

A Presbytery Poised for What is Next

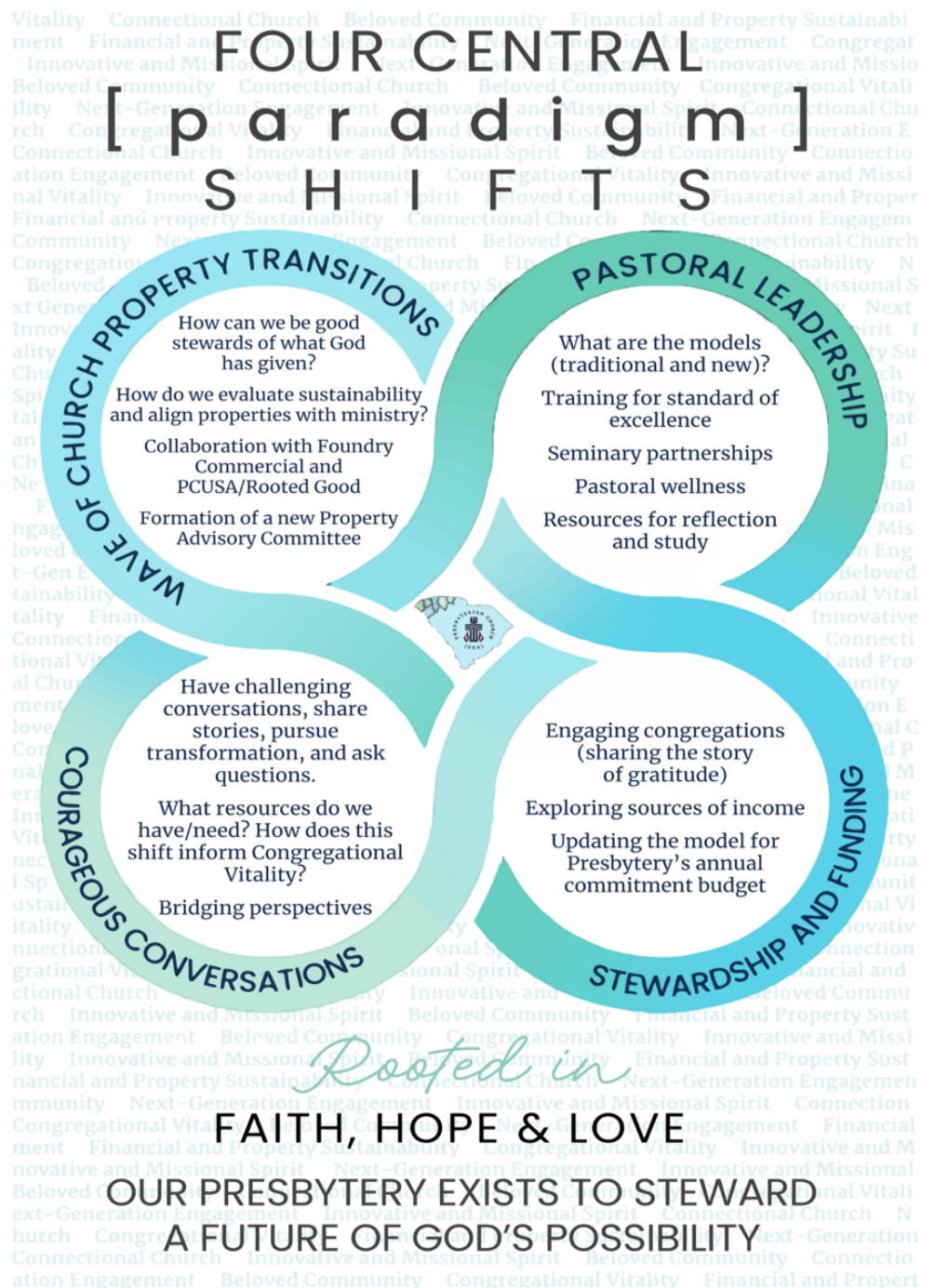
The work of the Think Tank began with a shared commitment to listen deeply, imagine boldly, and trust that the Spirit is actively at work within Foothills Presbytery. What unfolded over the course of our work was not simply a strategic process, but a communal act of discernment that revealed both the challenges and opportunities before us and the faithful energy already alive among us.

Paradigm Shifts

Underlying the work of the Think Tank are four significant paradigm shifts shaping the life of the church:

- A wave of church property transitions
- Changing models of pastoral leadership
- The need for courageous engagement with complex issues
- Evolving approaches to stewardship and funding

These shifts invite the Presbytery to move from maintenance to imagination, from a mindset of scarcity to possibility, and from isolation to collaboration.



From Listening to Discernment

Centering

At each of our meetings, the Think Tank:

- Centered our time by **Dwelling in the Word** and in **prayer** (Appendix A);
- Engaged exercises/practices designed to **stretch our imaginations** (Appendix B);
- **Referenced the Central Paradigm Shifts** and the two-loop life cycle (Appendix C);
- Shared in **collaborative conversations**;
- Concluded our time with **singing** hymns reflecting the theme of our work.

