

END-of-SUMMER REPORT to ALBANY PRESBYTERY

Sept. 15, 2018

Staffing Process Advisory Team (SPAT)

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I] Findings from open convocations at Stillwater

May 8 – *What can we all agree upon that we should look to Presbytery for?*

1. Help with transitions, particularly changes in leadership
2. Networking of ideas, talents, and resources (important especially to small congregations)
3. Pastoral care and emergency support for people in leadership
4. Prompt, responsive attention to inquiries and crises
5. Opportunities to experience spiritual renewal
6. Book-of-Order functions: discipline, accountability, prep for ordination, etc.

June 12 – *What might a stronger presbytery look like?*

[Discussing practical ways to implement priorities from May 8.]

1. Develop and train a team to specialize in transitional support for congregations.
2. Identify where the greatest energies lie.
3. Give struggling congregations permission to close. Engage that process actively. Honor it. Provide support to grieving members. Help the bereft make new starts elsewhere.
4. Proactively acquaint congregations with resources available thru higher councils – don't just wait for them to ask.
5. Plant and/or resource new communities: worshiping and/or missional.
6. Offer a traveling presence: leadership visits, even a mobile office.
7. Make deliberate decisions to undertake new approaches.

July 10 – *Staffing: What roles do we see as most important?*

[Viewing staff as a whole, not necessarily one person.]

This event was co-hosted by SPAT and the Personnel Committee.

1. Represent the presbytery when and where needed – which includes visiting congregations and/or preaching on Sundays
2. Pastoral care for teaching elders and other leaders
3. Visioning skills
4. Communication skills, along with skill in communication technology
5. Support for networks among congregations – also linking them to synod/national levels
6. Office, administrative & financial support
7. Stated Clerk functions: necessitated by the Book of Order
8. Someone to answer questions and make good referrals: for counseling, coaching, etc.

August 14 – *Finance: What is our optimal investment in staff?*

This event was co-hosted by SPAT and the Budget & Finance Committee. Many of the notes below derive from a background presentation given by B&F.

1. People approach financial decisions with attitudes shaped by family history and personal experience. Levels of risk tolerance can vary within a group.
2. For the last several years, Albany Presbytery has been running annual deficits around \$55,000.
3. Expense levels have not declined at the same pace as membership and giving -- that is, 14.3% from 2014 to 2018.
4. Over the last several years, Albany Presbytery has withdrawn from assets an amount roughly equal to investment income.
5. This year, at the end of June, Presbytery was running a modest financial surplus. The first six months of 2018 featured unusually low expenses.
6. Personnel's 2018 share of the budget comes to about 39%.
7. 2019 Budget requests arising from committees would result in total expense of \$444,361 – compared with projected income of \$402,564. That projected income already includes \$85,100 from investments: the 3-year avg return.
8. Budget & Finance Committee is now considering a balanced "2019 Target Budget" in the amount of \$402,564. (No projected deficit.)
9. In the "Target Budget," Personnel costs total \$157,395 – equaling the current (2018) experience plus a 2% cost-of-living increase.
10. The "Target Budget" also anticipates staff members working from home. Our current office leased in Troy will not be available after Dec. 31, 2018.
11. Also needed to achieve "Target" balance: a collective reduction of \$41,797 in first-round budget requests arising out of committees.
12. The B&F committee may offer another proposal to Presbytery on Sept. 15, in view of tonight's convocation. Final action is anticipated for November.
13. When the 21 convocation participants broke out into small groups to discuss our optimal investment in staff, 1 group recommended holding to the Target Budget amount: \$157K. The other 6 groups preferred allocating an average of 48% to Personnel (i.e., \$193,000, based on \$402,000 income.)
14. Increases to Personnel beyond the \$157K Target Budget amount will require either or both of two things: [a] further reduction in committee expense; [b] higher draws upon assets and investments.
15. The latter [17b] approach is not sustainable over a long run. Some organizations do choose to take this approach for limited periods with defined goals or measures.
16. A lot of presbyteries face choices similar to ours.
17. Growth in Albany's vitality, and giving, cannot be fully a staff responsibility.

September 11 – *Relationships: How can we better support on another?*

Ruling Elder Terry Diggory (Saratoga Springs) will lead this final convocation and will offer a verbal report at Brunswick on September 15.

II. Readiness to move forward on staffing decisions

SPAT believes that Albany Presbytery is ready. We do not predict unanimous decisions! We observe very real differences in the body over expectations and priorities. We note with concern that “insider/outsider” perceptions persist – as they have for a long time.

But we do see improvement since June of last year, when our team was created by the Coordination Committee. Much of this improvement derives from prayer and from attention to Presbytery’s communal life. Specifically:

- Two special meetings of Presbytery held for collaborative conversations
- A half-day workshop in which to process the report of the Synod Administrative Review Commission (SARC)
- Two overnight spiritual retreats at Christ the King Center
- Five open convocations at Stillwater
- Personal visits and encounters by SPAT members with various stakeholders

To sustain and build on this type of improvement, we recommend (separate document) the formation of a “Koinonia Team.” While that action may or may not require formal vote, our commitment to transparency compels us to share it.

Meanwhile, let it be noted:

- a) The SARC report recommendation about a skilled Interim Presbyter has, in our opinion (seconded by the Synod Leader) been rendered moot. The course of activities offered by SPAT has made significant progress toward the very goals the SARC had envisioned.
- b) Synod does not require any formal Albany response to the SARC report.
- c) As reported previously: Dan Rogers, Kate Kotfila, & Ted Wright met on Feb. 9 with the Synod’s Administrative Committee to give a progress report and to answer questions. At that time, we conveyed Albany’s disappointment over how the SARC report had named individuals. We were well received.
- d) SPAT was not charged to recommend a staffing model – only a “process and timeline” by which Albany Presbytery might approach staffing decisions. Our members do have personal opinions, but we are not expressing them here.
- e) We have worked in dialogue with both the Personnel Committee and the Budget & Finance Committee, to help coordinate approaches. These two groups can and should take the lead. We find both committees to be cooperative, knowledgeable, and dedicated to the Great Ends of the Church.
- f) We have undertaken our particular share of the work based on values of inclusion, transparency, and Christ-centeredness.
- g) We believe that God’s will in complex matters is best discerned through collaborative, worshipful conversations. Parliamentary settings don’t work so well; they’re better suited to action than understanding.
- h) Having come through the sequence of events listed above, we (SPAT) believe we have now fulfilled our mandate.
- i) If the Coordination Committee wishes to retain us longer, it should clarify what further it seeks.