

Staffing Process Advisory Team (SPAT)

Highlights from July 2017 – June 2018

Team members: Samantha Brewer (Hoosick Falls), Terry Diggory (Saratoga, PNEC), Rev. Lynn Brown, Rev. Katy Stenta, Rev. Ted Wright (HR) moderator

Appointed by: Presbytery Vice-Moderator Kotfila, on behalf of the Coordination Comm.

Charged to: *work with Synod of the Northeast Leader Harold Delhagen to develop a well-designed process and timeline for arriving at a final staffing plan.* [Not to recommend any staffing plan itself, but only the vehicle by which Presbytery may discern one.]

Sept. 12: Initial report, offered during a special presbytery meeting at Ballston Spa.

Findings: [a] Presbytery had accumulated good data from its 2.5-yr. transitional work but lacks good questions for how to use it; [b] Significant disagreements exist with regard to Presbytery's purpose and direction; [c] Hurt feelings, lack of trust, insider/outsider perceptions, etc. – these dynamics are undermining attempts at consensus.

Recommendation: *A series of patient, worshipful, and collaborative conversations in order to clarify goals & priorities...* [SPAT declined at this point to set a timeline at this.]

First step: *What do you think are the most important questions Albany Presbytery must wrestle with in order to move forward?* **Established going forward:** A set of values for the process, and an online forum through which to expand and continue discussions.

Nov. 1: (Special meeting in Troy, at which Presbytery authorized its current part-time Temporary Executive position): **Distributed and led discussion of:** *"My Presbytery's Well-Being"* – a conversational instrument used elsewhere by our Synod.

Jan. 20: 4-hr workshop in Albany to process the Synod SARC report (which had been formally delivered to Presbytery on Nov. 15.) Guest facilitator: Laurie Ferguson, PhD. Registrations totaled 38; final attendance, despite 3 no-show's, came to 41.

Jan. 29-30: Winter Retreat *"Come to the Well"* led by Rev's Rick Spalding & Elizabeth Wieman. 44 registered; 40 participated. Christ the King Spiritual Life Center, Greenwich.

Feb. 9-10: Progress reports given to Synod (Feb. 9) and Presbytery (Feb. 10)

Mar. 6: Proposal voiced to the Coordination Committee regarding a spring/summer sequence of forums – to pursue the Sept. 12 recommendation.

Apr. 21: Report given at Presbytery meeting, voicing a similar intent.

May 8: Convocation at Stillwater - *What can we all agree upon that we should look to Presbytery for?* 22 participated, including 4 first-timers for a SPAT event.

June 12: Convocation at Stillwater – *What would a stronger presbytery look like?* (For example: in worship, mission, communication, coordination, integration, youth ministry...)

June 18-19: Retreat *"Given"* – again with Rick and Beth, again at Christ the King Center.

Ongoing: Personal efforts to connect with non-participating churches & clergy.

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Joys, Concerns, and Forecast

JOYS

Thank God, this first year's process seems to be unfolding in helpful ways. We base our assessment partly on people's feedback, and partly by observing dynamics.

Team meetings are prayerful... honest... open... supportive... Team members feel strongly committed to their task, to the Presbytery, and to one another.

Somewhere above 65 people have taken part, at least once, in a SPAT-designed event -- not counting the two special meetings of Presbytery.

Whenever people turn out for SPAT events, they engage very well. We believe that conversations like these could not be possible in a normal parliamentary setting.

SPAT has enjoyed generous support from the Budget & Finance Committee, and also from the Synod Leader's budget.

Healthy, spiritual, community-building occurred during the Winter Retreat.

On paper, SPAT has fulfilled its original charge now: to develop both a process and timeline. C.f. the recommended summer sequence of convocations – which are subject to Presbytery approval on June 5.

CONCERNS

Despite various attempts at inclusion, we feel disappointed over the number of congregations, clergy, and new worshipping communities who either have not participated or have barely participated in the SPAT process thus far. We worry about feelings of disenfranchisement if and when the presbytery moves on toward making decisions.

Significant troubles remain regarding Presbytery's communal dynamics. These feelings and perceptions have developed over long periods; they will not disappear in just 1 year.

We continue to see significant differences of opinion regarding what Presbytery should be, should do, and how to do it. The May 8 event underscored this fact again – and ironically, it was supposed to concentrate on grounds for agreement!

FORECAST

In the short term, we strongly believe that conversations must take place along the lines we are proposing. The 4 particular events we propose (2nd Tuesdays at Stillwater) constitute a skeleton. These can be supplemented or replicated anytime, anywhere.

In the long term – no matter when Presbytery decides that discernment is over, and it's time to adopt a staffing plan – a need will remain for the kind of work SPAT has been doing: Spiritual renewal... Community building... Conversation around difficult topics... Listening... Inclusion... Apart from such commitment, no staff model or staff person(s) can be successful very long. So, how will this fit with our organizational structure?