

Vision Team Report to Presbytery

September 2015

The Transition Process will be guided by three general goals:

To become who we say we are in our mission statement—

“Led by the Holy Spirit, Albany Presbytery encourages, challenges and equips its members and congregations to thrive as disciples of Jesus Christ.”;

To explore how our current goals—to encourage, challenge, and equip **vital congregations; healthy relationships; missional living**—can be utilized to shape the Presbytery life in both form and function;

To move the all parts of the Presbytery from “governing body” to missional council as envisioned by the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity and Form of Government.

The Transition Process will be guided by these Three Core Values:

One: Biblical/Theological

Rootedness in the Reformed tradition.

Spending deep time and energy around discernment, worship and prayer at every gathering.

Sharing of theological friendships and curiosity with each other.

The Transition Process will be guided by these Three Core Values:

Two: Transparency/Sharing

Sharing entire process as it unfolds.

Posting all reports, readings, meeting information on the Presbytery website after each gathering.

Reporting at each Presbytery meeting.

Meeting with variety of stakeholders throughout the Presbytery, giving equal time, attention, listening to each.

The Transition Process will be guided by these Three Core Values:

Three: Presbytery as a Learning Community

Core Commitment to learning together about change, demographics, missional direction of the Presbytery/Church of the present-future

Each team of Presbytery spending 50% of its time together learning and growing in futuring directions

Inviting new leadership as guides

Watch-Words

Prophetic

Creativity

Abundance

Risk-Taking

Over the Summer we were invited to explore these questions (from the Transitional Working Document)

What are the major social, demographic, cultural, and religious trends that will affect our denomination and region for the next ten years?

Where is growth happening--here and in other parts of the world?

Where is creativity that could challenge or inspire us, in the denomination and beyond?

How are other religious groups in our region faring? How is the religious landscape changing?

Members of the Vision Team

Jim Reisner, Westminster/Albany

Ali Trowbridge, Caldwell/Lake George

Linda Martin, First/Broadalbin

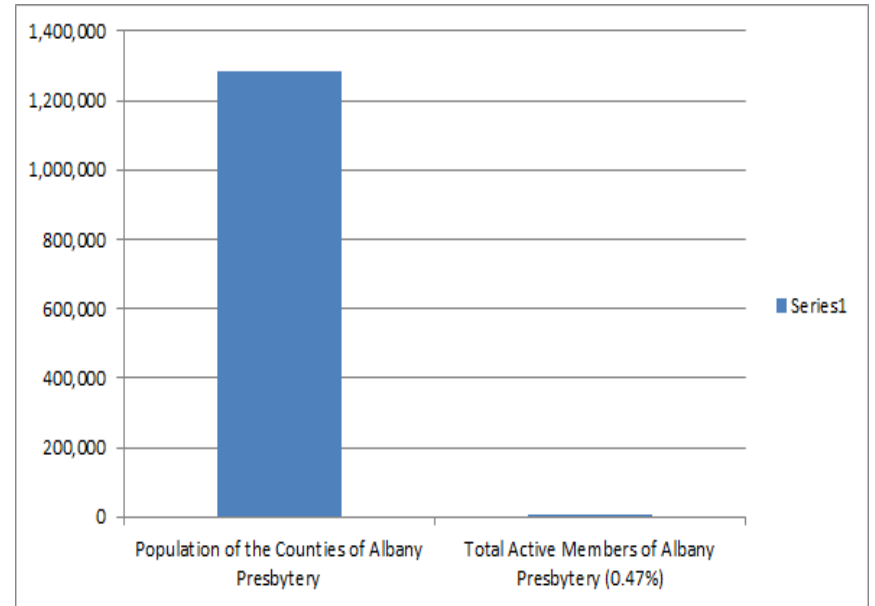
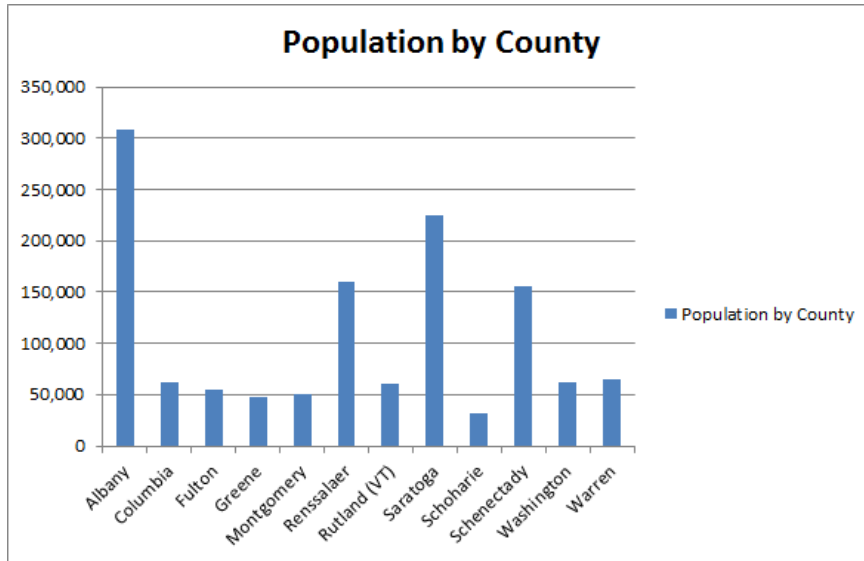
Kaitlyn TeBordo-Wood, First/Cohoes