Listening

The Think Tank's early work centered on gathering voices and listening to concerns, celebrations, and dreams. Through **13 listening sessions that engaged more than 125 participants across the Presbytery**, followed by listening sessions with ministry partners in the PCUSA and community, we heard stories marked by both honesty and hope. There was clear acknowledgment of anxiety about declining participation, leadership strain, and uncertainty about the future.

These concerns were consistently accompanied by a deeper current: **a desire for meaningful connection, a commitment to younger generations, and a longing for a church that is relational, innovative, and rooted in purpose.**

What We Heard

During our time of listening, It became evident, **Foothills Presbytery is well-resourced and ready to take courageous, faithful steps forward into God's future.**

Beneath the surface of concern lies a resilient and creative body, already experimenting with new ways of being the church. Through prayer, reflection, and synthesis, the Think Tank recognized **vitality as our central goal and discerned five core themes that capture both the present reality and future possibility of our shared ministry.** These themes are not abstract concepts; they are lived expressions already taking shape in our common life.

From Listening to Synthesis

As the Think Tank moved from listening to synthesis, **we recognized the importance of naming not only where we sense God calling us next, but also where we *already* see signs of vitality.**

Throughout the identified five core themes, we offer two guiding lenses:



Bright Spots are the places where vitality is **already** visible. These are the ministries, practices, and patterns we celebrate as evidence that the Spirit is actively at work among us. Bright Spots are real expressions of faithfulness that can be strengthened, shared, and multiplied.



Spotlights point toward the **future**. These are areas that invite deeper attention, intentional focus, and strategic investment. Each Spotlight includes not only a direction, but an implicit invitation: to experiment, to collaborate, and to take faithful risks as we respond to the changing landscape of the church and world. Spotlights contain specific recommendations based on the major themes from our listening across the Presbytery.

Together, Bright Spots and Spotlights help us hold both gratitude and possibility, **respecting the past, honoring what is** while stepping toward **what could be**.

Cultivating Vitality

The **Five Core Themes** from our Listening

1. Innovative and Missional Spirit
2. Connectional Church
3. Financial and Property Stewardship
4. Beloved Community
5. Cultivating Healthy Leadership

1. Innovative & Missional Spirit

- Openness to innovation, risk-taking, and Spirit-led experimentation
- Shift from “scarcity” to “abundance” mindset
- Valuing tradition while embracing reform and being open to new ideas

In a rapidly changing world, an innovative and missional spirit is not optional; it is essential. The Church is being invited to move beyond preserving familiar forms and toward engaging people where they are with creativity, courage, and deep attentiveness to the Spirit. **Innovation allows us to experiment with new expressions of community, worship, and service, while a missional posture keeps us grounded in purpose, participating in God’s work both within and beyond the walls of our buildings.** An innovative and missional spirit is already present within Foothills Presbytery. We see a growing willingness to experiment.

Bright Spots:



- **Re:Center** is a community hub for expansive spiritual exploration, artistic expression, and authentic connection. This is a new ministry model in partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and demonstrates an expression of missional innovation.
- **Legacy Partnership Project** is an intentional time of discernment for congregations to assess their spiritual, financial, and human resources, reflect on their impact in their community, and plan for the future.

Spotlights for the Future:



- **Develop an Innovation Incubator** to sustain and multiply imaginative energy. This will be a coordinated team environment where new ideas can receive mentorship, resources, collective discernment, and support.
- **Renovate and update the Legacy Project** with a new name and updated process to best reflect learnings from the last five years. Include components of the Faithful Innovation Initiative (2022-2023) and add a property assessment tool.
- **Create Congregational Think Tanks** modeled after our Presbytery’s Think Tank process.
- **Set aside at least 15% of the Presbytery’s annual budget for innovation:** Studies show that **organizations that devote at least 15% of their resources** (staff, committees, time, energy, and funding) to the work of innovation have **greater vitality and sustainability.**

2. Connectional Church

- Appreciation for the strong Presbytery staff and leadership support
- Desire for deeper partnerships between congregations (large and small), pastoral leaders, and those serving in validated ministries
- Importance of clear communication, storytelling, and relational bonds across the Presbytery

At its best, the Presbytery is not a collection of isolated congregations, but a **web of relationships** marked by mutual support, shared wisdom, and collaborative ministry. Repeatedly, participants named the importance of **not navigating change alone** and **gratitude for our Presbytery's staff and committees**.

Bright Spots:

- **The partnership with One Community Church, a legacy of Nicholtown Church**, is an example of courageous, faithful partnership among church, neighborhood, and Presbytery. Through it the Nicholtown Church was able to close well while looking to the future and providing for the needs of the neighborhood.
- **Cohorts among Ministry Leaders** are offering spaces of connection and encouragement. Current cohorts are the Western Region Pastors, Music Ministry, Commissioned Ruling Elders, Christian Educators, Youth Ministry Leaders, Large Church Pastors, and those serving in Validated Ministry, Young Pastors (under 40), and Mid-Size Congregation Pastors.



