

Webinar #1

Post-Webinar Emailed Comments

Dear Kim & First Webinar panelists,

I thought the Webinar was very successful! I know there were a couple of "technical difficulties," but they were pretty minor. I think this will be a great tool for us as a Presbytery as we work to build better community. For the next two webinars, I think the opening materials could include a list of participants for everyone to see-- it's nice to know who is out there. It would also be helpful to inform participants that all of the written comments & questions along with panelist responses will be made available. Shannan said that at the end--it would be helpful at the beginning. I had asked if it were possible to see comments & questions in real time, but I'm guessing that is a whole other level of technology.

I thought the panelists did a very good job with both the presentations and the responses to questions. As a future panelist, I could see the challenge of balancing questions & responses. There is very little time for that, and it is easy for that time to get eaten up by only one or two questions.

I am looking forward to seeing/hearing the comments, questions, and responses.

Kim, you did a great job as our host! Thank you again for the work you have done, the work you are doing, and the work you will continue to do in helping us be better at communication.

Grace & Peace,
Jerry

To further explain my point for the current mission statement being spot on with maybe one small change about supporting a strong relationship with a congregation and their unique community, and the work being updated....

Take a look at this document. If you take Independent Living Skills and replace it with a Faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior - you will see the language that people rally around, want to be the receiver as well as the giver in the relationship. Interesting, huh?

Blessings,

Denice

Hello Kim and everyone. First I want to thank everyone for the informative webinar. I did have trouble being able to speak when I called in on the phone I was

told that I was "a non-speaking participant" and for some reason I wasn't logged into the site either although I could see the slides and hear the discussion.

Here are the thoughts I would have shared.

- I think we should be very careful about using the term "end of Christendom" in our congregations. Most folks hear it as an "end to Christian witness" or worse yet "denial of Jesus Christ". Even though it has been discussed in theological and church circles for years to the people in the pew and even Session members it sounds pedantic and symptomatic of what is wrong with the Presbytery.
- I have taught Community Organizing and Human Services Management at the college and graduate school level for years. I had a lot of problems with the mission statement part of the conversation.
 - 1 The new mission statement is much too long and unclear.
 - 2 The part about "feeding" the "last, the least, and the lost" is more than a little condescending. If I understand Presbyterian doctrine at all, it asserts that we are all "last, least, and lost" without Jesus. Language such as this implies differential power relationships, not mutuality of Christian love.
 - 3 I have found that most organizations thrive best with a clear short mission statement followed by clear, measurable outcomes. I did not see measurable outcomes in the work as presented today. I usually advise folks to define measurable outcomes as an answer to the question "How will people's lives be concretely different if we accomplish our mission?" I will address some possible outcome language later.
 - 4 The socio-economic-geographic context is not usually addressed in a mission statement.
 - 5 I have serious problems with the assertion that we are in an "unchurched" area. In many places we are actually in an extremely "churched" area, the problem is that many "churches" are independent entities based on cultural Christianity, a variety of prejudices rather than the history long worldwide gospel, and often a sort of personality cult based on a particular individual who feels called to preach. One of Presbyterianism's greatest gifts is our educational institutions and seminary educated clergy. I would say that people are "poorly churched", not necessarily "unchurched".
- I liked the conversation on missions--especially the emphasis on supporting local church's missions (and the practical idea of Presbytery making monetary contributions to the outreach ministries of churches that host Presbytery meetings; the idea of holding campus ministries and others accountable by measuring the outcomes of their efforts on their target populations; the idea of some kind of networking among churches designed to support various ministries...for instance, many of our churches support "food ministries", home repair ministries, prison ministries, ministries to the disabled etc. They should be linked so they can learn from one another.

Here are some possible outcomes for the churches of the Presbytery:

- Children attending Sunday school and other children's programs will be able to talk about Jesus as a friend who stands with them forever.

- Everyone attending our churches will be able to give examples of how they are applying Jesus' teachings especially in the Sermon on the Mount in their lives.
- Everyone attending our churches will have an active prayer life and express a sense of connection to God.
- Everyone within the outreach ministries of our churches will know that they can come there to be "fed" in multiple ways from literal physical food to emotional support and compassionate listening to help with life's crises such as illness and death.
- Everyone no matter what their status in life will feel that they have a valued place in our fellowship.
- In our midst covenant relationships will be valued and efforts will be made to preserve them.
- Everyone in our fellowships will admit to their own weaknesses and their need for one another and the abiding presence of Jesus.
- Those in the community will know our churches by their love for one another and for those around them. We will know that we have succeeded when the bulk of community members in any given area tell one another "You can always go to the church for help" and mean our church. (As I am proud to say they do of Rockwell Falls.

