

Report from the CNY Missional Structures Team

The CNY Missional Structures (CNYMS) Team, made up of representatives from Northern New York, Susquehanna Valley, Utica and Cayuga-Syracuse presbyteries, began meeting in the Spring of 2019. The purpose of the team is to discern the most faithful way for us to serve the mission of Christ within our presbyteries. We are considering how a re-alignment, re-shaping and re-committing could spark a new and vital spirit in our congregations.

Our task for the summer was to hold targeted meetings for conversation about specific questions within our own presbyteries. The Presbytery of Cayuga-Syracuse held three meetings in May and June. The entire CNYMS team will meet later this fall to check-in, to welcome new leaders, and to chart our next steps in the missional structures process.

In the meantime, we thought it important to offer the “raw data” from the C-S meetings. Notes summarizing the information gathered from our three listening sessions can be found [here](#).

Faithfully,

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Notes from Discussion held May 30, 2019 with Former Moderators and Council Chairs

1. Given the changes in our communities, what is Jesus calling congregations to become for this time?
 - We spent some time reminiscing about how the Cayuga Syracuse Presbytery used to be... including our relationship with the Korean Presbytery (which still continues), evangelism to Syracuse University.
 - We need to spend time to reaching out to who is actually in our neighborhoods regardless of denominations.
 - Racial/ethnic diversity could be achieved this way.
 - Are we becoming nursing homes in disguise? - younger generations need a role to play in our congregations- not just to maintain the current structure. We need to help people find meaning. We need to engage in ideas that are interesting to people.

- Older folks are holding on to the 4 walls of the church buildings. Doesn't seem to be interest in engaging in their neighborhoods or the presbytery. Want the presbytery to come to us. We need to BE the church. "I'm not feeling fulfilled in church". No vibrance- I love the church but it's not vibrant. My church is an insular and tight community. How can we open them up to other possibilities? We need to get folks excited, engaged, with a sense of purpose. We need to own our identity (as Presbyterian Christians). Presbytery feels very separate.
 - Holy Cow Consulting- 75% of attenders are over 80 years old. What do we do to change while honoring the elderly? How do we do vibrant ministry when so many are snowbirds? People are interested in things that help them in their life stage- dealing with loss of spouse and other major life changes. Elderly are very connected to each other.
 - We used to have a presbytery committee- Mission and Strategy that helped us keep moving ahead with vital ministries and missions.
 - How can we welcome better?
2. Given the changes we see in our communities, what is Jesus calling presbyteries to be doing?
- Our presbytery is much different from what it used to be.
 - Overtures and records used to thank the clerks for their work. They would go to churches.
 - It's incumbent on congregations to keep the presbytery connected to their people.
 - What's in it for the congregations to be connected to the presbytery?
 - Folks don't see value in the presbytery.
 - We do talk about national church stuff and the value of the PCUSA denomination. (such as Disaster Relief)
 - If presbytery is a group of congregations, it must be a relationship of congregations.
 - We've become more congregationalist.
 - When we were bigger and had more committees more laity were involved.
 - Evangelism- relationship with Jesus.
 - Presbytery has just become part of the structure.
3. What is Jesus expecting from each of us to support one another into what God is calling? What do we need from one another to support these to happen?
- What do we need from one another?
 - Presbytery used to encourage partnerships a lot which helped greatly.
 - Relationship, love, care- how do we transfer that to our churches?
 - Respect- to feel like we matter.
 - Miss the office where one could go to connect with a person. Need someone to answer the phone. Miss having a place to meet and a resource center.
 - Miss relationships.
 - We should be a river of life, not a wall.
 - I want to know someone cares about me.

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More thoughts on Presbytery:

- Should be resource for all sorts of things.
- Someone to talk to outside of one's own church.
- When presbytery responds/resources a relationship is built.
- Should not be separate or distant from congregations.
- Should relate to churches softly and tenderly.

- Seems to exist for polity only... necessary stuff but not HEART stuff.
- Need to reclaim a sense of higher authority (guidance and relationship).
- The basic unit of the unity of our CHURCH is the presbytery.
- Per capita needs to be lower so people don't get cleaned off the rolls- don't feel enough support from the presbytery for the \$40 per capita.
- We need to get ministry colleagues to show up to meetings.
- We need to connect to mission that is already happening in our congregations.

Question #1 –

Given the changes in our world and local communities what is the church called by God to be or become for the coming generation?

Responses –

- Adaptable – especially to changing communities
- “Stay-ability”
 - Keeping doors open so church can continue mission in the community
 - Still needed but in a different way
- Focus on children
- Focus on adult spirituality, especially overworked parents and families
- Being aware what other congregations are doing
- Theological education
- Less programmatic and more Spirit-filled
- Flexibility to organize around people’s changing schedules and competition of sports and technology
- Searching for the “new thing” God is doing – responsiveness
- Growing beyond denominational differences
 - Only 1 of 12 new members decided to join as either faith denomination of the church, instead just joined as a member of that church.
 - All members at some churches are members of both denominations
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- Learning how to keep PCUSA connection even with other denominational leaders
 - Pastors of other denomination in federated churches not involved in PCUSA
- Church of love without distinction
- Community outreach – does it and should it lead to membership?
- Need to create profile in community
- Congregation unaware of denominational history
- Modeling an alternative way of being community
- Uncomfortable
 - In how we worship
 - In how we do things
 - Challenging tradition
- Contemporary worship styles
- Also considering needs of new members who like the tradition – finding a way to minister to both?
- Identify who we want to be as a congregation and then reach out
- Intentional pride in who we are in the community

Question #2 –

Given the changes we see in our communities what do our presbyteries need to be doing?