Spotlights for the Future:

There is a clear call to deepen and expand these partnerships. The future will require a more intentional connectionalism where congregations, leaders, and ministries are actively resourced and aligned for shared impact, rather than operating in parallel.



- **Strengthen the congregational connections** already sparked by the Committee on Ministry to include gatherings that focus on elements of worship, mission, stewardship, faith formation, and more.
- **Amplify the stories** across the Presbytery and share through a variety of communication methods such as video, podcast, and newsletter. Use the **Innovation Recording Studio** as a means to tell the story that *Woven Together in Christ*, we inspire each other and gain strength for mission and ministry.

3. Financial & Property Stewardship

- Ongoing concerns about financial strain, property stewardship, and shrinking/aging congregations.
- Recognition that outdated models of “success” and Presbytery structure need to be refreshed.
- Vision of reimagining resources: affordable housing, multi-use spaces, leaner infrastructure, and creative stewardship.

Across the Presbytery, the stewardship of resources, especially property, has emerged as both a challenge and an opportunity. **Many congregations are navigating difficult questions about sustainability, legacy, and faithful use of space.**

Bright Spots:



- **The Property Advisory Committee** (stewardship of land and buildings) has begun to provide needed guidance, resources, and expertise to assist congregations in approaching these decisions with greater clarity and support. A customized approach is needed, which informs the decision to work with a variety of partners such as **The Foundry Commercial, the Presbyterian Foundation, Rooted Good, and Ministry Architects.**
- **Gratitude for God’s abundance** and a shift from a mindset of scarcity to one of abundance informed a change in the format of the Presbytery’s budget, which now reflects an average annual 5% draw from investment funds to support the mission and ministry of the Presbytery.

Spotlights for the Future: As a significant wave of property transitions approaches, there is a need to strengthen and expand this work. This includes ensuring the right leadership, tools, and theological framework are in place to help congregations reimagine property not as a burden, but as an asset for mission.



- **Taking a case study approach** by targeting six congregations each year to focus on the question, “How do we leverage our property for the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ in the world?” Insights gained from these cases will inform work throughout the Presbytery.
- **Dedicating funds** for property renewal, reinvention, and repurpose.
- **Developing a comprehensive property inventory and audit** of all our congregations to clarify assets, challenges, and missional opportunities.
- **Creating a clear process map** so congregations know who to contact and how to navigate property-related decisions.

4. Beloved Community

- Commitment to building diverse and inclusive congregations across race, age, culture, and identity.
- Serving communities by intersecting ministries that serve people facing food scarcity, those who are housing insecure, and groups doing antiracism work.
- Vision of the Presbytery as a reconciling, welcoming, Spirit-filled community.

In a time marked by division and polarization, the Presbytery has shown a desire to be a place where difficult conversations can happen with honesty, humility, and grace. There is evidence that, despite great challenges, people are willing to stay at the table and engage. If our goal is to move the Presbytery's culture (not just name good intentions), the strategic choices are not isolated actions. They are choices that create momentum together — where one improvement enables another, and each one strengthens the others.

Bright Spots:

- **Pursuing courageous conversations** that challenge our faith and deepen our understanding of discipleship including:
 - Development of a Courageous Conversation **Curriculum** based on interviews with seven black leaders in our Presbytery that reflects on the impact of their stories and considers how what we learn informs action.
 - Completion of an intentional twelve month focus on **Mental Health and Faith** (theme of a Presbytery gathering, and Mental Health First Aid Training offered across the presbytery).
- **Relational Presbytery meetings centered in worship** continue to deepen relationships between congregations and leadership and offer spaces for us to share sacred stories.
- **Shared mission opportunities** such as the hands-on learning at Ferncliff Conference Center about the Presbytery Disaster Assistance, and the Civil Rights Pilgrimage through Birmingham, Memphis, and Little Rock.



Spotlights for the Future:

- **Expanding and strengthening the work of the Antiracism Ministry Team** by deepening Awareness, Relationship, and Commitment (ARC) through programming and training.
- **Deepen congregational and community Partnerships** by supporting successful initiatives which target food scarcity and housing insecurity.



The capacity to engage differences faithfully will be essential as the church navigates complex cultural and theological realities. Continuing to develop shared language, practices, and resources for this work will be crucial.

5. Cultivating Healthy Leadership

- Upholding thriving youth ministries through Presbytery Youth Council, retreats, and service opportunities.
- Cultivating fresh pathways for ministry leaders to draw deeply from a well of resilience, to nurture health, wholeness, and renewed life.
- Dreams of a strong, inspiring next generation at the center of the church's future.

The health of the church is deeply tied to the health of its leaders. Throughout the listening groups, there was a clear recognition that leaders are being asked to carry increasing complexity, often without sufficient support. Additionally, younger generations are longing for connection, opportunities, and support.

