

Flint River Presbytery
Proposal for a Smaller-Membership Church Forum

1. *What is being proposed?*

The Presbyterian Foundation is proposing that this Forum be established to provide a structure within which leaders from small churches (usually defined as those with 50 or fewer members, or at the presbytery's discretion) may meet, learn from one another, and identify and model "best practice" approaches to congregational ministry. Participants will also be introduced to the Foundation's *Project Regeneration* initiative which offers resources and advisory capabilities to congregations whose financial sustainability is in question.

2. *How would it work?*

The Forum would gather for lunch on a quarterly basis for one year (i.e., four sessions) in a convenient location in the presbytery. The Foundation would be responsible for providing a "topic expert" for a brief presentation on a subject relevant to small congregations, but the primary focus of the meetings would be to stimulate discussion around how various churches are identifying and addressing the challenges they face.

3. *What would it accomplish?*

Through interaction and conversation, church leaders with similar roles and responsibilities would become acquainted with one another, develop a network of local expertise to consult when facing a new challenge, and could receive information from the presbytery and the Foundation that may be of interest. The Forum would serve as yet another element of the connectional nature of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

4. *Who would be involved?*

The Forum would include congregational leaders, both clergy and laity. Clerks of Session and church Treasurers are especially encouraged to participate. (In some presbyteries, entire Sessions have attended to ensure that all the congregations' leaders have access to the information being discussed.) One or more representatives from the Foundation facilitate the meetings, and presbytery leaders would attend as their schedules allow.

5. *How does this benefit individual congregations?*

Individual congregations would participate in discussion about the successes and lessons learned from other churches facing similar opportunities and challenges. Many participants have reported that discovering that their own problems are not unique was a source of great encouragement.

6. *How does this benefit the presbytery?*

The Forum would play a role in strengthening the support mechanism provided to their smallest congregations, thus enhancing the presbytery's ministry.

7. *How does this benefit the Presbyterian Foundation?*

Much of the Foundation's work comes as a result of referral. By increasing awareness of the Foundation's capabilities and services, the congregations within the presbytery may choose to establish or deepen their relationship with the Foundation. The Foundation also perceives the Forum to be a valuable resource to congregations and a natural extension of the Foundation's core ministry.