Michael Plank, First/Hudson Falls & Underwood CrossFit NWC

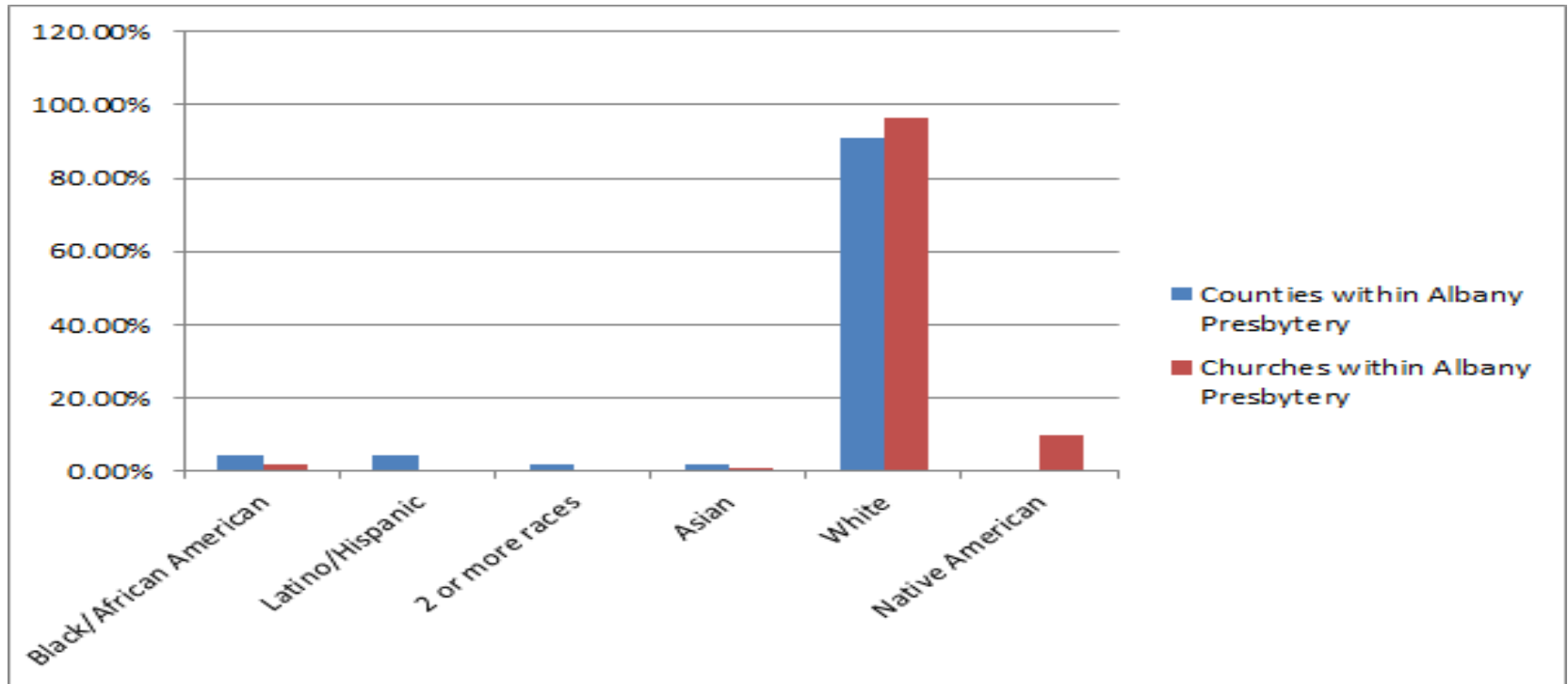
Cynthia Woolever, Westminster/Albany

Shannan Vance-Ocampo, Transitional Presbyter

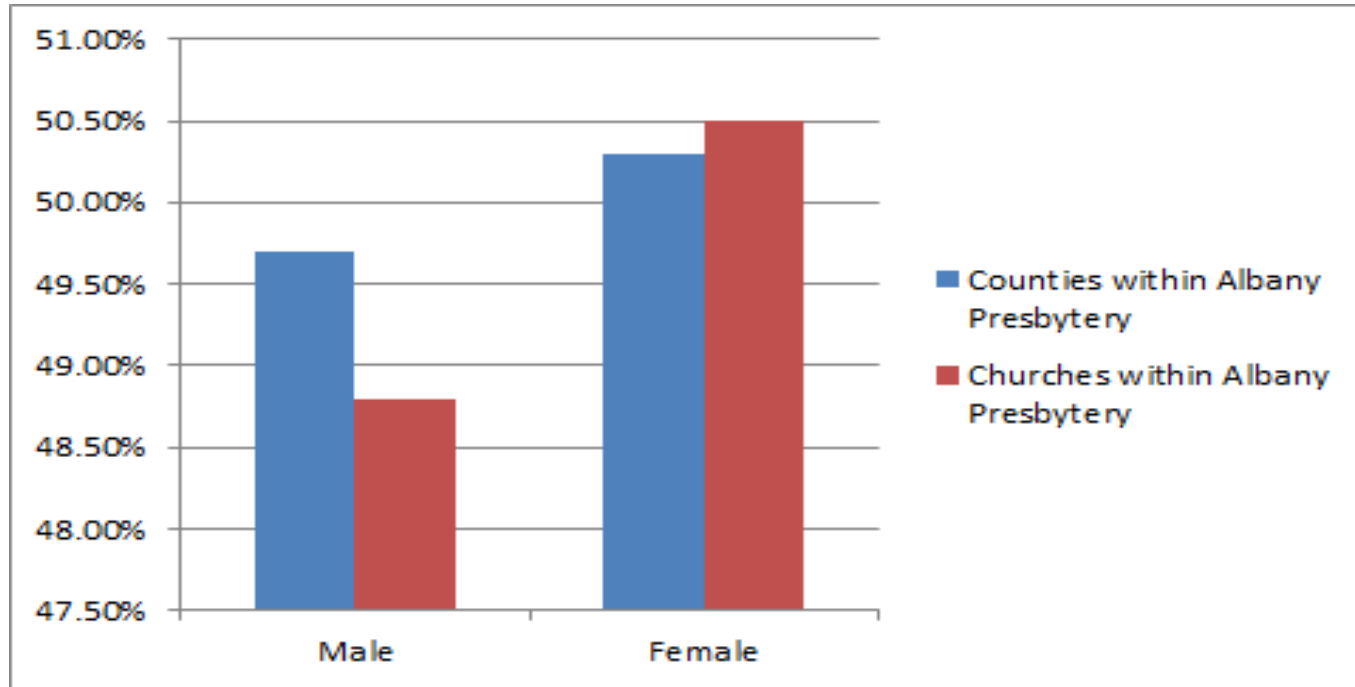
2014 Population Data from U.S. Census and Albany Presbytery
Membership of Albany Presbytery is one half of one percent of the
population of the counties that make up our Presbytery.