Bright Spots:

- **The next generation is central, not supplemental.** Foothills Presbytery's Youth Council stands as a powerful example of leadership development done well, shaping young people who are engaged, thoughtful, and deeply connected to their faith and the Church.
- The **Building Hope, Resilience and Compassion** workshop sponsored and led by the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance program developed critical skills for ministry in an evolving and changing culture.
- **The SC5 School of Theology** offers excellent and accessible theological education to church leaders and ruling elders who want to deepen their faith and serve congregations.



Spotlights for the Future:

- **Cultivating an eco-system of wholeness and wellbeing for leaders**, this includes not only training and development, but also spaces for rest, reflection, and restoration. Potential partners include Columbia Seminary, Board of Pensions, Davidson Centre, In Christ Supporting Ministry, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, Camp Fellowship, and the Center for Courage & Renewal.
- **Fostering and funding leadership development and support** for the Presbytery Youth Council (PYC), Student Summer Ministry Internships, University Campus Ministry (UKirk), the Presbyterian Student Association (PSA), and our Master of Divinity (MDiv) Students.



Using our Gifts for Innovation

(a look at the #s)

We heard “loud and clear” that our Presbytery **values an innovative and missional spirit**. That means we **revitalize, renew, and redevelop *while*** we continue to encounter a wave of property transitions and adapt to the changing models of pastoral leadership, staying rooted in abundance, while exploring new models for ministry funding, and continuing courageous conversations.

The Think Tank applauds the way our Presbytery currently invests our gifts (funds) for innovative mission and ministry. Between 2020 and 2022 our Presbytery voted to set aside investment funds that would allow for a **5% annual designation** to be used for:

- **Future Church Innovation Initiatives** (annual designated) **\$30,000**
 - 2022 – Faithful Innovation Leadership training at Luther Seminary
 - 2023 – Faithful Innovation Cohorts with five congregations
 - 2025 – Mattoon (Road Ahead: Future Church Accelerator)
 - 2026 – Re:Center (New Worshipping Community)
 - 2027 – Re:Center (New Worshipping Community)
- **Scholarships and Grants** (annual designated) **\$12,500**
 - Students in process for ordination as a minister in the PCUSA
 - Commissioned Ruling Elders
 - Those seeking Certification as Christian Educators
- **Shared Mission & Ministry Funds:** (annual designation) **\$12,500**
 - 2022 – Leadership development, mission giving, clergy appreciation, and camper scholarships.
 - 2023 – Scholarships, Mental Health First Aid, hunger, autism awareness
 - 2024 – Juneteenth, Presbyterian Women scholarships, emerging partners
 - 2025 – Triennium, National Black Caucus, officer training, and a Presbytery-wide Mission Marketplace.



Note: Our Presbytery also provided a one-time matching grant for the Presbyterian Student Association's (Fort Hill, Clemson) **Crucial Calling Campaign** (2019).

During the process of the Think Tank's work over the last eighteen months, we learned that **organizations that devote at least 15% of their resources** (staff, committees, time, energy, and funding) to the work of innovation have **greater vitality and sustainability**. We are currently investing 15% (\$103,000) of our annual budget (\$689,000) in innovation. We know **persistent engagement in innovation** equates to ongoing learning, experimentation, and new ways of moving forward.

Therefore, the **Think Tank challenges our Presbytery to move our innovation investment from 15% to 20% by 2030.**

Why It Matters: Committing at least **15%-20% of our annual budget** to innovation ensures we remain **faithful, relevant, and effective** in a rapidly changing world.

This **investment** allows us to:

- Break free from outdated assumptions.
- Listen for where God is at work today.
- Experiment with new forms of ministry.



What Innovation Looks Like

- **Reducing stagnation:** Dedicated innovation funding creates space for leaders to think, discern, and experiment beyond traditional constraints.
- **Deepening understanding:** We gain insight into generational and cultural shifts, allowing ministry to be more responsive and impactful.

Over the last few months of the Think Tank's work the Presbytery leadership has heard the five-core themes of the listening groups and has been doing some in-flight refueling by setting aside additional innovation funds:

New in 2026

- **Property Repurpose & Reinvention:** **\$30,000**
- **New Worshiping Community** (program commitment): **\$15,000**
- **Small Church Initiatives:** **\$25,000**
 - Leadership development
 - Missional experiments
 - Technology grants
- **Beloved Community Grants** (3-year commitment): **\$16,000**
 - Building a welcoming, Spirit-filled community with a heart for reconciliation.
 - Bridging perspectives, unlocking potential, and building cultural competence.
 - Strengthening partnerships with congregations and communities through work in the areas of justice, food scarcity, housing, and antiracism.



The Impact: This commitment positions Foothills Presbytery to:

- Innovate boldly and faithfully.
- Strengthen congregations.
- Equip leaders for today's realities.
- Build a more adaptive and vibrant future church.

A Presbytery Poised for What's Next

If there is a thread that runs through the Think Tank's work, it is the recognition that **Foothills Presbytery already holds within it the beginnings of what comes next.**

- **The Bright Spots we have named are not aspirations but lived realities, signs of vitality** already present in our common life.
- **The Spotlights invite us to pay closer attention to that life**—where it is emerging, where it needs support, and where it may be asking something new of us.

