

State of the Presbytery: Reflections on 2017
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Transforming and Strengthening Congregations to be Missional, Pastoral and Prophetic

We lost 763 members in 2016, down from a loss of 1494 members in 2015. We have not stemmed decline, but we have slowed it down. Presbytery still pursues the mission of strengthening and transforming congregations to be missional, pastoral, and prophetic.

The racial makeup of the Presbytery continued to change. Korean Americans are now the largest minority (5.24%) and African Americans are now 4.5% of the membership.

The Presbytery of Detroit through, its committees and teams, offered a lot of help to congregations last year. There was much impact. Here are the outcomes that I want to report.

The Care and Preparation for Ministry Committee:

- supported congregations by training and developing leaders for congregations, for ordained ministry of word and sacrament, and for Commissioned Ruling Elder.

The Committee on Ministry:

- gave help and inspiration to interim and temporary pastors;
- supported churches and pastors in their transitions;
- prepared new clergy to avoid sexual misconduct;
- visited many congregations to offer the support of Presbytery; and
- resourced retired pastors.

The Committee on Representation:

- held in front of the Presbytery the need to represent the diversity of the Presbytery in congregational leadership and on Presbytery committees, teams, and workgroups.

The Committee on Nominations:

- filled most of the teams and committees with gifted and called leadership.

The Trustees:

- assisted congregations with property management, and sale;
- represented the corporate functions of the Presbytery;
- supported the ministry of the Howell Nature Center;
- provided office space for the work of the presbytery; and
- oversaw the funds: strengthened the accounting and managed the investments that brought revenue to the Presbytery.

The New Church Development Team:

- helped pastors and elders ask how they can start meetings with those outside of the church, to serve people who do not come in. How can congregations reach those who are “done” with institutions? Or will have “none” of them?

Congregational Development and Transformation:

- helped with mission studies, demographics; and
- introduced a new tool for studying congregations called “Owlsight,” or visualizing a congregation from up on high with visual acuity. This helped measure level of satisfaction and energy of members.

The Leadership Equipping Ministry Team Workgroups team:

- introduced educators to new ideas for resources so they could “flip the classroom,” including providing resources for the 10 – 20 churches that visit each month;
- gave youth the opportunity to meet youth from other communities, across other races and cultures, while conducting mission, including taking a group to the Montreat conference center;
- equipped new officers with tools for ministry;
- helped leaders of congregations start new mission projects in their community, assisted by the missional church network, to help congregations make an impact on their community, to remake the church and change the world;
- welcomed and resourced new pastors and commissioned ruling elders, including introducing them to missions in Detroit, with a tour of Detroit and the exhibit on the 1967 uprisings at the Detroit Historical Society;
- opened leaders in the Presbytery to a deeper faith in Christ through Presbyterian Pilgrimage events.

The Multicultural Ministry Team:

- lifted up the vision of Martin Luther King, Jr., that our society, churches, and presbytery might reflect the “beloved community;” and
- introduced commissioners to the value of the Belhar Confession that calls for racial equality in the church.

Social Justice Ministry Team:

- helped congregations to understand the water crisis, and to help neighbors deal with the crisis;
- offered regular exhibits at presbytery assemblies on how to be inclusive;
- helped seniors to find health care;
- helped congregations know that they can help members and neighbors find resources when they hear about gender violence;
- encouraged entrepreneurship among Detroit residents through Self Development of People grants;
- offered 27,000 meals through the outreach of 9 congregations, including an outreach providing cereal for hungry kids in the summer, supported by the Hunger Work Group; and
- awarded grants for congregational outreach projects, funded by the Ranney-Balch Fund.

Mission Interpretation Ministry Team:

- continued to support congregations that led campus ministries at Eastern Michigan University, Oakland University, and the University of Michigan, as well as supporting a ministry on Wayne State University Campus by InterVarsity Christian fellowship);
- supported the growth of youth on the East side of Detroit at Second Mile Center, and Barnabas Youth Opportunities, Inc. in Midtown, which is currently moving out of Presbytery’s building;
- impacted members of congregations who saw their faith grow through mission and tried to attract young adults to ministry through the work of Motor City Mission Corps, a Young Adult volunteer program with emphasis on how they can serve God in their vocation;

- helped congregations make an impact on neighbors by holding health fairs for those without insurance; and
- helped the East Thika Presbytery to design and maintain wells and supported their ministry.

The Planning and Visioning Ministry Team continued to hold teams and committees accountable to describe the difference their funding will make towards outcomes. An outcome is the difference made by spending resources and holding activities. By planning for what outcomes take place, teams do more than measure how many opportunities for training they offer. They describe or picture the impact, or difference, they will make. Additionally, for the first time in my memory, Planning and Visioning assigned a Goals Work Group to delegate and to monitor Presbytery-wide goals.

Planning and Visioning also planned special events for each Presbytery Assembly to help congregations meet the Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304). Last year Assemblies focused on the end: the promotion of social righteousness. The discussions were about how churches could speak to their community about issues of social righteousness. They helped congregations speak about immigration, education, the needs of Detroit, and gender violence.

Presbytery's Support Groups

A word of thanks needs to be extended to the Trustees. They provide funds for the Presbytery, excellent office space, loans to congregations and support to congregations in their transactions. The Trustees asked Presbytery to establish a special committee to help declining congregations to their way into the future, either by consolidating, merging, or closing. The committee follows the Presbytery Policy on the topic, called P-21.

The Operations Ministry Team continues to support the staff. Annual evaluations were again held for all staff. They also led a study of staffing needs, assisted by consultant Robert L. Hunter. Bev Knox, longtime Executive Assistant retired, and with that change, it was time to study what staffing is needed. That process has included the Coordinating Cabinet, ministry teams and committees, and members of Presbytery. The staff mourn the loss of Beverly Knox, longtime servant to the Presbytery.