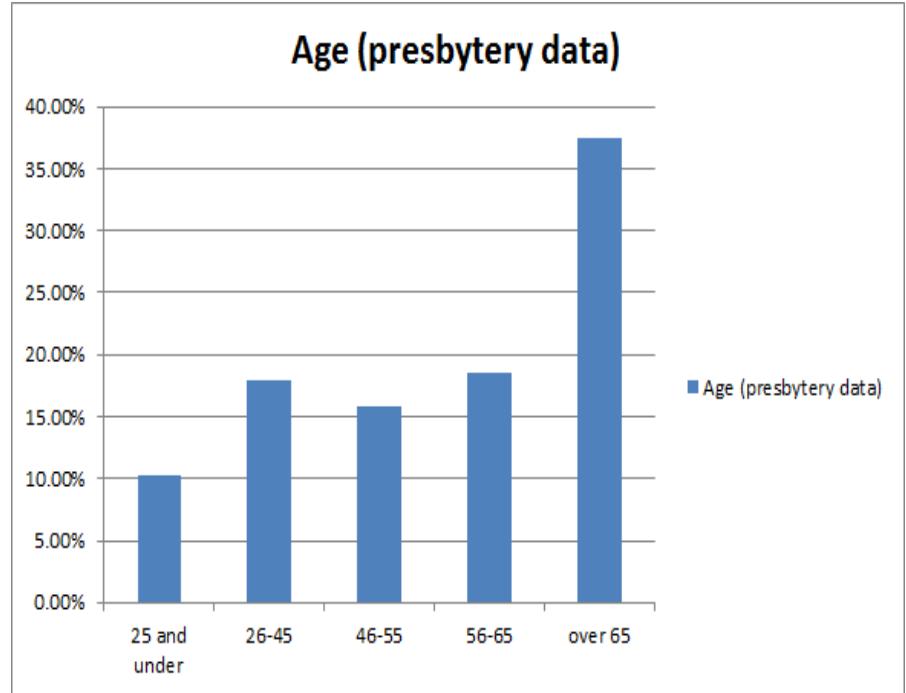
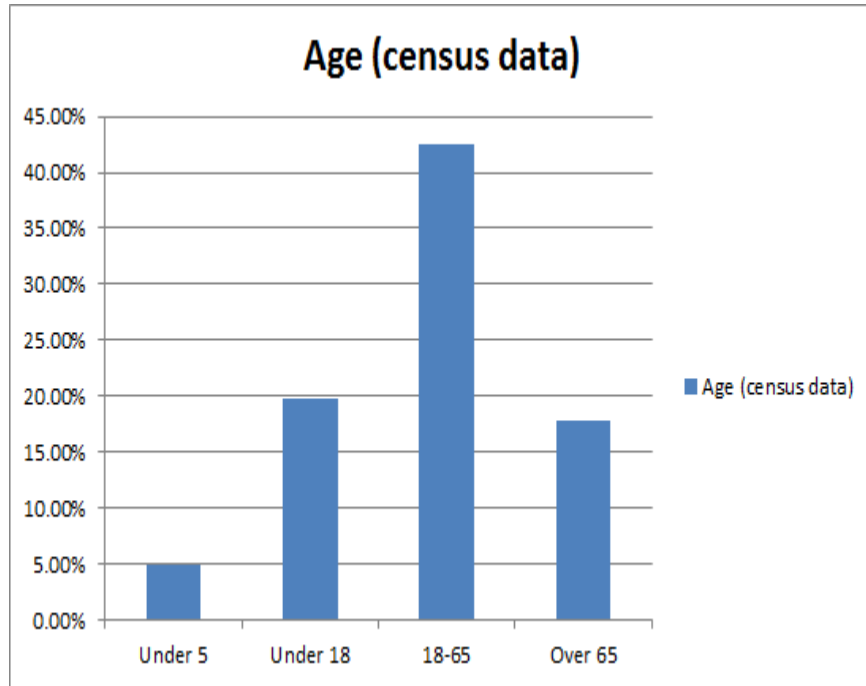
Statistical Data from U.S. Census and Albany Presbytery (2014) Racial/Ethnic Distribution