The work ahead will require a shared commitment to one another and to the calling we carry together: to deepen our connections, to steward our resources with both care and imagination, to make room for new expressions of ministry, and to sustain communities where honest conversation and faithful leadership can take root. This is not a call to reinvent the church, but an invitation to move with intention and trust as we navigate the changes already underway.

The church that is taking shape among us may not look like what we have known. In some places it will be smaller, in others more collaborative, and in many cases more flexible and creative. Yet there is reason to believe it will also be more deeply grounded, formed by relationships, attentive to the Spirit, and oriented toward meaningful engagement with God and the world.

Rooted in
FAITH, HOPE & LOVE

**OUR PRESBYTERY EXISTS TO STEWARD
A FUTURE OF GOD'S POSSIBILITY.**

Think Tank Report

APPENDIX LIST

- A. Dwelling in the Word Practice
- B. Imagination exercise
- C. Two-loop life cycle for congregations
- D. Four Central Paradigm Shifts Worksheet
- E. Foothills Presbytery Think Tank members and job description

Dwelling in the Word

- Dwelling in the Word is a simple practice that is rooted in the traditions of the church.
- It is a way of listening to God in Scripture that shapes our imagination.
- When we dwell in the same scripture repeatedly, the text begins to live in us as we live in the text.
- It is not a Bible study. All that's required is the scripture, questions for reflection and a willingness to share your experience with others.
- Using two or three translations of the text read by different voices deepens the exercise.

There are three questions that guide your listening during Dwelling in the Word.

- *"What caught your attention or what gave you pause?"*
- *"What questions does this text raise? Or what wonderings do you have?"*
- *"What might God be saying to you and to us as we listen to this text today?"*

The process of dwelling in a text is as follows:

- Read the text, slowly
- Allow for silence and time to mark words or phrases that caught your attention
- Read again
- Spend time in silence reflecting on the three questions
- Reflect together

Before you begin, you'll want to find two volunteers with different voices to read the text out loud. When you're ready to read the text, pray and invite God to speak to the group through the text that you are about to read. Then, have the first volunteer read the text in its entirety out loud to the team. Allow some silence for reflection and invite the group to mark words or phrases that caught their attention. After the second reading, in silence, invite the participants to consider the three questions.

After the second period of silence, go through each question one at a time and capture people's answers. Don't feel the pressure to answer questions or to explain away anything that anybody said. The point is to hear everyone's voice and to allow everyone to speak and say, "here's what we think God might be saying to us in the course of this dwelling."

Philippians 2: 12 – 18 (Common English Bible)

¹²Therefore, my loved ones, just as you always obey me, not just when I am present but now even more while I am away, carry out your own salvation with fear and trembling. ¹³God is the one who enables you both to want and to actually live out his good purposes. ¹⁴Do everything without grumbling and arguing ¹⁵so that you may be blameless and pure, innocent children of God surrounded by people who are crooked and corrupt. Among these people you shine like stars in the world ¹⁶because you hold on to the word of life. This will allow me to say on the day of Christ that I haven't run for nothing or worked for nothing. ¹⁷But even if I am poured out like a drink offering upon the altar of service for your faith, I am glad. I'm glad with all of you. ¹⁸You should be glad about this in the same way. Be glad with me!

Philippians 2: 12 – 18 (The Message)

¹²⁻¹³What I'm getting at, friends, is that you should simply keep on doing what you've done from the beginning. When I was living among you, you lived in responsive obedience. Now that I'm separated from you, keep it up. Better yet, redouble your efforts. Be energetic in your life of salvation, reverent and sensitive before God. That energy is *God's* energy, an energy deep within you, God himself willing and working at what will give him the most pleasure.

¹⁴⁻¹⁶Do everything readily and cheerfully—no bickering, no second-guessing allowed! Go out into the world uncorrupted, a breath of fresh air in this squalid and polluted society. Provide people with a glimpse of good living and of the living God. Carry the light-giving Message into the night so I'll have good cause to be proud of you on the day that Christ returns. You'll be living proof that I didn't go to all this work for nothing.

¹⁷⁻¹⁸Even if I am executed here and now, I'll rejoice in being an element in the offering of your faith that you make on Christ's altar, a part of your rejoicing. But turnabout's fair play—you must join me in *my* rejoicing. Whatever you do, don't feel sorry for me.

Introducing Imaginable Exercises

Why does futurist thinking matter? Researchers have determined that when you imagine the future with visualizations, devoting your mental energy toward that future, your brain codes that future visualization as a memory. This allows the brain to have access to more emotional and cognitive resources, which can then be used to shape the future.

Additionally, futurist thinking exercises:

- Help people feel agency to impact future realities through problem solving, gathering resources, building alliances, developing skills, etc.
- Build a sense of **urgent optimism** that helps people stay engaged with a better world.
- Create Mental Flexibility- willingness to believe that anything can change.
- Cultivate Realistic Hope- active practice of paying attention to risks and opportunities.
- Strengthen Future Power- gives us a sense of agency to respond to future challenges from a place of preparedness and confidence.

