuals.

The question was raised whether we should move our brokerage accounts to the Presbyterian Foundation. That question will be left to mature as we wait to hear what is reported from the New Jersey Missional Communities Transitional Working Group.

It was moved and passed to endorse the treasurer's work on the presbytery's bank accounts and to authorize her to make other such changes as seem wise to her, reporting them to the trustees.

The treasurer reported that a total of \$36,350 in grants has flowed through our accounts. We have handled passing on some of this grant money to the reverend Nidia Fernandez of C.A.F.E. and the reverend Nagy Hanna of the Arabic Church by giving them gift cards. There is more grant money coming in for them and the trustees will have to address the question of what the best way might be to pass income on to them.

## **Sharing Minutes**

The trustees considered the request of the Committee on Ministry that the members, trustees and of the Central Leadership Team sign the same confidentiality agreements that

members of the CoM sign in order that the CoM might share its minutes with the CLT and the trustees. The trustees agreed. The trustees also asked the stated clerk to exercise his discretion to redact any minutes shared with them for matters that are personal as well as confidential and which, in his judgment, do not need to be shared with the trustees.

### **Resource Presbyter**

The trustees had seen the position description for the resource presbytery proposed by the Central Leadership Team with the advice of the Personnel Committee.

There was some conversation about what the Committee on Ministry expects from the resource presbytery. The trustees noted that equipping and training the CoM was of first importance to the CoM. Their second priority was help with the most difficult cases. The CoM is also concerned with their own administrative inefficiencies and is hoping for help with this from the resource presbyter.

There was some concern about the possible realignment of the New Jersey presbyteries in 2021, but agreed that this position is too important to delay until we see what happens.

Personnel has requested that the trustees budget an additional \$10,000 for compensation for the resource presbytery. That is over and above the money that is already budgeted in the compensation of Bob Tomlinson and Leslie Dobbs-Allsopp who are presently doing most of the work that will be assigned to the resource presbyter.

After agreeing that the money would be taken from unrestricted reserves, the trustees passed a motion to budget an additional \$10,000 annually for a resource presbyter.

### **Policy for Grants**

Elder Jean Woodman reported on the draft Policy for Grants applied for by the presbytery. This is a process document for internal use to guide the presbytery when it applies for grants from other organizations. It does not apply to applications by member congregations for a grant from the presbytery. As a guidance document it does not need to be approved by the presbytery. When it is ready it will be circulated among all the presbytery's committees and other bodies and reported to the presbytery.

It was agreed that the policy should apply to grant applications by member congregations for grants from other bodies that require that the presbytery report that it has seen and endorsed the grant application. Some clarification is needed to distinguish between grant applications that merely require the presbytery to attest that it has seen the grant application, and grant applications that require work or investment by the presbytery.

A motion was passed to adopt this policy as a guideline. Elder Woodman will tweak the document in accordance with the comments made by the trustees.

It was noted that, in the past, presbytery staff has had some responsibility to serve as a resource in making grant applications. This is still happening, even though it is not named as a responsibility on anyone's job description.

### **Child, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy**

The Child, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy has now been reviewed by a lawyer and by our insurance company. They suggested some minor changes which were

adopted. Nothing substantial has changed since the last version that the trustees saw. The document now has language in it that applies to virtual meetings.

This policy will impact the New Worshipping Communities that count as ministries of the presbytery.

The trustees voted to recommend to the Central Leadership Team that it be recommended to the presbytery for adoption.

Because of information discovered while preparing this policy, member congregations of the presbytery will be advised that they should keep their old insurance policies forever. If issues come up years down the road it will be necessary to consult the insurance coverage that was in force at the time any given incident occurred.

### **Central Leadership Team Update**

The CLT reported that we did not receive the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance grant that we applied for. There may be a chance later to apply for a second round of such grants. The fate of the Presbyterian Missions Agency grant to support the Vital Congregations Initiative is still unknown. An information session on the Lilly grant application was held in July and the Lilly grant will be on the docket for the September meeting of the presbytery.

The grant applications for the Lilly grant and the PMA grant are already out. If the grants are awarded the presbytery will need to act formally to accept the action plans implied in the grant applications.

The question was raised what the presbytery should be doing to prepare for the possible transition if the New Jersey presbyteries reorganize. We await the text of a concrete motion from the Transition Working Group.

The Central Leadership Team consulted the Office of the General Assembly about liability in suits arising from cases of COVID-19. It was clearly communicated that we would be more liable as a presbytery if we issued a directive to our sessions. The advice already given by the Committee on Ministry, and any future guidance that the presbytery may issue, will be styled as advice on best practices for re-opening churches.

The trustees spoke to the question of a gift for Bob Tomlinson upon the completion of his service to the presbytery. It was moved and passed to support a gift of \$1,000 towards the purchase of a canoe or kayak. Contributions will be solicited from the members of the presbytery and the difference will be made up from unrestricted reserves.

The meeting was adjourned with prayer at 1:17 pm

Respectfully submitted  
D. Paul La Montagne  
Stated Clerk