Statistical Data from U.S. Census and Albany Presbytery (2014) Gender

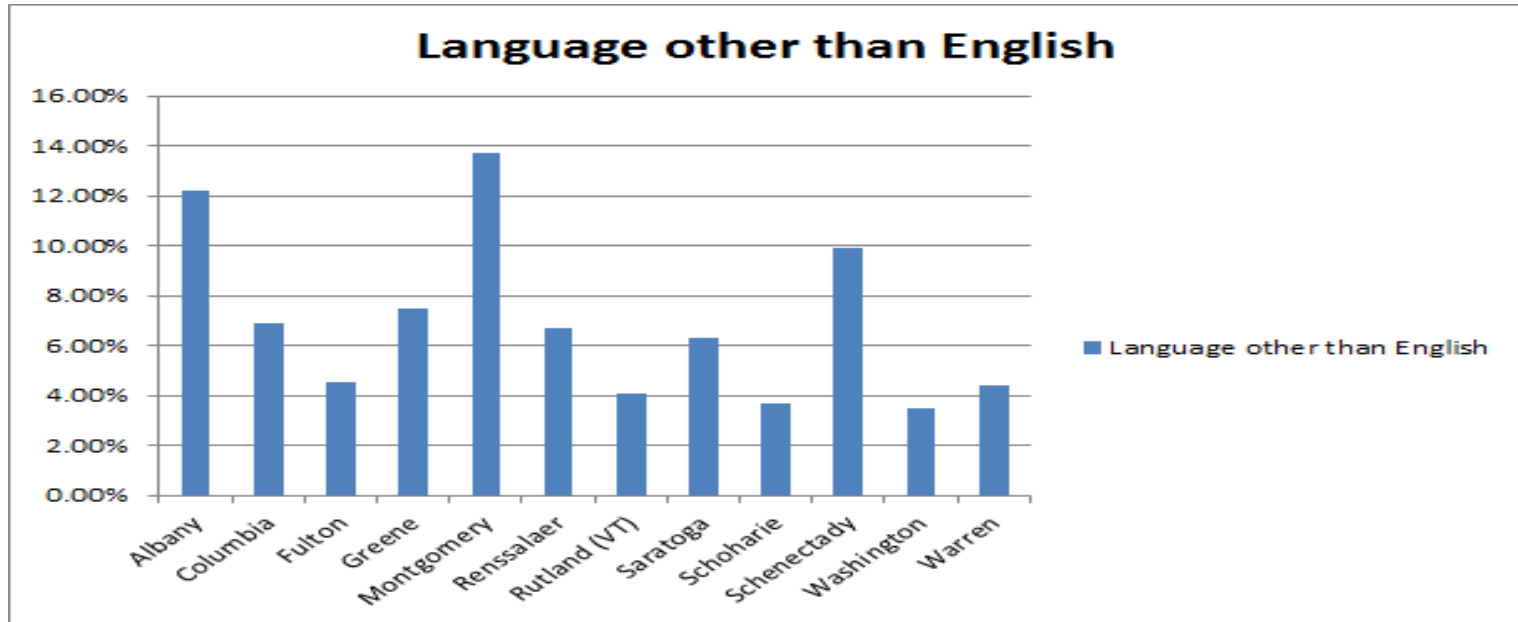


Statistical Data from U.S. Census and Albany Presbytery (2014) Age Spread



Language, Worship and Faith Communities

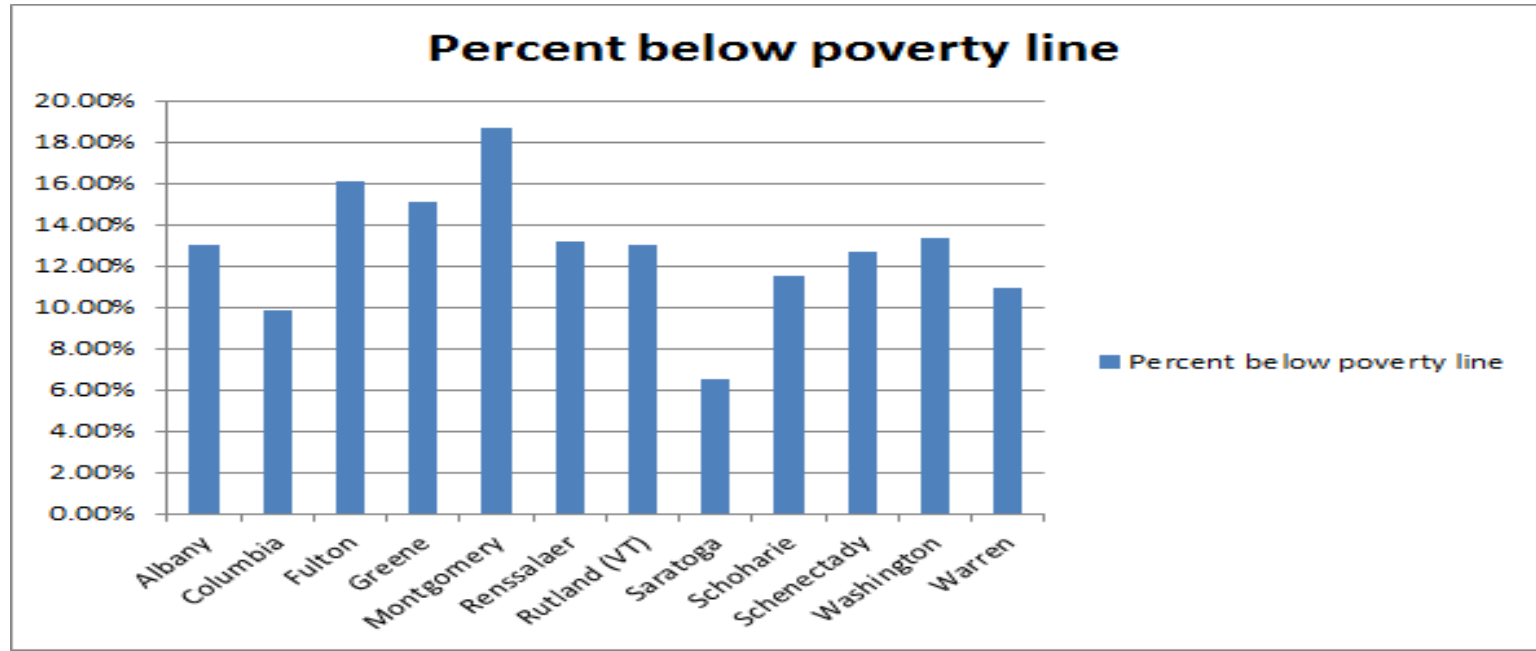
In the counties that make up Albany Presbytery, 6.9% of people have a language other than English as their primary language at home. What is the primary language in your congregation for worship?



Poverty in the Bounds of Albany Presbytery

Averaged out, we have a 12.8% of population living under the federal poverty line.

Here is the breakdown by county:



What are the major social, demographic, cultural, and religious trends that will affect our denomination and region for the next ten years?