According to Jane McGonigal, (Futurist and author of [*Imaginable, How to See the Future Coming and Be Ready for Anything*](#)) in the past few years, the word “unimaginable” has appeared in 2.5 million English language news stories. The word “unthinkable” has appeared in 3 million news stories. We are living through a time when the scale of “collective shock and trauma” can be overwhelming.

For people of faith, we have more reason for **urgent optimism** because we know that God is actively at work in the redemption of the world, and that we can participate in that work by the power of the Spirit. We are assured in Ephesians 3:20 that God can accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine.

McGonigal says that the opposite of collective shock is **collective imagination**. Maybe this is what the Acts 2 church was experiencing when we read, *“In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.”* What kind of collective imagination did they tap into? Clearly it was one that involved community support and engagement, generosity, growth- both in depth of connection and in size and structure.

You are invited to **practice imagination** together — not to predict the future, but to prepare for it, to claim agency, and to cultivate what Jane McGonigal calls *“urgent optimism.”*

Postcard from the Future

(A sample Imaginable Exercise)

Set the Scene

"Welcome, everyone! We're going to take a little trip together—not across town, but across time. We're going to visit the year 2036, just ten years from now. Close your eyes for a moment. Imagine you're part of a thriving spiritual community in 2036. What do you see? What does the church look like, feel like, sound like? Who's leading it? What's new or different about it? Take a moment to imagine."

(After a minute or two, offer time for reflection and discussion.)

The Game: "Postcard from the Future"

"Now, let's time travel again—but this time, you're going to send a message *back* from 2036. On your table, there are index cards. Imagine that you're writing a postcard to your 2026 self from your future church in 2036. Write ONE thing your spiritual community is doing in 2036 that feels life-giving, just, and Spirit-led.

Maybe it's how you share property with your neighborhood, or how you fund ministry, or what leadership looks like, or how your church shows up for justice.

Don't overthink it, just dream. Boldly. It's possible that you may have just glimpsed the actual future, as some of those dreams may become reality.

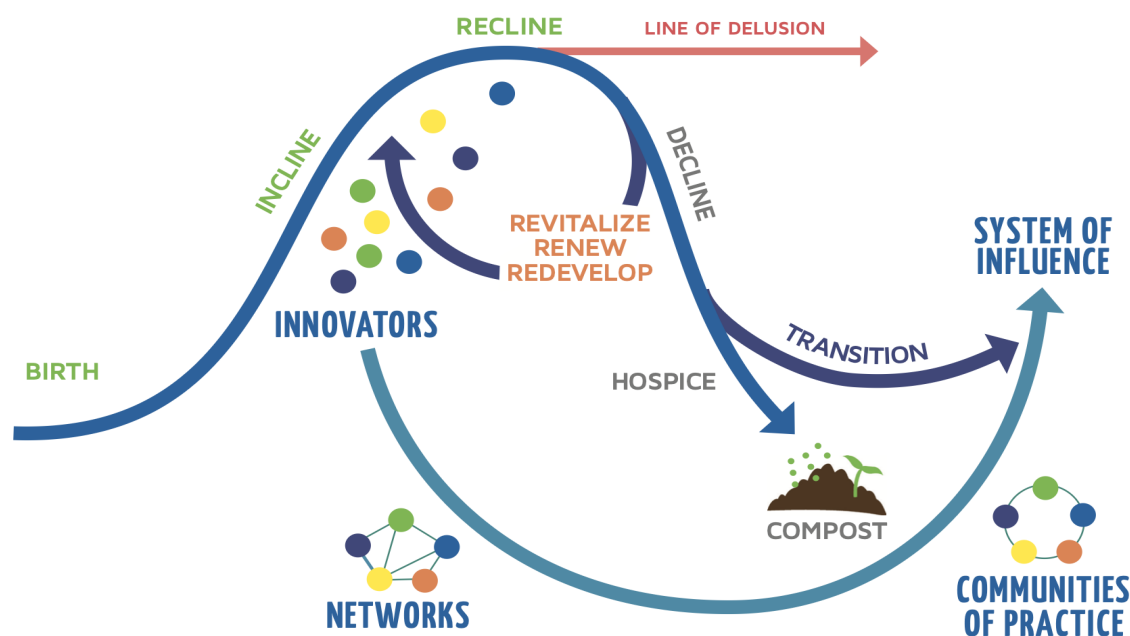
(After postcards are completed, offer time for reflection and discussion.)

Closing Prayer

Imaginative God, we give you thanks for your Spirit of newness and wonder, and for the ways you invite us to co-create with you a church that is alive, connected, empowered, and equipped to do your work in the world. Take the sparks of imagination and breathe life into that which gives you glory. Give us the courage to keep dreaming. Amen.

Understanding the Moment: Two Loops of Change

TWO LOOP LIFE CYCLE FOR CONGREGATIONS



Inspired by Margaret Wheatley's two loops theory of systemic change, this is a revision of Chris Corrigan's "A Theory of Change: Living and Dying in the Church of the 21st Century." Unpublished slide deck from EDGE webinar. Provided by Rev. Erik Samuelson.