I am sure that others can think of specifics. I hope this feedback is helpful.

Joyce S. McKnight

Associate Professor/Empire State College

Ruling Elder/Presbytery Representative--Rockwell Falls Presbyterian Church

Dear Kim,

I listened to the first webinar. I hear people wanting to claim and do too much. Church people need to see that you can't go out and get new members. New members are the by-product of other things you do. An attractive community that meets real problems is perhaps the master key. What will people get from coming here? Existing members can get a handle on this by asking "What do I get from my participation in the church?" "What brought me here and kept me coming back?"

In the conversation I had the sense the "the Gospel" has become old and out of date; static and deadly, not reflecting the newness, passion, and transformative power that it once had. My thought is that the church needs to get back to the basics of following Jesus. All the old structures and buildings are no longer assets but liabilities.

So a mission statement needs to be basic:

Albany Presbytery proclaims the gospel in word and deed,
to make and grow disciples,
and to respond to human needs
so that everyone in our communities will thrive.

This is 28 words; I was aiming at 25. It doesn't use any hip buzz words.

I have a portable event designed by Dieter Hessel for an old curriculum (1978?) called "Doing the Word." (It is 2-3 pages.) In this event people are asked to describe their community, identify and prioritize the top 3 problems in the community, and develop a response that they could make to one of these problems. Then they plan what would have to be done to make it happen. I did this in several churches in New Brunswick Presbytery in the early '80's. In those days presbyteries had Social Action committees, and many congregations had such groups, too. Participants got excited about their plan, and didn't want me to leave. However, the lesson is that it is up to them. I can share the printed instructions, but I am not volunteering to lead such events. I have to dig in my paper files for this.

My own view is that every congregation should be known by most people for miles around for something it does besides worship and dinners. "That church runs a great day care center," or "tutors kids in the school and makes a difference."

Dennis Maher

Thanks for the list. It is helpful to know the audience. It's also interesting to me that the participants are basically the same folks as it was 5 years ago. I'm not sure we're connecting with more folks in the presbytery - especially the people in the pews.

I'd love to be able to see the recordings of the other two. I'll be in NJ for training and won't be able to get away to participate.

Thanks again for all you do!

Rob Rose

Dear Kim,

I have just finished watching and listening to the Webinar on Vision and Ministry for the Albany Presbytery. I offer the following comments.

I was amazed that the key word in the initial discussion was "post-Christendom." Insiders to the process may see it as a subtle descriptor of a time where churches have lost a privileged position in society. I believe anyone in the general public would hear it as an admission that the time for Christ's church has come and gone. It is an admission of defeat. No matter what is meant by the creators of this descriptor, it leaves a sense of "Why bother? The church admits its defeat."

The northeast may be less religious than other parts of the country. That said, the church is not gone from the landscape or faded into oblivion. If the leaders of the Presbytery, however, promote this view in their message, it can quickly become so. How can a church grow by telling everyone they see themselves as a burned out,

dying organization? How can the leaders promote any optimism when their perspective shows they have none?

Bluntly, this is a horrible starting place for discussion. It leaves no hope for revival.

With respect to the mission statement, the discussion never addressed, let alone answered, the question of what a Presbytery is and why it is needed. What is a Presbytery in Albany supposed to do? Who needs it? There seems to be an underlying acceptance that PCUSA says that there should be a Presbytery and that's good enough, rather than a deep search for what this organization should be and do.

The current mission statement has the advantage of brevity. The proposed new one is verbose, yet it provides no more guidance or clarity of purpose. It certainly is nothing anyone will remember. Discussing the possibility of coming up with a brief motto to supplement the mission statement admits that the mission statement isn't very memorable or useful on a day to day basis.

With respect to mission, the discussion never addressed the question of why Presbytery engages in any mission that is not supported by some portion of its congregations. If Presbyterians in the pews don't support an effort, why should the Presbytery hierarchy, acting in their names?

Overall, my reaction is that this process is not done yet. It has not addressed some fundamental questions (What is a Presbytery and who needs it?) and has wandered off into some very unproductive and defeatist territory.

Sincerely,

Floyd E. Barwig
Member
Personnel Committee

First, I have a question: Is there posted, anywhere, the results of the Landscape survey? I'm sure I'm not the only person who was unable to make one of the four regional meetings and would be interested in knowing the actual results (rather than references to them in subsequent discussions).

