

Report - Small/Rural churches Task Force – 4-15-26

Every congregation is unique, both in the persons who are its members and in the context in which it is set. And in good Presbyterian polity, each congregation determines its life and ministry practices, trying as best it is able to follow God's leading and will. One of the learnings, which should not be a surprise, is that there is not a good understanding between small/rural churches and more urban ones. For example, within the metro area, a PCUSA congregant has options of other congregations if needed. In a rural or small town setting, if a PCUSA church closes, there may not be another progressive church within a reasonable distance.

Small/Rural congregations need more than just pulpit supply; they need/want consistent spiritual leadership and formational faith education. They also have a sense of urgency about the ongoing vitality and presence of their congregations that is too often not recognized or shared within the more urban areas of the Presbytery.

Recommend restructuring COM into 6 Geographical Regions to better serve the congregations. Each region would be assigned 3 COM Partners, 1 COM member per class.

Set up regional gatherings —cohorts with COM Liaisons

Again, this facilitates consistent communication and an opportunity to know each congregation in the region but also to recognize commonalities and opportunities for shared ministry.

Survey Retired Clergy to determine interest/willingness/availability to assist with pulpit supply and/or short-term supply for smaller/rural congregations.

Develop a cadre of persons skilled in technology willing to go – if and as desired or requested - and assist/train persons in small congregations and advise on needed tech installations/upgrades. Provide assistance as needed and if desired, helping local worship leaders prepare liturgy to use with recorded sermons.

Urge CPM to develop training for Commissioned Pastors as quickly as possible. Work through both CPM and COM to recruit candidates. Ensure good communication and readily available information to those interested. Work toward an expedited schedule.

Develop a plan for publicizing/educating throughout the Presbytery the core beliefs of PCUSA. Differences of progressive vs fundamental.

Promote and advertise through a standardized communication enlisting volunteers to help with staffing and special projects. This would augment the regular Nominating and Committee structure.

Work toward well-informed partners about how to proceed, resources available. Offer good guidance on possible models for leadership, cooperative ministries. Innovative models. Emphasize to all Partners the importance of regular and consistent communication with the congregation to which they are assigned.

Resources:

Presbyterian Foundation

Invite Sherri Finke, regional representative, to give educational presentation on resources of Presbyterian Foundation to COM and/or Presbytery.

Project Regeneration – No cost other than purchase of study book. Assessment of finances, building viability, congregational strengths. Assistance with reality-based options for future.

Various workshops led by Foundation rep. No cost

Investment with New Covenant Trust. Can be set up as congregation needs. Allows access to funds from endowment, etc, as needed.

Presbyterianfoundation.org

Sherri Finke 618-406-3463

--Omaha Foundation

--DeEtte Decker with Office of Innovation at PC(USA); partnership with Rooted Good

--Rural Churches Initiative at University of Ozarks

--Synod School at Lakes and Prairies—if MidAmerica isn't offering it any longer, we can go there for training (COM, Clerks, etc.)

Other findings:

Administrative Assistant or other Presbytery office presence is a KEY priority (maybe more than a Leader!); the maintenance of information and distribution is absolutely essential. A renewed focus on connecting with smaller churches, especially those without pastoral leadership, will assist in making sure the leaders are aware and feeling more a part of Presbytery.

For example, the most recent Records Review was cited as a lost opportunity—could/should have included educational and fellowship aspects. And renewed publicity about the Presbytery Newsletter: should get sent to every Clerk, Pastor *automatically*.

COM Task Force:

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