

## Notes from breakout group conversation led by TE Jim Reisner

Group convened at 7:15 p.m. , disbursed shortly after 8 p.m.

Copies of the second draft of the mission statement were distributed to the group. Jim explained that the statement was a work in progress –and that the intent was that a final draft come to the presbytery floor in June 2016.

Offering background on the language in the statement, Jim explained that the first draft resulted from notes taken during breakout conversations at the presbytery meeting in Hudson. In those notes, the team was struck by how many churches were involved in feeding ministries.

The group then began to review and comment on the second draft.

Observations: first and third statements overlap

Objections to use of the phrase ‘the least of these’, one describing it as ‘inside baseball’ and several as ‘condescending’.

One asked: ‘Does this imply that the Gospel is for somebody else?’

The statement is not true to who we are - ‘it’s what we think we do for others’. Our congregations are not composed of those who are hungry. There is a need to craft the statement with more mutuality

One TE felt there was too much Christ-centered language and emphasized the need to craft ‘a statement for everyone’ that is ‘immediately accessible’.

Statement is too long - needs to be short, sweet, concise, memorable (one TE said group didn’t have the previous mission statement with which to compare new draft -- and pointed out that no one could remember it)

A question was raised: ‘who is this for?’ Are we talking to ourselves, i.e. is this primarily internal? Is this presbytery’s statement for presbytery or for others?

Rather than using the phrase ‘all of God’s people’ , why not use ‘all people’

The statement’s mentality communicates that presbytery is something different than the congregations. Prefer including something like ‘together we support one another...’

Suggested change: “We are communities of faith bound together by the love of Jesus Christ, ...” Comment: presbytery is not unitary.

One TE suggested that we consider the Great Commission a mission statement and asked, ‘why is this so difficult?’

One TE emphasized that millennials want to know what you want from them thus the clearer and more transparent we are, the better.

One TE said she really wanted to add the word ‘covenant’

One TE thought the statement’s language prosaic and commented that the mission statement ‘needs to have some poetry in it’

One TE said the statement needs to be ‘authentic, accessible, and effective’

Our Context: One TE said, “This is not the context where I live. I live in Christendom. New folks are coming in, and there is conflict happening.”

The context needs to reflect the significant contrasts in our presbytery.

The communities surrounding our churches are different than those who populate our pews. (our congregations are significantly older)

One ruling elder commissioner emphasized that to meet needs of different generations in communities, churches need to provide a variety of programs; ‘our job is to reach out’

Statement and context need to express not just who we are but who we want to become.

‘New’ seems to be a very important word in the second draft. One said, “let’s lose the language of ‘new’ and claim who we are.’

One TE emphasized his conviction that ‘what people are looking for is authentic community life’ and termed church growth a ‘worldly concept’

Objections were raised to description of geographic identity: too focused on the Capital District. Draft underlines the fact that Albany Presbyter is about Albany, Troy and the Capital District. But presbytery spans geography up and down the Northway, from the Catskills to the Adirondacks and along waterways in addition to the Mohawk and the Hudson.

(how to include the phrase 'a river runs through it?')

### **Mission Partners**

TE Reisner provided brief background. Presbytery is getting farther from our churches.

Is moving toward reducing or not funding mission at the presbytery level and needs to find a way to encourage local churches to support valued mission partners.

Concern raised that all or most mission partners are located in the Capital District.

Question raised about location of Rural and Migrant Ministries. (headquartered in Poughkeepsie) TE Kotfila said she would love presbytery to support rural ministries within the bounds of Albany Presbytery.

TE Reisner described possible funding transition during which, for a specified time, presbytery mission dollars would be rerouted back to churches and designated for distribution to mission partners

*(Scribe: Alexandra Lusak)*

### **Presbytery Break Out Group on April 6, 2016-04-07**

**Leader: Linda Martin**

Response to Mission Statement Portion:

#1 Feedback on proposed changes to mission statement:

~Who reads this? Would they know what "post Christendom" means?

~very good "stuff" in it - but it is not "memorable" - not catchy - boil it down more?

~Will Context portion be included or just "Who We Are" section?

~Context is important - rural and urban is important - the diversity that can come together to help support one another because we are entwined - need one another - educate one another

~Context statements are not true for whole presbytery: "capital district" - not Northville, Mayfield, etc. and not all these outer places

are experiencing "post Christendom" as the capital district is

#2 What does it mean for you to be part of a Presbytery that claims its role in a post-Christendom society?

~all agreed we cannot be the church we “have always been” – important for others to know we understand the culture we are working within – but also need to note that not all churches are functioning in exactly the same understanding or experience of that post Christendom society

#3 What resources from the Presbytery to serve as a mission outpost on the frontier of Christianity?

