Report for The Council
Focus Groups and Feedback Sessions in the
Presbytery of Cincinnati
2004

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Focus Groups and Feedback Sessions in the Presbytery of Cincinnati, 2004

12 focus groups were conducted in the Presbytery of Cincinnati during May and June of 2004. The original plan was for pastors, DCEs and CLPs to be the only participants of the focus groups. Input from elders was to come from a mailed survey. Council received a number of requests that elders be included in focus groups as well and decided to make that adjustment. In the end, some of the groups had only pastors, CLPs and DCEs. In other groups, pastors and elders met together.

A total of 54 pastors, CLPs and DCEs participated and 40 elders, making for a grand total of 94 participants. 14 listening sessions with standing groups in the presbytery were then conducted in August of 2004. Attendance was not kept at those meetings, so there is not a record of the number of total participants. The numbers at each meeting ranged from one person designated to speak for the committee to around 10 people present.

This report constitutes a compilation of responses from the focus groups and the listening sessions. At the time of writing, the survey mailed to all elder surveys was not back yet. Results from that process will be added at a later date.

I. FOCUS GROUPS
What follows is a summary of the comments made during the 12 two hour focus group sessions. The full listing of comments can be found in Appendix B as well as the script for the process.

A. Strengths of Congregations in the Presbytery of Cincinnati

The groups began with initial sharing around strengths in the congregations. While these comments were not officially recorded, some examples can be cited, including: good Sunday school for adults, a strong sense of caring among the members, parish nurses, a variety of worship opportunities, after school programs to disadvantaged children, tutoring programs, youth programming. Everyone present in each group had something positive to say about their church.

B. Challenges of Congregations in the Presbytery of Cincinnati

Following that opening round of sharing, the focus group participants were asked to identity the challenges facing their congregations. They related a broad range of challenges. Comments are compiled under eight themes, arranged by how often and how much that theme surfaced (the themes most mentioned often are listed first).

1. Culture of the Congregation
Every group made many comments on the culture of the congregation. The dynamic most often commented on was the focus on institutional survival, which was experienced in an inward focus and concern for church 'my way.' For many, the issue of declining membership was also a high concern; some had gotten to the point of being 'defeated by their size.' Other participants reported struggles with growing memberships and the difficulty in integrating new people into the system. Issues related to the age of the membership surfaced a lot as well. For some, an

aging membership put a strain on the system. For others, it was the fact of the missing generation (roughly from the 20's and 30's) and the resulting split (and inferred conflict) of the other age groups. Issues of church size surfaced a number of times, either in reference to liking the small church atmosphere or to the presence of the conflicting desire for 'small church feel but large church program.' The resistance to change among members was mentioned a number of times, either out of fear of change in general, or a desire for stability in a sea of change. Many reported on the difficulties they were facing in keeping old and new members happy. The pull of tradition or the 1950's came up a few times as well. Other issues raised, though not as often as the previous ones described, include: racism, poor self-image, conflicting desires (we want those kids but not they way they dress!), trying to be everything to everyone, lack of excitement, poor communication, lack of biblical knowledge.

2. Leadership Issues Within the Congregation
Every group also mentioned in one way or another issues related to the leadership of the congregation. The top issues mentioned most often: lack of a vision or a strategic plan, leader burn out, inability to find new leaders, and 'death by committee.' In many churches, older, long-time leaders yearn for younger leaders to step up, which they are not. "How do we connect with young adults?" was asked with a sad acknowledgement that they were not doing so. Struggles with conflict surfaced a number of times, either around different styles of worship, or related to fear and fallout from past trauma. Some comments about the state of the leaders included: weak, closed, too busy running the church, looking inward, longing spiritually.

3. 21st Century Culture
Every group also mentioned dynamics that reflect the reality of the world in which congregations must live and serve. The most often cited issue was that of competition from the culture. So much is going on in people's lives and church rarely seems to come first. This pressure results in sporadic attendance, the 'one hour on Sunday syndrome' if people do come, difficulties in setting meeting times, and difficulty in recruiting volunteers. Another form of competition was mentioned in the growing presence of mega churches in many neighborhoods with a concern that they made the Presbyterian church look boring and irrelevant. Other comments were made about cultural trends that the church is having difficulty dealing with: the developing 'cafeteria style' religious culture, the technological society, and a more complex religious scene.

