

April 30, 2018

The Synod of the Trinity Review

RE: In response to Item 05-01 from the 222nd General Assembly (2016), urging Synods "to undertake an intentional system of review and self-study and to report to General Assembly on a bi-annual basis."



The Synod of the Trinity has recently adopted John and Miriam Carvers' Policy Governance approach to assist in maintaining appropriate relationships with the 16 presbyteries¹ of the Synod and to guide it in enacting relevant regional ministries together.

We are still learning this new way of being but have felt comfortable enough with it for the past 18 months to conclude that we are moving over the hurdle of initial implementation.

Policy Governance requires us to understand presbyteries as owners of the Synod as well as primary beneficiaries of its work and ministry. Life for us is a constant conversation between the presbyteries (and through the presbyteries, the congregations) and the synod commissioners, leadership and staff as we listen for ministry wants, needs and future.

Our commissioners and Governing Commission have the responsibility to take their listening and develop primary and secondary ends that guide the work of staff, advisory teams and task groups. In October 2017 the Synod Assembly reviewed and confirmed the continuation of our current ends (purposes), and in November 2017 the Governing Commission designated three of the ends for special emphasis in the coming year.

The Synod's *primary* end is:

As part of the Body of Christ, the Synod of the Trinity, through the responsible use of shared resources, supports and challenges member Presbyteries to be vital, innovative, and faithful in their collaborative and distinctive callings.

The *secondary* ends of the Synod are (bolded ends have been emphasized for the work of the Synod by the Governing Commission):

- **Connecting presbytery leadership for coordination, spiritual support and sharing best practices.**
- **Encouraging innovation in, between and among presbyteries through the use of human, programmatic and financial resources.**
- Providing services of education and nurture as requested by member presbyteries.
- Extending partnership of member presbyteries in joint and shared mission and ministry.
- Nurturing relationships within the larger church for the purpose of greater witness.
- **Fostering conversation and action for the promotion of social righteousness.**

¹ Presbyteries of Beaver-Butler, Carlisle, Donegal, Huntingdon, Kiskiminetas, Lackawanna, Lake Erie, Lehigh, Northumberland, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Redstone, Shenango, Upper Ohio Valley, Washington and West Virginia.

In addition to reviewing and affirming, changing or replacing the secondary ends, the Assembly and Governing Commission review the work of the transitional synod executive each year to determine whether or not the executive has maintained the fiscal and administrative responsibilities required, and to see if the executive has pursued implementation of the ends through the work of staff, task groups etc. We are still refining what this regular monitoring will look like but in general are pleased with the way that the ends are being used to develop the work of the Synod.

What we learned at the end of the first full year, October 2016 to October 2017:

1. We are doing a good job of training the 10 members of the Governing Commission for their work. At each of its four yearly meetings, moderator and staff configure a meeting that allows time for necessary governance tasks, deep conversation about an aspect of culture and ministry in our region, and consideration of how we continue to enhance the ongoing conversation with the presbyteries, both in their role as owners and as beneficiaries of our work. GC members express their own personal growth through this process and their deepening ability to *see* what might be across a broad region. They articulate how their time spent to understand and serve the broader church has helped them in their congregations *back home as well as in their connection to their presbyteries*.
2. Supporting the full complement of commissioners into their new roles has not been easy. There are two aspects of the commissioner role – governor and liaison – and the two are not completely separate. For our work of governance to be as rich as possible, commissioners must come into service with an awareness of their own presbytery, its ministry context, its strengths and places of needs. They must then be able to engage in discerning conversations that consider the larger region, including but not limited to their own. As a liaison, they are to continually be alert for local information that would benefit the work of the Synod, Synod/regional information that needs to be shared back home, and an eye towards their colleague commissioners for possible networking and partnership. We struggle to deal with folks who do not have sufficient internet skills to stay in helpful connection and those for whom these expectations may feel like too much work. We are testing the kind of training and ongoing conversations/gatherings that will help commissioners embrace their role and the possibilities in it, but we are not yet where we want to be. We continue to share our commissioner job description with the presbyteries in order to help them select those who might best serve. In addition, we have asked presbyteries to make room for Synod Commissioners at their leadership tables in order for commissioner awareness to be raised and that is beginning to happen more frequently.
3. The executive has taken significant steps with the staff to shift from work simply being done because it always has been done, to work being done because of the ends and in ways that meet the ends. Initially this felt like turning the proverbial battleship, but as staff have learned to breathe the ends, new strategies and possibilities for implementation are emerging.

4. The Synod of the Trinity embraced virtual meeting possibilities beginning in 2010 and began to experiment with that using WebEx and encouraged the presbyteries to borrow and test the synod service. With the advent and ease of Zoom, virtual work is a regular occurrence across the Synod and even some of our most technologically timid can see the benefit. Recently during the month of snow storms in the Northeast, an entire Governing Commission meeting was successfully spread over the course of two days using Zoom. Leadership carefully reworked the meeting for the online modality and the GC members were delighted. All of the work got done and everyone actively participated.

Some key work completed/in process includes:

- Partnering with the Community Responders Network in Harrisburg to video three skits around bias that will be put out on YouTube with brief study guides for use by anyone.
- Special support during our 300th anniversary year for global mission and mission partnerships. Grants to presbyteries served:
 - As seed money for matching funds to South Sudan in the face of the food crises.
 - To develop CRE resources in a partnership with a Dakota presbytery.
 - To enhance a medical clinic in Ghana.
 - To rebuild homes in Haiti.

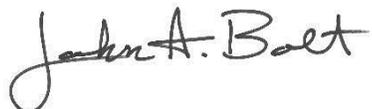
Special support during our 300th anniversary year for Freedom Grants to congregations in small cities for ministry with predominately African American male populations.

- Renewed and revised process for grants supporting the next generation through campus ministry. Instead of funding campus ministry directly, the Synod will fund presbyteries to fund a particular ministry. The desire is to develop relationship and partnership between the presbytery and the campus, potentially increasing funds and those who will enact the ministry.
- Several presbyteries who have moved beyond traditional leadership models have received grants for process consultation as well as ongoing Synod leadership presence to enhance their work and help them to be mindful that they do not do this change work alone. For many this is a first awareness that their future may be in a different kind of connection to and with others than they have had in the past.
- Renewed and expanded emphasis on Synod-wide communications, telling the stories of our presbyteries and congregations, seeking the unique and life-changing experiences of faithfulness and balancing our press to include the whole region and not just those who are the loudest and most active. This area of continuing growth was set in motion in 2014 with the hiring of a fulltime communications staff person. This role is now moving out to include training for presbyteries when desired and the expansion of synod *ears* to intentionally include others who will participate in listening for stories and information and developing stories and resources to share across the region.

Even at more than 300 years old, the Synod of the Trinity is reinventing itself to be a faithful, 21st Century expression of the connectional church, building on a strong foundation created at the beginnings of American Presbyterianism but remaining cognizant of the challenges of a world where organized religion – especially Christianity – is viewed with suspicion in many corners, including those where future growth must originate.

The Synod is not “rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic,” but turning to new technologies, new expressions of mission, new structures and organization, to fulfill its calling as a part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Synod leadership is confident in its future, even while not being entirely sure what it will look like.

Respectfully Submitted,



Ruling Elder John A. Bolt
2018 Synod Moderator



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