~they liked the image of mission outpost as way of looking at being church now

~appreciation from the Facebook, web page, e-news resources which lift up events, etc. that would otherwise be hard to keep track of

~like the transition work and think it should be constant – not just for “this time” but always focusing on being clear about who we are and what we do – to be proactive not reactive – to promote the corporate “we” .... “permanent” transitioning

#4 Opportunities and challenges for ministry we have as a Presbytery?

~our diversity is both – not everyone at same place at same time

~economic realities – what is our mission in that context?

~2 opportunities: 1) both rural and urban – places of food sources and places of food needs, communities are related by gift and need – what do we do with that or help make connections? 2) state capital in our midst – our special responsibility to work through that political scene to make our voices heard and to assist those who come to the area to help their voices be heard

Response to Mission Partners section:

#1

Hand count of those churches represented that participate in some way with each of the identified mission partners:

CRTC – 11 – but all agreed this needs to be in a different category than mission partners

TAUM – 2

SICM – 4

Union – 3

SUNY – 4

Sage – 1

Rural Migrant – 0

Oakwood – 3

Seven had no connection with any of them. But all agreed our focus should not be just on what each congregation needs – but need to be involved in helping those outside our “bounds”.

#2 Primary role for Presbytery is in mission funding?

~Unanimous “NO” (if it had said “facilitating” or something to that effect the response would be different)

~one mentioned the focus should be on helping the PCUSA churches within our bounds

~quite a bit of discussion on the fact that there has been ongoing conversation (“these agencies have been put on notice”) and meetings for at least 5 years with these mission partners, so they will not be surprised that changes are coming.

This group had several folks who had been part of those discussions and all were very at ease talking about it. There was no tension...a good understanding that things need to change. All seemed to agree that the 22% rate of gifting is not do-able anymore.

#3 didn’t get addressed directly – the discussion branched into what might be helpful for the Presbytery to promote or assist with:

~coordinating things for youth that local small congregations can’t make happen

~supporting mission trips for youth and adults is important – seems more like “mission” than funding mission partners

~the current mission partners do not represent all the counties in our presbytery – some of which are the most underserved counties in the state

~all agreed there are many other good missions happening in these other counties that would be good candidates for support rather than remaining rooted in the current list

There were folks representing some of the college ministries in my group who reminded us that students come from all over and how difficult it is to fund raise or depend on individual churches vs. corporate giving.

I would also note that in response to the plea for youth “help” it was mentioned that Larry Deyss has formed a very active group of youth that 3 churches support. He might be a good resource to have further discussion with.

### **Feedback from Group #3**

- Please define what you mean by “the least of these”
- Is “the least of these” in-house language?
- Feeding the marginalized perhaps instead?
- A bit too long, we need something short and memorable
- What will this be used for? Is this something to go out or something for us internally?
- “Church on the Margins” instead of post-Christendom
- Equip to minister to and serve poverty perhaps?
- Say that congregations do ministry and the Presbytery does equipping and resourcing for that ministry
- Our mission should be only to resource congregations
- Post-Christendom—maybe we use this language as a teaching tool around the Presbytery for our reality?
- Equip churches to live out the Gospel of JC in a culture where the church no longer has the same cultural power we thought we had
- Post-Christendom is a negative
- I love the last two lines of this statement
- Not the spiritual/power/authority we once had, what does that mean?
- Resources: More streamlined, need to be freed up to experiment to create labs of experimentation, forget decently and in order, permission giving
- Small churches need help with economy of scale (ex: officers training etc.)
- Need to know we are not alone and have the support and care of each other

- Need structure: lots of forms to get ministry resourcing (ie: grants and loans), that doesn't feel like trust to me
- More responsive: a presbytery of freedom rather than control
- Equip and train local congregations for mission

Missions:

Cornerstone/TAUM/Oakwood—First United Troy

Sage—First United Troy

Third Troy—None

Spencertown—a bit with R&M but tangential connection

Brunswick—none

First Pres Albany—SUNY Albany, tangential, CRTC

New Scotland—CRTC

Scotia—SICM, lots of involvement, Union Campus ministry

Stillwater—None

Greenwich—None

Salem—None

Malta—None

First Pres Albany—Synod of NE and PMA Missions

PMA Ministries that congregations in this group have connections to: Peacemaking, PDA, Hunger program, Mission Co-Workers, World Mission, YAV Program, UN Office, Washington Office, PW (a little bit)

Synod Ministries this Group had connections to: EMI, Gun Violence Network, COM Network, Synod Retreat last year,

All the mission except for one are Capital-District centric and that is really bothering some of the congregations that are around this group