We worked on this question through looking at the major 2015 Pew Study on religious affiliation in the United States just published this May. It will be linked this week for all congregations to read under the Resources tab of the Presbytery website on the Transitional Planning Page.

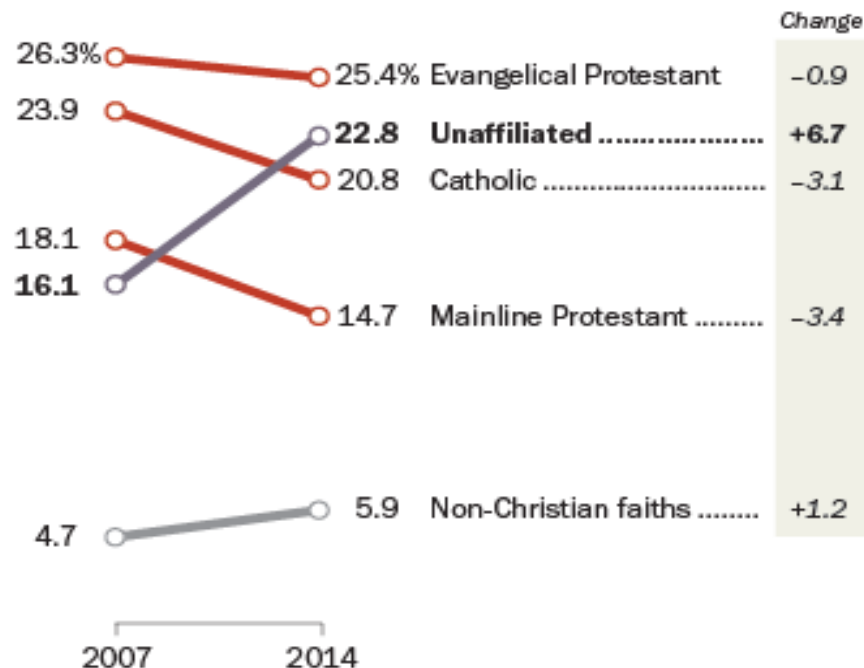
2015 Pew Study - National Decline in Mainline Protestants

Changing U.S. Religious Landscape

Between 2007 and 2014, the Christian share of the population fell from 78.4% to 70.6%, driven mainly by declines among mainline Protestants and Catholics. The unaffiliated experienced the most growth, and the share of Americans who belong to non-Christian faiths also increased.

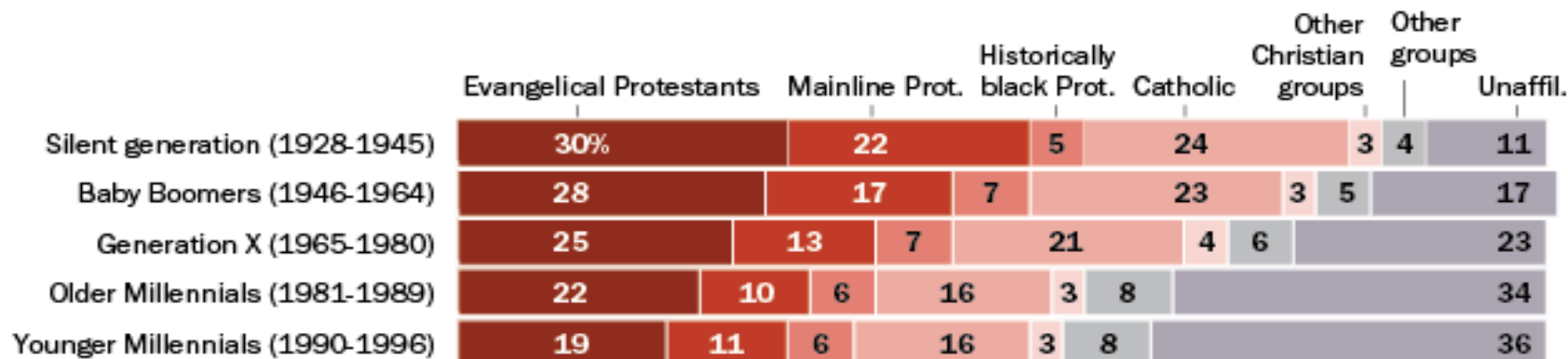
Source: 2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014

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2015 Pew Study--Generational Issues

Generational Replacement Drives Growth of Unaffiliated



2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding. Don't know/refused answers not shown. "Other Christian groups" includes Mormons, Orthodox Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses and a number of smaller Christian groups.