To help make sense of what we are experiencing, the Think Tank found resonance in Margaret Wheatley's "Two-Loop Theory" of systemic change. This framework suggests that in seasons of transformation, two realities unfold simultaneously.

In the first loop, an existing system begins to decline. It does not fail because people have been unfaithful, but because the conditions around it have changed. In the life of the Church, this can look like shrinking participation, aging congregations, financial strain, and leadership fatigue.

At the same time, a **second loop begins to emerge**. This is where **new forms of life take shape**, often quietly, experimentally, and at the margins. These are not yet dominant, but they carry the seeds of what the future may become.

The work of leadership in this moment is **not to cling to one loop or abandon the other**. It is to faithfully tend both:

- To **honor and steward** the first loop with care, dignity, and gratitude, walking with congregations through necessary transitions, including difficult decisions around property, staffing, and structure.
- To **notice, name, and nurture** the second loop, supporting emerging ministries, new worshiping communities, and creative expressions of connection and mission.

What became clear through our listening is **that Foothills Presbytery is already living in both loops**.

Many congregations are navigating real decline and hard questions. And at the same time, we see **new life emerging: innovative ministries, collaborative partnerships, courageous conversations, and experiments like Re:Center**. These are not separate stories. They are part of the same transformation.

- **The Bright Spots we have named often sit at the intersection** of these two loops where existing structures are adapting or where new life is already taking root.
- **The Spotlights invite us to be more intentional** about strengthening that second loop while continuing to walk faithfully with the first.

This framework does not offer easy answers, but it does offer clarity:

We are not witnessing the end of the Church. We are participating in its transformation.



Four Central [paradigm] Shifts

Rooted in the understanding that God provides abundantly/Enough

Shift #1

Wave of Church Property Transitions

- How can we be good Stewards of what God has given?
- How does our mission drive use of our land and buildings?
- How do we evaluate sustainability and align property with ministry?
 - Repurpose
 - Remodel
 - Replant
- What is the process?
- What legacy for the future church needs to be considered?
- What resources are available?
 - Covenant Partners:
 - [Presbyterian Foundation](#)
 - [Foundry Commercial](#)
 - [Office of Innovation PCUSA](#)
 - [Ministry Architects](#)
 - [Presbyterian Disaster Assistance](#)
 - For reflection and study:
 - [Dwelling in the Word](#)
 - [When Church Stops Working](#) by Andrew Root
 - [We Aren't Broke and Gone for Good](#) by Mark Elsdon

Shift #2

Pastoral leadership and implication for congregational life (Particularly the Smaller Church)

- What are the models (traditional and new)?
 - Installed, Temporary Leadership (Transitional, Stated Supply, Pulpit Supply)
 - [Shared Pastoral Leadership](#)
 - Commissioned Ruling Elders
 - Parish Partnerships
 - Student Leaders/Residencies
 - Congregational leadership
- Pastoral Fatigue
 - [Faith Leader Resilience Support](#) (PCUSA/PDA)
 - [Board of Pension \(PCUSA\)](#)
- Training for Standard of excellence ([CRE](#), [CCE](#))
 - [SC5 School of Theology](#)
 - [Union Presbyterian Pathways program](#)
 - [Center for Excellence in Christian Education](#)
- Seminary partnerships (MDiv)
- Resources for reflection and study and how it informs Congregational Vitality.
 - [Board of Pensions Theology of Call](#)
 - [The Future of the PCUSA is Pastor-less and that is okay](#)
 - [80% of more than 400 Black congregations are w/out a pastor](#)

Shift #3

Stewardship and Funding for Mission and Ministry

- New model for funding the Presbytery's Annual Commitment Budget
- Exploring other sources of income
 - Annual Commitment from congregations
 - Draw from Investments
 - Grants, Funds, and Endowments
- Engaging congregations ([sharing the story of gratitude](#))
 - Who is Presbytery?
 - What are we called to do and be together that we can't do alone?
- Stewardships impact on Congregational Vitality.
 - [Presbyterian Foundation](#) and [Stewardship Kaleidoscope](#)

- [God's Gift of Generosity](#) by Karl B. Travis
- [Three Principles of Radical Hospitality](#) by Yvonne Gentile and Debi Nixon
- [Horizons Stewardship](#)

