

Albany Presbytery Committee on Church Mission
March 15, 2019

PRELIMINARY REPORT TO PRESBYTERY MTG. OF MARCH 26

[The committee is scheduled to meet again on March 21.]

Campership Grants

As announced in January by various means – verbal and electronic – grants totaling \$5000, funded from proceeds of the Camp Hebron sale, were made available starting Feb. 1 on a first-come, first-served basis. The application process was entirely electronic. It shut off automatically on Feb. 8, when budgeted funds were fully committed.

Grant payments will go directly to camps, not to applicants or their families.

The standard grant was \$225 for the first member of a family, \$200 for additional members. A lesser grant of \$130 pertained to those planning to attend Christian camps run by groups not in correspondence with PCUSA.

Twenty-five (25) students received camperships. Collectively, they represent six of our congregations. Fifteen are headed for Camp Fowler (RCA). In second place: Skye Farm / Skye Lake (UMC) with four of our students.

Because the application process was pre-set to close when funds were no longer available, this committee has no way of knowing who else might have been in the pipeline, or otherwise hopeful. Hence, our recommendation to the Moderator with regard to the worship offering on March 26:

“Church Mission Committee recommends that today’s worship offering go toward a new round of campership grants. It further recommends that preference be shown toward applicants from congregations not among the six who already were successful between Feb. 1 and Feb. 8.” [alphabetically: Brunswick, Cornerstone Community, First Albany, First United Troy, Trinity (Scotia), Stillwater]

Please note: At its regular meeting on March 21, the committee plans to fine-tune a process for determining how to award any grants which may result from this second round. The number of grants, size of grants, priority of grants, and “open season” all must be discussed. We will publish and announce our recommendation(s) as soon as possible.

Listening, Learning, and Mission Consultations

The Church Mission Committee sees its primary work not as dispensing funds, but rather supporting congregations in planning, developing, networking, resourcing, and evaluating mission strategies and activities.

Please refer to our 2-page flyer: “What Do You Seek?” available on the presbytery website. Paper copies will also be available at Delmar on March 26.

On Feb. 16, our chairman enjoyed a productive visit with leaders of the Korean church, Schenectady/Rotterdam. We should all be so mission-minded!

The Future of Presbytery-level Mission Funding

There is a long-overdue conversation which must be held regarding policies and practices of Albany Presbytery in granting mission funds from its budget.

On March 26, we will formally launch this conversation, using two forums:

[a] Open Space, from 9:00 to 9:45 a.m. -A free-flowing opportunity for questions, comments, or just listening. Representatives of Presbytery's six Mission Partners (budgeted grant recipients) have been invited to participate.

[b] Small-group discussions during the presbytery meeting itself. Moderator Kotfila intends to utilize a "World Café" type of format.

Why are we doing this?

- Because it hasn't been done for a long, long time.
- Because of steadily-declining revenues for distribution.
- Because of questions (see below) either coming to, or arising from, the Church Mission Committee and its predecessors, among others.
- Because Presbytery's budget gets drawn up every summer and presented during the fall, so the proper time would be now.
- Because our six Mission Partners are stakeholders in this process, and should not be subject to any last-minute surprises.

What will happen with this conversation?

- Church Mission Committee will collect written feedback from every participant, though not anonymously. We will collect the notes generated on paper, March 26. We will collect messages sent electronically to our chairman: wrightsafrica@gmail.com
- Church Mission committee will bring to the June 1 Presbytery meeting a recommendation regarding way forward. It will be up to commissioners whether to accept or modify our recommendation. Failure to do either will result in the Budget & Finance Committee determining over the summer the way forward.

At this point in time, Church Mission Committee has an absolutely open mind. We are not steering toward any preconceived conclusion. Our primary duty is to raise this conversation. Otherwise, decisions will get made by default... again.

Questions we have heard:

1] Who are the six Mission Partners currently funded in Presbytery's budget?

Answer:

- Protestant Chaplaincy at SUNY - \$3,900
- RPI/Sage Chaplaincy - \$9,300
- Union College Chaplaincy - \$9,300
- Rural & Migrant Ministry - \$3,067
- Schenectady Inner City Ministry - \$5,683
- Troy Area United Ministries - \$8,736

2] How long has Presbytery been funding these Partners?

Answer: Some go back at least 40 years. Some were even founded or co-founded by Presbytery. In every case, ties are historic. Certain ties are personal as well; several Mission Partners employ members of this presbytery.

3] Has Presbytery ever dropped a Mission Partner?

Answer: Yes. We can quickly think of two: Oakwood Community Center, and Capital Region Theological Center. But neither was dropped for malfeasance or disapproval.

4] What percentage of Presbytery's budget goes to the Mission Partners?

Answer: 10.37% for 2019. The total budgeted sum comes to \$39,986.

5] Why such discrepancies in funding levels among the college chaplaincies?

Answer: Years back, our commitment to SUNY had been based on assumptions regarding other funding partners. When the United Methodist Church dropped out, we were not able to step up proportionately.

6] Has Presbytery's declining revenue ever affected our Mission Partners?

Answer: All Partners were cut by 10% going from 2018 to 2019.

7] Is there any opportunity for potential new Partners to receive consideration?

Good question.

8] Do any of the Mission Partners receive funding directly from congregations of this presbytery?

Answer: Yes. Our committee has not undertaken a detailed study. Certainly, the Partners themselves can answer with regard to specific congregations. Likewise, Sessions can answer with regard to specific Partners.

9] Why does Presbytery take money from congregations and then give on their behalf to Mission Partners? Why not leave funding at the level of Session or congregation, where typically it would be more meaningful?

This question is arising more and more frequently - especially from smaller churches.

10] In what ways are Mission Partners accountable to Presbytery?

Answer: They are quick to answer queries. Occasionally, one or another will appear before Presbytery. (For example, the three college chaplaincies shared in an Open Space, Sept. 2018 at Brunswick.) But historically, there has not been great consistency - nor has the Mission Committee been consistent in promoting our Mission Partners, either to Presbytery or to its congregations.

11] To what extent do the current six Mission Partners depend on Presbytery's budgeted grants?

They can answer for themselves.

12] If Presbytery were to scale down or cease Mission Partner grants altogether, what would happen to the saved money, if it actually exists?

That would be Presbytery's decision.

13] In scenarios envisioned by Questions 9 and 12, would there be some sort of "off-ramp," so that our Mission Partners have time to adjust?

Answer: The Church Mission Committee would certainly support this.