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Comments from the Vision Team

- The trends shown in the Pew Study are not surprising, they have been going in this direction for a number of years
- The region of NY State that Albany Presbytery is in always hits top marks in “unchurched” and “not friendly” places in other studies such as Barna.
- Top down management vs. networks is an emerging trend, with networks being the preferred way of leading in this time. Top down is not invitational any longer. Collaboration is a shift in how leadership can best be leveraged. This is a significant learning as we seek to engage ministry in a new way.
- Race is a huge issue in our time in the North American/U.S. context. The church is woefully behind in addressing race issues and remains highly segregated. This is a particular challenge for Albany Presbytery and a need for relearning and reforming around this issue is urgent.
- There will be a period of disaffiliation related to these changes and we are already seeing the leading edges of new affiliations. They are not coming through traditional channels and outreach but have moved to loose networks, online channels, intersectional and cross-relational groupings. This means that we need to expand our ministries to take advantage of these new ways of reaching people as proclaimers of the Good News.

Where is growth happening--here and in other parts of the world?

Size and Projected Growth of Major Religious Groups

	2010 POPULATION	% OF WORLD POPULATION IN 2010	PROJECTED 2050 POPULATION	% OF WORLD POPULATION IN 2050	POPULATION GROWTH 2010-2050
Christians	2,168,330,000	31.4%	2,918,070,000	31.4%	749,740,000
Muslims	1,599,700,000	23.2	2,761,480,000	29.7	1,161,780,000
Unaffiliated	1,131,150,000	16.4	1,230,340,000	13.2	99,190,000
Hindus	1,032,210,000	15.0	1,384,360,000	14.9	352,140,000
Buddhists	487,760,000	7.1	486,270,000	5.2	-1,490,000
Folk Religions	404,690,000	5.9	449,140,000	4.8	44,450,000
Other Religions	58,150,000	0.8	61,450,000	0.7	3,300,000
Jews	13,860,000	0.2	16,090,000	0.2	2,230,000
World total	6,895,850,000	100.0	9,307,190,000	100.0	2,411,340,000

Source: The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050

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Where is growth happening--here and in other parts of the world?

World

- The number of Muslims will nearly equal the number of Christians around the world by 2050. There is great need for us to learn about and interact with our Muslim sisters and brothers as we will share world leadership in religious traditions by 2050.
- Atheists, agnostics and other people who do not affiliate with any religion – though increasing in countries such as the United States and France – will make up a declining share of the world’s total population. The world overall is getting more religious.
- In the United States, Christians will decline from more than **three-quarters** of the population in 2010 to **two-thirds** in 2050, and Judaism will no longer be the largest non-Christian religion. Muslims will be more numerous in the U.S. than people who identify as Jewish on the basis of religion.
- Four out of every 10 Christians in the world will live in sub-Saharan Africa by 2050.
- Growth in the Christian tradition is in the Global “South” for the next 40 years, not in “Western” countries.

Where is growth happening--here and in other parts of the world?

- A major growing demographic in the Albany area is from SouthEast Asia and so we need to continue to learn about how to expand that ministry
- There is a need for us to unlearn colonial habits in the global “North” alongside these changes. This is tied to the ongoing conversation around undoing racism in the United States.
- Deep learning on new cultures will be important, growing in language capabilities and especially bridging the knowledge and relational gap with our Muslim sisters and brothers will be key to long-term success.

Where is growth happening--here and in other parts of the world?

New Worshipping Communities is another spot of real growth. PCUSA Research Services released [this](#) study on NWC in 2015

Highlights from that study:

- 43% are ages 19-39, an additional 9% are ages 13-18
- 53% are racial ethnic communities
- Up to 77% are new to the denomination

The survey also found that 44 percent of the participants had:

- Not attended church within the last five years (20%)
- No previous religious affiliation (17%)
- Were of a non-Christian faith (7%)
- 33% had previously been a part of churches of other denominations



Where is growth happening--here and in other parts of the world?



Models for New Worshiping Communities are abundant. The worshiping group at, Underwood Park CrossFit, a New Worshiping Community within the presbytery bounds, is tied to, and supported by the business of the CrossFit gym. The community worships weekly and the “service” is offered to any person at no charge. People who wish to participate in the life of the community formed by the gym members beyond weekly worship are asked to pay membership dues. Memberships are offered on a sliding scale so that income is not a barrier to inclusion in the community. The business is then able to support staffing and logistics for the weekly worship group.

The open space provided by the New Worshiping Community initiative allows for a whole host of innovative and creative communities of faith. **The faith communities that seem to grow most sustainably and have the most energy around them are those that are begun with genuine and organic passion for a particular context and/or community model, and that then follow the Spirit’s leading to reach people who are not drawn to traditional models of church.**

Where is growth happening--here and in other parts of the world?

