

Landscape Summary Albany Presbytery

The Landscape Survey from HolyCow! Consulting was administered during November and December 2015. The instrument was sent to the following groups:

- Teaching Elders (active), all categories
- Teaching Elders (retired)
- Staff
- Clerks of Session
- Active Ruling Elders in the Presbytery
- It was also sent out to all other persons in the Presbytery for which we had email addresses and Teaching Elders were invited to forward this invitation to members of their Session

HolyCow! Consulting has trained interpreters that work with congregations and middle governing bodies on understanding their results and planning for future ministries based off of these results. Dr. Keli Regenstein of the Samaritan Center is one of these people who is part of a network around the country, so we are blessed that Keli is in the Presbytery and available to us locally and has many local insights about us from years of service to this Presbytery. In the last year three congregations in the Presbytery use HolyCow!'s CAT, the Church Assessment Tool: Brunswick, Stillwater and Bay Road. There are other congregations who are considering utilizing this powerful tool for their congregation. Additionally, over the last year some members of Presbytery have been interacting with both Keli and trainers from HolyCow! on their various instruments so that learning is spread across the system of the Presbytery long-term. They are:

1. Lynn Brown
2. Coqui Conkey
3. Scott DeBlock
4. Elizabeth Shen-O'Conner
5. Susan Strang
6. Shannan Vance-Ocampo

There will be additional learning opportunities for other members of Presbytery over the next coming years through the Samaritan Center.

Our survey was responded to in full by 60% of those who were sent the instrument. The other 40% is an interesting subgroup. Of those, 50%, took the entire survey but then when they got to the last part of it where they were asked to identify themselves through the confidential demographical information, declined to do so and effectively quit the survey. This is a high number and flagged the staff at HolyCow! and Keli in that this speaks to an issue of trust.

The reports are broken out by the various subgroups and there is a general report that blends all of the subgroups together. One of the important features of the

Landscape Survey is its focus on those who are “on the fence” meaning the middle majority in our Presbytery that can be swayed any way. It is also important to look through the sub-groups to determine where the greatest tipping points are in the Presbytery. For example, it is clear that those who serve on committees of Presbytery are very bought into the work of the Presbytery and rate in a high positive area. Active Teaching Elders are in the zone on the survey are in the “transformation zone” and a focus on this category poses the greatest opportunity for shifts in the Presbytery if that group is shifted and brought in in greater ways. Retired Teaching Elders are the least satisfied or incorporated members of the Presbytery and are a category whose numbers bring the overall “score” of the full Presbytery down and out of the transformation zone. So we have a need to focus on particular sub-groups within this survey as they have particular needs, and attending to those in focused ways can assist the Presbytery in moving forward in its overall mission.

The top three priorities that were identified for the Presbytery across all groups:

- Equip congregations to be more effective in addressing problems affecting their surrounding communities
- Cultivate a higher level of trust within the Presbytery
- Equip Pastors and other leaders in congregations with strategies that enable them to reach new members

You can see in the “all results” area these broken out by category.

Conflict

There is a high level of mistrust according to this survey and a feeling that there is a small group that frequently blocks what the majority wants to do. There is also a sense that problems between groups in the Presbytery are resolved together (which speaks to a long-term emphasis the Presbytery had in this area during the decades of theological divide in our larger denomination). It is a blessing that this Presbytery is not hampered by the high level of conflict around theology and departures that is present in other Presbyteries. This gives us the opportunity to work on the first piece of a feeling of a small group creating discord and we have ways to address this already that are learned in our system and can be assisted by groups such as Samaritan who are in our midst.

Engagement

Overall, engagement is an area that needs to be brought up around the Presbytery. We are making some strides on this through our focus on communications and there is a report from Kim Deal, our Communications Manager that the Council received last month that may help point some of the ways forward in these areas.

Governance

Again, this area points to the lack of trust. An ongoing conversation that is difficult in this Presbytery and that we need to continue to work towards is that of

committees vs. commissions and how we can move forward in trust to be more efficient in our governance but also to trust those who specialize in particular issues around the Presbytery. As we know “committee of the whole” has significant drawbacks and there are many areas of work around the Presbytery that do call for specialization. Finding balance here is key.

Collegiality

Those who serve in the Presbytery rate highly on the collegiality index. Collegiality scores highest and this is an area to continue to focus. We have had a focus in the past few years on “healthy relationships” and this focus can assist on collegiality, including bringing health to all committees/teams/task forces of the Presbytery where when there are questions they are discussed openly by the group and not settled by small groups offline. Continuing to work towards open process continues to build collegiality, which is an opportunity to tip and change other indexes in a positive way.

Leadership

This is an area that is low and there is a call in this area for the development of a unified vision that the leadership of the Presbytery adheres to and is learned across the system. This area also discusses Presbytery meetings. As we are seeing in other investigations around structure of the Presbytery, there is a trend around the PCUSA of Presbyteries developing strong, impactful gatherings of Presbytery. As we see in other categories, there is a high desire for resourcing, so this would be an area to move into in greater focus and equipping as we prepare gatherings of the Presbytery.

Morale

Again, this is on the low end of the scale. As we look into the subgroups, which are broken out, it is clear which groups are high in morale and which are not. Those who serve the Presbytery rate the highest because they are closest to the action and work of the Presbytery and understand their role. Communication again, is a key piece of work in this area.

Support to Congregations

Again, resourcing in this area rates highly and a growing sense of trust for the Presbytery to assist congregations in times of crisis. The COM has focused a great deal over the last few years in this area and that focus is showing and can grow and increase. This work with congregations is a long game but one that is highly worthwhile as it cuts across various categories.

There is a strong sense (88%) for full change as the Presbytery, but we also score low on flexibility. How can we increase flexibility for change? Where do the subgroups score out in this area and where can we have the greatest focus? These are key questions in this area.

There are additional breakouts related to communications and also our mission partners, which are open questions in our transitional planning.

This survey leads to various questions that we can keep asking of ourselves and seeking to answer as our transitional groups do work. These are long-term questions and consistent work in these areas can lead to strong results for the transformation of the Presbytery.