4. Community Issues
Neighborhood issues surfaced in every group as well. Participants most often cited the difficulty in dealing with a changing neighborhood especially where the neighborhood was changing into something different than the congregation. In some cases, older members still live near the church while younger members have moved out or never moved in. In others, hardly anyone in the church lives in the community anymore. A few groups raised the issue of over-churched neighborhoods. Some also mentioned dealing with community problems, like crime or alcohol and drug abuse.

5. Financial Issues
Most of the groups mentioned the problem of not having enough money to support the budget. Declining membership, aging stewards and lack of creativity were cited as part of the income

problem. Debt service and the increasing cost of doing church were cited as part of the expense problem.

6. Building Issues
Related to money is the building. Most groups mentioned at least once the problem of old and outdated buildings that cost too much to run, much less revamp for today's ministry needs. Some congregations face challenges with their location, others with learning how use their space in a variety of ways.

7. Staffing Issues
Many comments about staff emerged in connection to money. Churches are faced with not having the money for the staff they need and current staff are stretched thin. When the money was there for staff, difficulties in finding or attracting clergy were mentioned. Pastoral expectations are climbing at the same time that respect for the position of pastor is declining. A few comments were made about a decline in the availability of people with the right mix of gifts. One comment was made about the limits put on the CLP position at a time when it is hard to find good leadership.

8. Relationship to the Presbytery
Most of the groups also cited the relationship to the presbytery (or the denomination as a whole) as an on-going challenge. Highest on the list was the impact of the on-going discussion over ordination standards and homosexuality. Participants spoke of members leaving or visitors not returning over news of the latest bout in the fight (nationally or regionally). This experience cut both ways. The next most mentioned issue was the lack of connectionalism among both members and visitors.   Some of this seemed caused by the culture in general; the rest by negative past relationships with the presbytery, characterized by these kinds of comments: 'being ignored or ostracized by presbytery,' 'the smaller church feels like presbytery just wants their land,' 'presbytery process takes so long,' 'them versus us.'

Participants were asked to prioritize the greatest challenges facing congregations. The following themes surfaced most often: burnout; aging membership; resistance to change; fear of conflict; lack of vision; a yearning and need for something deeper; attracting, retaining, and incorporating new people; the difficulty in connecting across certain divides, especially age and socio-economic differences; leadership needs; denominational issues and connectionalism in a congregational culture.

C. Possible Roles for a Presbytery

Focus group participants were asked to think theoretically about the role of a presbytery. The comments cited are summarized below, grouped in eight themes.

1. Supporting and Resourcing Congregations
Every group made numerous comments about the role of presbytery in nurturing its congregations. The desire for support was strong, often spoken about with phrases such as 'work with,' maintain solid contact with,' 'empowering', 'understanding and valuing.' A related issue

was the need for help. Over and over, comments were made about the presbytery providing resources for its congregations, with references made to 'written and human resources', 'evaluation', 'training,' 'information.' Ideas about an attitude of servant hood on the part of presbytery were also present. Specific areas for where this help was needed were also offered, none repeated as often as just the plea for help. These areas include: conflict, spiritual growth, evangelism, theology and worship, vision setting, strategic choices such as 'leave / die / merge', community issues, church transformation. One group cited the desire for a place for congregations to hold retreats.

2. Fostering Partnership / Connection
Every focus group also spoke about the role of presbytery in the building and nurturing of networks and partnerships. This work was seen as needed in connecting people to people, churches to churches, and both to the resources they need to do effective ministry. Some of the comments focused on connecting to something larger in order 'to move beyond ongoing conflicts.' Adjectives about these connections included, 'trusted place to talk,' 'mutual building up,' 'common ground.' The desire for this connection to provide ways to do mission 'that congregations can't do on their own' was expressed often. Doing mission regionally, in a focused, engaged way was important to participants. Other related ideas that surfaced in this discussion include the importance of providing 'a meeting ground for diverse church people.' Specific ideas (mentioned only once each) that some participants wanted to see provided included creative worship together and outdoor ministry.

