

Presbytery of Cayuga-Syracuse stated meeting, September 16, 2024
Report on Synod Mission and Ministries Commission
Elder Linda Russell, Commissioner

The Synod of the Northeast's Mission and Ministries Commission held a stated meeting on September 13-14, 2024 via Zoom. I am assigned to the Mission Working Group. Highlights of the Commission's work follow.

Mission Working Group (MWG):

Emerging Gospel Community (EGC) Grants

Application criteria for an EGC include:

- Represents a new or developing (in its first several years of existence) gathering of people within the geographical bounds of the Synod of the Northeast.
- Builds ongoing relationships between participants.
- Centers on a shared interest in and commitment to the teaching of Jesus.
- Brings to life an innovative, fresh expression of the Gospel message at work in the world.
- Encourages team-lead leadership models.
- Practices Synod values of Community, Diversity & Inclusion, Missional Identity, and Partnership

The MWG reviewed five (5) applications. Our budget was \$90,000. Two applications were not approved. One of these was encouraged to reapply next year as an Innovation Grant. Three grants were approved at the maximum level of \$20,000 each for a total of \$60,000. 1) **La Iglesia del Pueblo** (2nd and final year of eligibility), a Spanish-language spiritual home for a community in NYC Presbytery focused on issues of racism, poverty, militarism, ecological devastation, and religious nationalism. 2) **Transformations** (Hudson River), an on-line community gathered around the ministry of offering comfort, healing, peace, connection, and inspiration through music, meditation, reflection, and connection. This community offers a safe and comfortable space for people who are facing the end of life, the loss of a loved one, or burdened by secondary trauma in their work in health care and spiritual care. 3) **Pray and Play** (Genesee Valley), a multi-ethnic, economically diverse, intergenerational, family-oriented worshipping community focusing on families with young children (but including older children, grown children or no children), offering a Christ-centered weekly respite by providing a warm meal (plus leftovers) for congregants, and by gathering in a safe place that meets the playful, messy, wiggly, and ever-changing needs of the households.

Going forward applications for Synod grants will need to be approved by the grant seeker's presbytery. This will require great attention to presbytery process and meeting dates, as well as Synod deadlines for applications.

Transitional Synod Leader:

Rev. Dr. SanDawna Gaulman Ashley continues to lead the Synod staff, Discernment Team, Leadership Team, and Working Group conveners in reflection and assessment on questions of: What does it mean to be an innovation practitioner? Where is Synod thriving? Where is new growth taking root? Where are we encountering challenges? Conversations with key stakeholders will focus on governance, branding, regional learning, program initiatives, grants (reviewing and recommending changes), and collaboration. The goal is to clearly define: 1) why the Synod exists, 2) how can Synod most effectively allocate its resources, and 3) how can Synod ensure that its efforts align with the needs and aspirations of the broader Synod community. Engaging with constituents is critical. To this end, the Discernment Team made six (6) site visits this summer to grantees who received funding for innovation, leadership development, and emerging gospel communities.

Report of the Stated Clerk

Rev. Nancy Talbot highlighted the following:

- Synod Assembly will take place in downtown Albany on October 25-26. As the C-S commissioner to the Synod Mission and Ministries Commission, I am one of the C-S commissioners to this assembly. The pre-assembly event on October 24-25 will feature The Center for Jubilee Practice. Their work “lives at the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, climate change, immigration policies, and more.” One of the presenters will be Rick Ufford-Chase, formerly the Co-Director of Stony Point.
- Synod’s overture to the 226th General Assembly (2024) to create a permanent Mid-Council Administrative Commission (AC) passed! Since it passed under the Consent Agenda at General Assembly it does not require the presbyteries to vote. Therefore, the AC should be populated by December and ready to meet at the beginning of 2025. This AC will serve as the General Assembly in between Assembly meetings and will approve presbytery mergers or realignments, church moves to a different presbytery or waivers for presbyteries that have less than the required number of Teaching Elders to be able to continue to operate. Given the number of churches and presbyteries now considering changes in their boundaries, it is critical to keep the momentum going and approve these major changes as soon as all the required work has been completed. Many across the denomination have thanked our Synod for putting forward this overture as it will make their work much easier.

Connectional Ministries Working Group

- Connectional Ministries has scheduled a Synod Indigenous Mission Day on September 28, 2024 including the Shinnecock and Brook churches on Long Island.
- Awarded a \$3500 Ecumenical support grant to the New Jersey Coalition of Religious Leaders who hold two events each year on “having difficult conversations.”

Early Ministry Institute

The Early Ministry Institute (EMI) continues to be a success among the Synod's Emerging Pastors (those in the first five years of their ministry). EMI welcomed 10 first year pastors/CREs this year, allowing Synod to enhance its efforts to support and empower emerging leaders. Three National PC(USA) speakers served as workshop or plenary speakers: Rev. Dr. Ray Jones, Rev. Dr. Rose Niles, Rev. Dr. Carrie Mitchell. Workshops included: - Loneliness of the Solo Pastor, Butts in Seat and the Streets, Community Organizing, Negotiating Your Contract, Should My Church Merge, Setting Boundaries, How to Work with Your Volunteers, Stewardship and Generosity.

Other:

- 2025 draft budget was approved for recommendation to Synod Assembly. **Proposed Per Capita for 2025** is \$4.25. Cayuga-Syracuse paid its 2024 Per Capita in full for early discount of 2.5%. (Paid \$10,525.42 vs. \$10,795.30, based on 2022 statistics reporting 2,633 members.)
- Synod ended July with net assets of \$16,108,300. Lipe and Dalton account (70/30 split) realized YTD gain of 6.9% vs benchmark of 9.7%. New Covenant Trust Company account (61/39 split) realized YTD gain of 11.0% vs 10.3% benchmark.
- Recommended Rev. Gregory Simpson to Assembly as Synod Treasurer for 4-year term.
- Recommended Rev. Sue Smith to Assembly as Synod Moderator-Elect.
- Recommended moving date of a special Synod meeting from October 24 to November 15 (in person).

Persons with questions about the work and ministry of the Synod are welcome to contact Linda Russell at lsruss@aol.com or 315-730-6930. See also Synod website: www.synodne.org.