



Presbytery of Susquehanna Valley

Dear Members of Cayuga-Syracuse Presbytery and Susquehanna Valley Presbytery,

This letter is written for the purpose of communicating with the Presbyteries about the progress made concerning the idea of a merger. Both presbyteries have voted to proceed with exploring merging together. As those motions begin to take root and movement begins to happen, it is important to understand what that means.

Several committees of each Presbytery have met to discuss ways to collaborate. There is a desire on the part of the committees to work together to help one another in a more intentional way. This grassroots reaction to exploring a merger is encouraging and exciting as committees find ways to do together what we are finding hard to do alone.

The leadership of both presbyteries have appointed three individuals (Susquehanna Valley: Rev. Dave Johanson, Elder Jeff Smith, Elder Robbie Jean Rice; Cayuga Syracuse: Rev. Lorrie Cooney, Elder Steve Eidt, Rev. Steve Plank) plus Rev. Greg Garis (Lead Presbyter for Transformation) as staff resource, to be a team of seven to work as a *Vision Team* to move the presbyteries forward toward a merger that would make us stronger at being a witness for God.

This Vision Team is tasked with forging a path toward merger. As we continue to explore, guidance is being sought from the Synod, from other presbyteries that have merged and possibly a consultant with experience in bringing ecclesiastical entities together. The possibilities are wide open as far as what a merged Presbytery's mission would be, how it would function, how it might be structured and how we move into the future.

To this end, the Human Resource Committee of Cayuga-Syracuse Presbytery and the Personnel Committee of Susquehanna Valley Presbytery have met several times since the fall of 2024. They have proposed an idea to the leadership councils of both presbyteries to share Rev. Dr. Greg Garis between them and to hire an Assistant to the Lead Presbyter to work with Greg in serving both presbyteries.

The idea of sharing Greg is beneficial to each presbytery: Greg working with both presbyteries will offer consistent and continued leadership, guidance and support to Cayuga-Syracuse who does not have a Lead Presbyter at this time and to Susquehanna Valley as they explore a fresh approach to ministry.

On a practical side, Susquehanna Valley's Synod grant, which supports 28% of the Lead Presbyter's compensation package, ends in April 2026 and Cayuga-Syracuse Presbytery would benefit from staff support.

Both presbytery “councils” (Coordinating Council/Cabinet) have given permission to the Human Resource/Personnel committees to work out an agreement, in essence a “new call”, outlining this shared presbyter idea. Finance committees will be consulted during this process about the compensation package. We have proposed a start date of September 2025 for this to begin. In the meantime, there will be a vote on pursuing this path of a shared *Lead Presbyter* role and an *Assistant* at the May presbytery meeting of Cayuga Syracuse and the June meeting of Susquehanna Valley.

It is exciting and encouraging to know that some committees of each presbytery are already working together. The possibilities are great for a future single Presbytery in the central New York area to join in the work that God is already doing in our communities and in each presbytery. We do not know what the future will hold nor exactly what it will look like, but we sense the strong movement of the Holy Spirit and are excited to move forward trusting that the way will be made known. We are hopeful you will join in this excitement and become actively involved as opportunities arise in seeing what “new thing” God is doing in our midst.

Grace & Peace in the name of our Risen Christ,
Vision Committee

Rev. Lorrie Cooney, Elder Steve Eidt, Rev. Dave Johnson, Rev. Steve Plank, Elder Bobbie Jean Rice, Elder Jeff Smith

5/1/2025