3. Providing a Regional Vision and Strategy
Almost every group spoke about the need for a presbytery to offer a 'clear, inspiring,' vision for 'being the church together.'   Presbytery as the connection to the larger church was repeated a number of times. Some comments revolved around presbytery providing regional public relations as well as being an 'area witness' for shared commitments. Some participants pointed out that presbyteries were responsible for strategic decisions regarding church location and starting new churches. Multiple comments surfaced about the need for communication in living out this function.

4. Fostering a Positive Atmosphere
Nine out of twelve groups included some sort of comment about presbytery's role in cultivating a 'healthy spiritual environment.' People thought that participation in the presbytery ought to be 'invigorating.' All the comments listed revolved around the desire for energy, encouragement and dynamism. Some specific suggestions made towards fostering such an atmosphere included: 'become transparent,' 'be invisibly effective,' 'listen to concerns and meet needs,' 'drop theological agendas,' 'encourage discernment rather than win-lose debate,' 'model transformed values.' One group specifically mentioned the importance of 'lifting up Christ.'

5. Gate-keeping and Providing Oversight
Seven out of twelve groups mentioned the need for supervision and oversight. One set of comments often repeated was about oversight of pastors and congregations, including work on 'setting boundaries' and 'accountability.' The other set of comments made frequently focused on the role of presbytery in the process related to candidacy and calls. Presbytery was seen as being the body assuring the smooth functioning of calls / ordinations / transitions etc. Two

groups cited the role of providing conflict mediation. Two groups listed the need for presbytery to uphold the PC(USA) constitution.

6. Developing Leaders

A majority of groups included comments about the role of presbytery in cultivating and nurturing leaders – for both presbytery and congregational leaders. Participants spoke of 'educating' and 'training' leaders. A few comments were made about the role of encouraging more young people into the ministry.

7. Caring for Clergy

Six out of twelve groups made the same comment: 'support the pastors.' One group specifically wanted to see a 'pastor to pastors' provided by the presbytery.

8. Administration

Three out of twelve groups mentioned the role of providing administrative support for the functions of presbytery. things like 'statistics, paperwork, record keeping, insurance, legal matters, property matters' were raised, though one group registered a disagreement as to whether this was really important.

D. The Strengths of the Presbytery of Cincinnati

Focus group participants were asked to share those things they considered to be the strengths of the presbytery. Their comments are summarized in the following seven themes.

1. Staff

Most of the groups included the staff on their list of strengths. The complete list of comments was shared with the staff prior to the publication of this report. The staff was described as 'wonderful people,' 'good and dedicated,' 'helpful, accessible, friendly, supportive,' 'responsive,' 'efficient.' One group mentioned that it was good modeling to have a multi-cultural staff. Another group acknowledged that the staff is stretched too thin. A few references were made to specific people. One group listed the 'superb stated clerk' who gives strong parliamentary and constitutional help. Another comment was made about Yvette, who cares, as evidenced by her involvement with churches. Carol was mentioned as an example of all the office folk who offer good experiences to those who need help. The financial staff was mentioned as well. A few places of disagreement showed up in only two groups.   One group said it is a well organized staff and someone else in same group said it was not a well organized staff. Another group said the administrative staff was efficient and helpful and someone else in the group disagreed with this. In the same group, someone said that there were some caring personnel and nobody disagreed.

2. Leadership

Leadership surfaced as a strength in most groups as well. Most of the comments, repeated over and over, were about the talented pool of active leaders in the presbytery. Descriptors included: committed, caring, intense, capable, gifted, awesome. One group mentioned the influx of new, younger clergy who are bringing good ideas.

3. Atmosphere

Most groups made many comments on the culture of the presbytery. The most often cited strength was also the most contested. That contested strength is the willingness to tackle tough issues with respect. A number of comments were made about this process as evidence of a desire 'to do God's will and do the right thing.' Other comments made about the presbytery's atmosphere included these: it is 'permission-giving,' it worships well together, it 'keeps plugging along.' Friendliness was mentioned a few times, though in one of the times, someone else disagreed. One group said that it has untapped potential – that this presbytery has 'the capacity to be much better than we are.'