Immigrant Populations

Within the bounds of Albany Presbytery are increasing enclaves of ethnic groups who have a history of Presbyterianism. In prior generations, we sent missionaries out into the world to minister among distant peoples. Today, the grandchildren of those people have moved next door to us. **Can we approach them in post-colonial ways?**

We have in the capital region, populations of Brazilians, Trinidadians, Jamaicans, Puerto Ricans, Indonesians, Pakistanis, Ghanaians, Cameroonians, Kenyans, Koreans, and others who knew Presbyterians before they ever moved here. The highest number of Mexicans in the State of NY (outside of NYC) reside in the Amsterdam area. There are people of other lands and other denominations of Christianity, who are fervent Christians but have not yet found a worshipping community. As we fret about the atheism that surrounds us, there are plenty of un-churched Christians moving into our region within the immigrant population.

Opportunities exist to either build ethnic congregations within that population, or for our congregations to reach out and welcome immigrants, thus moving towards becoming multi-cultural, diverse and international congregations.

Where is creativity that could challenge or inspire us, in the denomination and beyond?

We need to reclaim the love of the Church and the love of the Presbyterian Church!

Technology is a large place of creativity and ministry--how can we join in?

There is a real hunger for community that is deep and wide throughout the Presbytery. This is a place for creativity!

There is a need to “market” ourselves! We have good stories to share, let’s share them much more than we already are!

Where is creativity that could challenge or inspire us, in the denomination and beyond?

Successful congregations are mirroring their context that they are in

The trend/creativity used to be in megachurches. Now it is in small congregations that intentionally replicate and building additional small communities. Think micro-enterprise. Think experimental.

Most successful congregations today are looking more like home churches, more DIY, farmer's market etc.

Missional isn't a buzzword--it is incarnating into the place where God has planted you.

Buildings as weighing us down so new creative communities inhabit former buildings but most do not want bricks and mortar.

Food for Thought and a Challenge

Hard to get outside of a box,
especially when it has a
label. -Kaitlyn TeBordo Wood

What's the "label" in your
community on the box you
are in and how can you
move beyond it?



How are other religious groups in our region faring? How is the religious landscape changing?

We spoke with members of neighboring Presbyteries and other ecumenical governing bodies. From those we were able to speak with here are their responses to how they are faring:

Neighboring Presbyteries we Partner with in the Upstate COM network

Northern New York

- 36 Congregations
- 2 Open in the Summer only
- 13 FT Clergy, 5 of these not sustainable

Number of CRE's--some difficulty with the process.

Stated Clerk is the only staff
Presbytery meetings are relaxed and familiar

Some of the smallest congregations are very mission-oriented

Utica

- 31 Congregations
- 3 Served by 2 CRE's working together as a cluster.
Maintain their own Sessions but worship together on Sunday AMs. Called "The Three Voices"
- 12 FT Positions
- 9 Active CRE's serving churches

Stated Clerk is the only staff person

A number of retirements coming up

Merged two congregations last year

Cayuga-Syracuse

- 38 Congregations
- About ½ are FT
- 1 NWC--First United/Syracuse, Isaiah's Table

Some of the churches in Syracuse and other cities and are coming back online with their ministry and work.

Stated Clerk/Communicator is the only staff person

Reassessing staff structure after three years of it

Ecumenical Partners

American Baptist

- 294 churches
- 48,184 members
- Entire Upstate NY region
- Three staff
- Optional polity system which presents many challenges for them
- $\frac{1}{3}$ of congregations have a FT call
- Great difficulty attracting “talented” and credentialed clergy to the area
- Many meetings are technology-based

Lutheran

- Entire upstate region
- 170 congregations in the Synod
- Two of the conferences make up our territory = 46 congregations
- $\frac{1}{2}$ of those have FT calls
- Beginning to have teams do ministry
- Working on anti-racism issues

Reformed Synod (RCA)

- Entire upstate region
- 98 congregations
- 7,856 members
- Smaller classis’ that provide local support
- Similar polity and oversight to the PC (USA)
- Many smaller congregations, only around $\frac{1}{2}$ in FT calls
- There is regional staff, (5) and local classis PT clerks

Learnings from the RCA (2013 Self-Study)

- That “they” will come to us, we expect people to come to church;
- that we (the church) deserve to be here;
- that there is something wrong with “them,” and that we are right or better or chosen;
- that success is defined by numbers, or merely by keeping the doors open;
- that an autonomous congregation with a minister and building is the best ministry,
- that faithfulness will mean money and people;
- and correlatively that a lack of money or people will mean a problem with faithfulness;
- that leadership means only, or mostly, the ministers;
- that status is defined or conveyed by the number of ministers;
- that every pastor should be a “high capacity/performing” worker, meaning an over-functioner;
- that pastors are essential for the proper functioning of the churches;
- that work on classis or Synod business takes pastors from her or his own “proper” work, reducing capacity and causing “our church” to suffer.

These mental models are seriously debilitating to our capacity to live out our call to follow Jesus Christ and to serve as his church.”