Responses –

- To help with resources
- Communication between congregation with presbytery and synod
- Share resources with other presbyteries
- Increase opportunities for interconnectedness
- Share educational opportunities
- Less focus on presbytery structure and more focus on shared identity
- Shared mission
- Talking openly with other leaders about what ministry is doing and challenges
- Help individual congregations hold onto the Big Picture
- Offer a glossary – communicate what the presbytery is, does, and can help with – especially for those in federated churches less familiar with PCUSA
- Help give directions to resources
- Presbyteries as...
 - Guides
 - Encouragers
 - Coaches
 - Consultants for congregations
 - Midwives
 - Chaplains – a pastor for the pastors
- Less definitive judicatories
 - “Does Jesus want us to show our love? Or say, “I am a Presbyterian and I love you”?”
 - Very diverse interfaith backgrounds even in a single congregation
- Help connect congregations to other denominations
- Need for language interpretation – help finding this and similar resources
- Offer a “Wellness Check” to congregations – don’t wait for congregation to reach out, but presbyteries should proactively reach out to congregations
 - “How are you doing spiritually? How is your soul?”
- A place to DREAM
- A reminder that we ARE the presbytery
 - Everyone on a committee is a volunteer
 - Cultivating passion and ownership

Question #3 –

What do we as members of the church need from one to support these changes?

Responses –

- Grace
- Social connection (not just business)
- Ownership
- Engagement
- Passion
- Adaptability
- Connection
- Prayer and prayer chains
- Ability to communicate with one another better
- “Everyone is doing their own little thing”
- “Our congregations are just a little ways away. But we don’t know each other.”
 - Sharing what’s happening in our churches with each other

Notes from Discussion held June 24 with New Voices in the Presbytery

1. Given the changes in our communities, what is Jesus calling congregations to become for this time?
 - God calls us to be connectional through relationships and this can be done through technology. AND we need to gather weekly in person.
 - We can do distance learning.
 - General Assembly takes social justice/political stances. We need to live into that at the congregational level.
 - Communicating with college kids within churches to stay connected
 - Young children in churches- it's important to have a community of people who love them
 - Connecting inside and outside the church
 - Combine community inside church to all week through technology to help connect to all part of our lives
 - "come as you are" to our faith communities. Need freedom to be authentic- not all buttoned up and putting on
 - Better music- worship team- singing as we gather
 - All types of music
 - Find a way to get young folk back into our congregations
 - Need to go out to where young people are
 - I don't like the tokenization of young people
 - Live into who you are as a congregation. Be authentic and don't be afraid to die
 - Community that is connected to other communities to meet others and other groups of people
 - Open buildings to groups outside of church
 - What are the problems we need to solve and then that will radiate to the outside community- authenticity- that's attractive to more people
 - Do younger generations know and care about justice issues?
 - Churches are disconnected with current learning styles
 - Traditional churches may never attract younger and unchurched
2. Given the changes we see in our communities, what is Jesus calling presbyteries to be doing?
 - Different types of worship throughout the week but gather as presbytery monthly to be connected and intergenerational and to build relationships between worshipping communities
 - Respect and enjoy other ways of being church
 - Our presbytery is missing connectional piece- miss having large gatherings for youth
 - Just hanging out can be spiritual
 - Look at how today's youth already find God and look for ways to connect with what's already happening
 - Let go of control- does everything have to be "decently and in order"
 - Not a rise of atheism in society- just a decline of church affiliation (Diana Butler Bass)
 - Presbytery could be a big party to celebrate all our diversity (in the types of congregations and how we gather)
 - Presbytery could have spiritual directors and better communication (esp. better website)
 - Don't want presbytery to feel like a job that I'm not getting paid for
 - Throw out the book of order?
 - Reading the book Flipped and having the author, Doug Pagitt speaking event was great and accessible to all
 - Identify opportunity to engage in social justice issues and be sure everyone knows about it and is welcomed to connect
 - Diversity of social justice passions
 - Need leader for presbytery

Notes from Discussion held June 24 with New Voices in the Presbytery

- Presbytery could help others find a church- online dating app for you and a congregation
 - Presbytery could help take technology burden off of individual churches
 - Clearinghouse for people requesting information- update website
 - Need more people involved and engaged in presbytery- NEW VOICES
 - Don't make being involved feel like a JOB
 - Have fun time and take time to develop fellowship and "groupness"
3. What is Jesus expecting from each of us to support one another into what God is calling? What do we need from one another to support these to happen?
- Authentic conversation being able to express oneself and have listening ears
 - Relationships
 - What if we tried a "music based" or "art based" worship service? (separate from a presby meeting)
 - Meet others so connections can be made
 - Need to speak (and feel) positively about the presbytery
 - Rebrand the presbytery
 - Future looking
 - Must embrace permission-giving mentality
 - Just try stuff
 - Not judge "success" on attendance numbers
 - Keep talking about new ideas
 - Be brave, need courage to step out of norm
 - Acceptance of each other
 - Sharing of ideas and resources
 - Gather together for various interests- small group ministry model

More thoughts on Church/Presbytery:

- We are doing a lot of good things, especially on individual church level. PCUSA level also.
- Presbytery should be the white part of the oreo- sandwiched between the great stuff happening in the denomination and the individual churches.
- We need PASSION
- Right now we have a "service industry" model- how can we foster relationships instead
- Church needs to be a safe place to explore without judgement and just be yourself
- Mall church/rural churches- harder to connect with others in community outside of church- so instead, connect with other churches
- Reintroduce church into daily life- make it more fun! A place you WANT to be!