Regarding feedback on the webinar:

I feel the proposed mission statement is far too long, and in the case of at least one clause, repetitive. And as I was VM when the original mission statement and these goals were adopted, I can state definitively that there is a reason no date is included in any of the items. They were broad enough to be timeless, and I fought very hard to educate Council as to the following:

- 1-Mission statement should embody our reason for being and should be timeless;
- 2-Goals are broad statements of intent (to fulfill our mission) and should never have dates associated;
- 3-Objectives have dates: what you want to accomplish by what date, and should in some fashion help us reach our goals;
- 4-Action plans are how you hope to accomplish those objectives.

If incorporated by all the committees/task forces (something recommended at the time, but never accomplished by PSBY), we would be fulfilling our mission.

I think by limiting ourselves to a geographic description, we are thinking too small. If anything, we tend to minimize our mission rather than pursuing it vigorously. I have no problem with drawing a motto from our mission statement, and I do feel the statement we adopted in 2012 was concise, easily remembered (if we bothered to learn it), and appropriate. To change it just to change is, I think, inappropriate. Perhaps the transition we should be looking to is actually implementing some of these tenets we previously adopted. As I mentioned, if we used "equip" three out of five times to describe our future priorities and "disciples" once, I think we have, in fact, readily adopted our mission statement on some level, even if we are unable to recite it.

And finally, in support of Cara's observation that many do not understand "post-Christendom", I heartily concur. Perhaps 20% of our members fully grasp the concept, but that leaves an overwhelming majority who do not. If we are in fact in an era of dwindling influence of the Christian church, then let's call it that. No confusion there.

Finally, as I mentioned, whatever mission statement we use, that should focus our mission, not the other way around. We need to ascertain our reason for being, and once we have done that, all else will fall into place (perhaps not easily, but incontrovertibly).

Thank you for sharing the input from the Presbytery meeting, for holding the webinar, and for soliciting feedback on the results. We are, in fact, with you in body and spirit as we search for our path forward in these difficult times.

Lois Hessberg

Hi Kim,

Just finished listening to the webinar. Here are my thoughts broken down into the 3 parts.

1) I agree with Arthur, the term post-Christendom sounds negative. The majority of people in the pew will not understand what that means. The bible states that you "reap what you sow". You sow negative statements, you will reap negative

results. There has to be a way of saying that in a positive or less negative way. I'm afraid I'm in the same boat as Lois: I don't have any idea how.

2) Mission: The phrase, "common concerns, common commitments" was used as to how the presbytery would choose mission projects. Common to whom? Will individual churches have a say as to what missions the presbytery supports? Guatemala? Campus ministries? Not all churches want to support every mission the presbytery picks. I brought up in small group that the presbytery doesn't support any mission in Saratoga or Schoharie counties. Albany Presbytery is more than the Capital Region. I was glad to hear that said.

The old mission statement says it all. If it says what we do, what we want to do, why change it? Change or update the goals. The old saying is true, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!"

3) Landscape Future Priorities: I found it interesting that the top 5 mentioned increasing membership, helping leadership, etc., but not mission, and yet that is where the conversation in this section led. Lois made a valid point when she mentioned that the terms mentioned in the priorities were the same as in the old mission statement. Has any dialogue been given to those top 5? Helping congregations, pastors, leaders? I would have liked to hear more about that.

Thanks to everyone who took time to lead the webinar.

Peace,
Pam

ello all,

Just watched webinar and thanks for your work!

For whatever they are worth, here are some thoughts---

1. Keep mission and vision statements as short and concise as possible.
2. That Landscape exercise helped us see what truly matters in the presbytery--- coming alongside congregations and care and support of their missions and ministries.
3. I like the idea of a built in tithe for the budget for mission support and the need to realize the function and purpose of judicatory bodies and how that impacts the true purpose of a presbytery.
4. The five ranked priorities from Landscape should have a direct influence upon future staffing discussion and configuration. Looking forward to the next webinar!!

Joy and Peace,
Scott DeBlock

Brunswick Presbyterian Church

Hi Kim,

I've just finished listening to the recording of the first Webinar. Not surprisingly, I

have a range of reactions, but will restrict myself to two topics here.

First, as one who didn't participate, this after-the-fact exposure is helpful: it gets me at least partially "up to speed" regarding the focus; it also serves as a stimulus for further reflection.

Second, two questions not specifically addressed occur to me. 1) How, if at all, do questions about possible future realignment of presbytery boundaries affect envisioning mission now; 2) should our geographical reality be expressed in ways that evoke issues for various constituencies* affecting the living of their faith and secondarily as the physical realities** providing the environment for those same constituencies?

*I'm thinking of where people live and spend their time: in a rural setting, an urban/suburban setting, on a college campus, in a neighborhood school, at a city mission, in a local jail, etc., etc.

**Jim's mention of the landscapes through which we drive is representative; how we are affected by them and the larger issues they represent "position" us.

Faithfully,

Hugh Nevin