4. Organization

Most groups made some kind of comment about the organizational life of the presbytery, though none of the strengths mentioned were repeated a lot. The two areas of organizational life that received multiple comments were that of COM and communications. COM was described as 'strong' and 'helpful.' The use of administrative commissions came up two times -- one of those times, the group did not agree it belonged on the strength list. The availability of communications made the list in some form four times. Other strengths mentioned at least once by the groups included the fostering of clusters (helps people 'know one another'), the training of CLPs ('cutting edge'), the work of the CPM ('timely, proactive, responsive'), the trustees ('take their responsibility seriously.').

5. Diversity

Half the groups mentioned diversity as a strength in some form or other. The kinds of diversity cited included racial ethnic, theological, geographical, church size, ages. One group listed the comment that 'ethnic concerns are taken seriously.' Another cited the intention of the presbytery to be inclusive as a strength. This comment might best sum it up: we are 'hanging in with diversity so far.'

6. Geography

Four out of 12 groups mentioned geography as an strength – that this presbytery is a good size, not too small and not too large. More than one group, however, acknowledged that it feels too big to some folk.

7. Finances / Assets

Four out of 12 groups cited the presbytery's assets as strengths: its investments, its buildings, the office. One group had the strength 'fiscally sound' on the list, however not every one agreed.

E. The Challenges Facing the Presbytery of Cincinnati

The focus group participants were asked to identify those challenges this presbytery will face as it moves forward. In almost every group, these were more readily identified than the strengths. The comments from the groups are summarized in the following eight themes.

1. Atmosphere
Every group had a lot to say about the culture and the atmosphere of the presbytery. Among the concerns mentioned most often and in absolutely every group was some sort of comment about the lack of trust, or as one participant put it, 'a profound amount of distrust.' This distrust was described a few times as experienced in all the various relationships of a presbytery: church to presbytery and vice-versa, church to church, clergy to presbytery and vice-versa, clergy to clergy. Participants used a number of different descriptions that relate to the issue of trust. Those descriptions include: 'sarcasm', 'harshness', 'skepticism,' 'lack of respect and courtesy'. One person said that people were 'put in boxes.' Both liberals and conservatives were listed by one group as feeling put down and discounted. Tension between congregations and the presbytery was cited a number of times. Several groups mentioned a feeling of frustration and fatigue, that there was a 'lack of excitement,' that people were 'apathetic', 'zombied,' and 'going through the motions.' Another recurring comment was that the presbytery is resistant to change. Two groups mentioned that there was a culture of 'lack of support for pastors.' Other comments pertaining to atmosphere, but occurring only once each include: 'minister tend to dominate,' 'not decisive,' 'lack of organization.' 'not transparent.'

2. Strategy / Priority Setting
Every group also said a lot about strategy and organization. The concern most often mentioned was about a dysfunctional organization: 'cumbersome,' 'even squelches some life', 'too many committees.' One person asked, 'how much energy are we using to preserve the institution?' There was the recognition that the presbytery has attempted creative things, including the downsizing of council, but the prevailing feeling is that nothing has changed. Many participants mentioned that the presbytery is very reactive. Another oft-repeated comment was about the lack of a common vision or a common set of goals. A number of items were listed one or two times, many about some aspect of the work of presbytery that the speaker found to be lacking in focus or strategy. These include: support of pastors, new church development, new ideas for mission, small and declining churches, worship in Spanish, social justice, evangelism, education, spiritual formation, rural congregations, camp issue, youth and children, ecumenism.

3. Leadership
Every group also listed some sort of comment about leadership in the presbytery. The most common challenge cited was the difficulty in finding people to serve on presbytery committees and groups. Many attempts at explaining this problem were listed as well, including: long meetings, non-productive meetings, long commitments, people too busy at local church, apathy, fatigue, dissatisfaction from previous service. A few groups cited a general lack of leadership which came out in a lack of commitment and follow through. Finding new leaders, as in the congregations, surfaces as a challenge a number of times. A few comments were also made about how difficult it was to know where to turn for help.

4. Diversity
Nine out of twelve groups talked about diversity as a challenge. Numerous comments were made about the presbytery not being very inclusive, that 'some voices are not heard,' and that there is a 'lack of commonality and desire to come together.' The difficulty in negotiating the 'major division in theology' came up many times as well.

