

Report of the Coordination and Nominations Committee from January 2020 on 'Growing into Small - Living into Our Presbytery Realities'. January 14, 2020

Presbytery action: *Presbytery directs the Coordination Committee and the Committee on Representation and Nominations to meet to discuss, in light of the difficulty in filling committee positions, how the Presbytery can adjust to (and grow into) the reality of the Presbytery's current reduced membership level.*

Per the direction of the Albany Presbytery at its November 19, 2019 meeting, ten presbytery participants met at First Presbyterian Church in Ballston Spa.

The conversation was framed for the participants by considering the following condition of Albany Presbytery:

- As of November 2019, 42 members of presbytery were serving on a committee, the trustees, or a judicial commission. But there was a 29% vacancy rate in presbytery committees (17 unfilled positions)
- Our churches' membership has been declining 6% annually for the last 4 years (in 2018 it was 4,781). The national discussion in the PCUSA has concluded that the minimum size of a presbytery should be 10,000 members. We are only at 49% of the minimum.
- Basic and shared witness covered only 74% of the 2018 budget; the rest came from presbytery investments.
- There are between 3 and 6 churches in the presbytery that may close or leave the denomination in 2020.
- In 2016-17 the presbytery did a reorganization that focused primarily on the leadership of the presbytery, not the presbytery itself. That reorganization plan recommended that that the entire topic be revisited in 2020.

In the preliminary discussions it was noted that we as a presbytery have created too many positions to fill for too few people. This parallels many of our churches that have difficulties filling key positions in the church such as elder, deacon, treasurer, etc.

What is the presbytery doing well? (general observations)

- Presbytery meetings have been effective in the last year and the meetings create an opportunity for personal renewal as people are encouraged by the content and enriched by individual interactions
- The presbytery has a creative side as evidence by all the varied New Worshipping Communities.
- The small church forum has engaged many people from our smaller churches
- Koinonia team has continued to be helpful to our presbytery
- Providing a chaplain for ministers

What should be priorities for presbytery?

1. COMAC – It has an essential function to congregations, especially those going through transitions ('you are not alone'). The greatest need churches have is the 'in-between' time. But presbytery hasn't provided enough help to COMAC (i.e., not fully staffed with volunteers). Many presbytery resources are used to deal with dying churches (probably 20 in our presbytery); we have to make hard decisions about them, namely that we cannot keep them alive. Fifty percent of the ministers are retired and need some level of support and encouragement.
2. Leadership development. Start with moderator selection and choose people based on their vision and leadership skill; consider giving them two years in office. At the non-moderator level, identify and develop managerial skills among presbyters, especially committee or work group chairs/leaders.
3. Koinonia Team/fellowship – Empower this group to continue to assist with our communal life. Make sure all meetings have an engaging atmosphere.
4. Learn to move from a staff-led to volunteer led presbytery. Help presbyters engage with opportunities to serve on committees, work groups, with Zoom, etc.

Future Steps

Following the example of the SPAT process, the group agreed to cast a wide net to invite presbytery members to participate in the ongoing discussion as well as to keep people informed of the discussions and decisions. There will be a report at each presbytery meeting as well as blog posts as appropriate.