The staff gave great support to the Presbytery. During a time of staff transition they worked hard and helped publicize the work of congregations, and special events of congregations. They attempted to provide for financial accounting and reporting. Our staff and consultants provided resources for congregations, as well as consulted with congregations about their mission, including addressing hunger needs, and transformation. They also supported the ecclesiastical functions of the Presbytery, such as statistical reporting and clergy membership.

The mission of the Presbytery was also extended by the Presbyterian Women, The Presbyterian Men, and the Michigan Black Presbyterian Caucus.

Funding the Mission

Some of our congregations are very generous with funding to the mission of the Presbytery, while other congregations only supported their own mission. My hope is that congregations both support the mission of the Presbytery and mission in their community and in the world. There are ministries that teams see that are not supported by congregations, so need the support of Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly.

Last year the Presbytery operating mission budget (Fund 100) had more revenues than expenses. While at the writing of this report the accounts have not been audited, initial reports show that the budgeted expenditures were lower because teams or committees did not spend all that they asked for (primarily the Operations and New Church Development Teams). Revenues were higher for two reasons: increased income from Presbytery's

portion of the endowments and increased per capita revenue from congregations that brought their per capita obligations up to date.

What do I see in the future for the Presbytery?

I would like to lend support to the committees, teams and work groups in their strengthening of congregations. Excellent plans that are in place. Ministry teams are envisioning great outcomes for their work and there is potential for great impact.

In my opinion, our new staffing design will lead to more support of congregations. I look forward to a new and increased strategy for communicating what Presbytery and its congregations offer. I look forward to supporting congregations and pastors more directly with the help of an Associate Executive Presbyter. I look forward to giving ministry teams more accurate and timely accounting, so they can step out boldly in their work.

Per capita dollars support the administration of the Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly. Most of the congregations see the importance of the connectional church and receiving the support of the denomination. The congregations especially see the need for the support of presbytery in times of pastoral transition, and when they send a candidate for training of the presbytery.

Last year the Leadership Equipping Ministry Team offered training for churches looking to join God in their neighborhood. Five pastors joined a bi-weekly conference call to compare notes and give each other support, under the coaching of Michael Binder. The trend to collaborate with others in the community is growing, and neighbors are seeing the extension of the kingdom of God through the outreach efforts of congregations. These congregations are securing their place as God's servants and leaders in the community.

I am also encouraged by two new directions of COM: to hold clergy cluster meetings to support pastors, and to offer a coach for each clergy new to ministry, with the impact being support for the start-up phase of ministry. COM also has formed a new sub-committee, to look at innovations in ministry for congregations. They are collaborating with the Congregational Development and Transformation Team.

I have some concerns:

I have heard from five congregations that they see their time as limited. I have suggested to each that they contact P-21 (Presbytery Policy 21 – on closing, merging or consolidating churches) to make a proactive plan for ministry. Struggling churches have options if they take early action. For example, the Drayton Avenue Congregation have nested in another congregation in the community, and listed their property for sale, as an act of stewardship. They have joined some community wide ministries that are nurtured by three congregations now. These congregations see the value of partnership.

The number of congregations with temporary and part time pastors is growing. Presbytery commissioned four ruling elders to congregations, and they are doing a wonderful job. 18 congregations of our 79 churches have part time pastors. 14 of our churches are looking for a new pastor. This takes more time for the Committee on Ministry. The Trustees will have to help sell property.

One other change to note is the shift in diversity. While there are more Asian Americans (5.2%) African Americans (4.5%), Asian Americans are under-represented on teams and committees. The Committee on Nominations continues to work hard to represent all ethnic groups on committees and teams and made progress in recruiting Asian Americans to serve the Presbytery. The Committee on Nominations needs help in recruiting called and gifted people to serve.

I am encouraged by the number of congregations who are engaged in mission in their community. When our new Hands on Mission Coordinator, Michael Barconey, began his ministry, the team asked me to give him congregations to visit that demonstrate healthy mission. I sat down and thought of 41 congregations. I believe this is the church of the future. We can't be the church that turns inward.

Yes, we need to nurture faith in Christ, but in an equal way, the church needs to hear Christ's call to serve him outside their walls.

Recently the lectionary shared the text, "If any one want to come after me, let that one deny oneself, take up her or his cross, and follow after me" (Mark 8:31-38). The pastor of one congregation reminded his congregation that success is not having a fine building and great programs. Success is measured by how we follow Jesus. Jesus calls us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him. Where is Jesus going? Into the community and into the world. Jesus is welcoming the stranger, lifting the poor and hungry, healing the broken, releasing the captives and sharing the good news of the gospel.

Somewhere along the line, some churches turned inward. They said, "We will build it and they will come." Or they were satisfied with worship with only their friends. In my opinion the church of tomorrow needs to demonstrate the power of the gospel in such a way that people in our communities will see the kingdom grow, and will see the added value a congregation of faithful believers can give them.

What is that added value? The Presbytery looked at Jeremiah's hope for Jerusalem, that he shared for God. Jeremiah said, "seek the welfare of the city in which you live, in which you are exiles. Pray for them; build houses; grow families. For in their welfare, you will find their welfare." He concludes by saying God has a plan for them, for a future and a hope.

Jesus calls his disciples to be the salt of the earth and a light to the world. In Jesus' day, salt was used to preserve food, and to give zest to food. May we preserve what is true and good, and may we bring zest and hope to those around us. Jesus said, put your light on a hill so all can see. Don't hide it. May we be a beacon of hope. Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before others, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt 5:16).

And the Apostle Paul urges us, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col 3:17).