Shift #4

Courageous Conversations inform Congregational Vitality

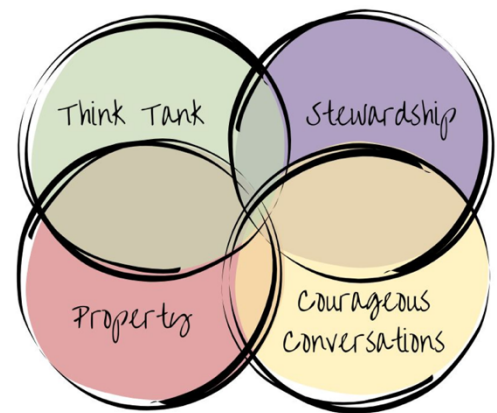
- How do we have challenging conversations, share those stories, pursue transformation, and ask questions such as:
 - How are we listening and [learning from our past to inform our future](#)?
 - Who is missing in our conversations?
 - What are [we missing in our theological discourse](#)?
- What resources will inform and engage how racism informs our lives?
 - [Presbyterian Disaster Assistance Counter Story Productions](#)
 - [Why Heroes Don't Change World](#) & [You are Changing the World](#), D. LaMotte
 - [Office of Theology, Formation and Evangelism](#)
 - [Union Presbyterian Center for Excellence in Christian Education](#)
 - Antiracism Ministry Team (Foothills Presbytery)
 - [Statement on racial injustice](#) and [Two years of resources](#)
 - Seven [Courageous Conversations](#) interviews (in production)
- What are the intersections in [faith, health and wholeness](#)?
- What is Christian Authoritarianism?
- How do we Bridge Perspectives? [Intercultural Developmental Inventory](#)

What is the Presbytery's role? G-3.0301 [The Art of Gathering, How we Meet & Why it Matters](#)

- The presbytery is responsible for the Government of the church throughout our six counties and for assisting and supporting the witness of congregations to the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that all congregations become communities of faith, hope, love, and witness.
- Keeping before it the Marks of the Church, its Foundations, and The Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0302)

How do we Encounter God already at work in our community? We Listen/Act/Share by:

- **CONNECT**-ing the Presbytery/Congregations
 - Future Church Experiments
 - Legacy Work Continues
 - Faithful Innovation Adaptations
 - Future Accelerator models
- **CAPTURE**-ing the possibilities - Recast the Vision
 - Think Tank – Target 2026
 - Stewardship of Property
 - "I Love to Tell the Story" (On the Road & in Studio)
 - Courageous Conversations
- **CHALLENGE**-ing presbytery to step out/risk
 - Who are the Supporters/Challengers?
 - What are the risks?
 - Who/What are we leaving behind?
 - What other questions do we need to ask?
- Consciously knowing that **CHAOS** can follow (lament/pain)
- **REORDERING** or **REORIENTING** will come (Hope).



Additional DISCERNMENT resources

- Future Church Initiatives
 - [Legacy Partnership Project](#) (Foothills Presbytery and Presbyterian Foundation)
 - [The Road Ahead](#) (
- [Think Again](#) by Adam Grant
- [Imaginable](#), Jane McGonigal
- [Sailboat Church](#), Joan Gray
- [Subtract: The Untapped Science of Less](#), Leidy Klotz
- [The Power of Moments](#) by Chip Heath and Dan Heath

DGF03/14/2026

Foothills Presbytery

THINK TANK

Job Descriptions and Members

The purpose of the Think Tank is to gather to pray, dream, listen and imagine the future possibilities for Foothills Presbytery.

Members:

Trish Gwinn, Past-Moderator of Presbytery (TE, Grace Covenant)
 Eliza Smith DeBevoise, COM Representative (TE, University Chaplain, Converse) Terri Price, CPM Representative (TE, Parish Associate Westminster)
 Jackie Putnam, CSM Representative (TE, Associate Fourth)
 Russ Williams, Finance Representative (RE, Westminster)
 Peggy Swann, Small Church Representative (TE, Retired)
 Hudson Neely, Personnel Representative (TE, Second Spartanburg)
 Rudy Painter, Disaster Preparedness & Response Commission Representative (RE, FPC Greer)
 Ex Officio: Debbie Foster, Presbytery Leader & Stated Clerk; Pressley Cox, Associate for Shared Mission and Ministry

Discernment Tasks:

1. Dwell in the Word
2. Work in Collaboration
3. Reflect on the current model of Presbytery
4. Participate in a Vision Process
5. Review the current and prospective financial picture
6. Evaluate sustainable staffing plan (2027-2030)
7. Make recommendations to other committees and ultimately to Council

Resources:

1. Four Central Shifts
2. Present Presbytery Mission Statement
3. Organizational Model
4. Presbytery Stats: Congregations, Membership, Pastoral Leadership, & Giving
5. Denominational Connections
6. Legacy Report, Budget format, Investment and F&S Reports to Presbytery
7. Staff/Job Descriptions
8. How we got here (current model) tool
9. [*Imaginable: How to See the Future Coming and Be Ready for Anything*](#), by Jane McConigal

The Think Tank began its work in August 2024 and completed its work in May 2026.

We want to hear from you!

Your feedback shapes our shared future. After reading this report, please take a few moments to complete our short questionnaire.

On this brief form, you will find questions designed to guide your reflection, including:

- **What brought you joy** after reading the report?
- **What gave you pause** as you read?
- **What might God be saying** to you or to us in these themes?
- Considering your current worship context, **what are your bright spots** and **where are your spotlights**?

Congregations are invited to partner with the Presbytery to engage in their own Think Tank experience.

Use this [Questionnaire Link Here](#) or scan the QR code below to submit your reflections or to let us know that your congregation is interested in creating your own Think Tank.

QR code for Questionnaire-