5. Finances / Assets
Most of the groups also made brief mention of the concern over money, that there is not enough money to do all that is needed to be done. A few elaborated, citing these concerns at least once: 'resources tied up in buildings', office building, churches withhold per capita.

6. Staff
Five out of twelve groups raised some aspect of the staff situation as a challenge. Comments regarding the current staff included that the presbytery is understaffed. Concern was raised that some people might be in the wrong positions. One challenge raised more than once was that it is 'impossible to find who is responsible for what.' One group listed that Yvette and the office staff were seen by some as not helpful or great. Comments about staffing in general included concerns about the new GP position. One group said that there needed to be GP time 'for pastoral care.' Another group said that there had been ineffective GP leadership built in to the system in the past.

7. 21st Century Culture
A few groups briefly acknowledged the changing culture as contributing challenges to the presbytery. Side-lining of the mainline church and cultural congregationalism were both mentioned.

8. Geography
Three out of 12 groups listed the size of the presbytery as a challenge, with distance being a problem.

F. What Might the Presbytery Do To Be Helpful
The focus group participants were asked to share ideas they had for how the presbytery might be more helpful in its work with the congregations. These ideas are arranged in the same order as the ideas generated under the discussion of the roles of a presbytery (see page 4.) Ideas that did not fit that list are at the end of this section.

1. Supporting and Resourcing Congregations
All but one of the groups had suggestions pertaining to the work of supporting the congregations. A number of comments referred to a strong resource center, even one with a 'traveling road show' approach to getting materials out to congregations! Some ideas cited related to staying connected: using triennial visits better and making sure folks who do visit congregations are trained well and understand the dynamics of the kind of church they are visiting. Some groups emphasized the way this work should be approached: 'not top down,' being 'bridge builders,' 'empowerment', being 'flexible.' Help for youth came up a few times. One comment made at one group suggested that the presbytery 'pick ONE thing on the list of challenges congregations are facing and focus on it.'

2. Fostering Partnership / Connection
Almost all of the groups also spoke about the help that making connections could bring. A number of comments were cited about networking the congregations so that they can help each

other. One participant asked how the presbytery could 'nurture partnerships for mission rather than doing it.' One image used was that of presbytery as 'broker.' Some specific ideas surfaced included having a mission fair or a presbytery mission work day.

3. Providing a Regional Vision and Strategy
Almost all of the groups made suggestions about the presbytery truly discovering and agreeing on a purpose and making commitments to 'clear and focused priorities.' A number of comments included the term vision but one group acknowledged that sometimes 'vision statements are meaningless.' Some examples of actions that might be used in accomplishing this surfaced including: 'study what other presbyteries have done,' start by listing what 'we must do' according to the Book of Order, do a 'historical study of how we did things,' and explore 'alternative ways of doing presbytery.'

4. Fostering a Positive Atmosphere / Community Building
Most of the groups also talked about ideas related to building healthy community in the presbytery. The most common idea was about developing 'effective communication.' Groups spoke of 'developing trust,' 'promoting togetherness', and being 'less dogmatic.' Various ideas were mentioned, such as: 'sit down at tables together', 'talk together about Jesus,' 'make structure representative of our diversity,' 'worship and sing together more, run 'small groups for spiritual nurture'.

5. Gate-keeping and Providing Oversight
Only two groups had anything about this issue on its list. One mentioned 'examining ministers on the floor' and having 'candidates preach.' Another spoke about creating a model for accountability for pastors.

6. Developing Leaders
Most of the groups mentioned something about leadership development. Most of the suggestions were about providing training, sometimes just generally mentioned, sometimes focused on a specific issue, such as: stewardship, visitor retention, worship, conflict resolution, generational issues, clerk of session. Two groups listed the idea of having a leadership training day. A number of ideas were about helping and enriching pastors: teaching 'pastors to talk about money,' 'pastoral care for pastors,' 'help them grow spiritually.' One group mentioned that the presbytery ought to learn how to 'use presbytery leadership positions to develop leaders rather than pay off folks.'

7. Caring for Clergy
Three out of twelve groups had ideas about this issue. A few cited the need for a pastor to pastors. Another mentioned the need for renewal opportunities for pastors.

8. Administration
Two groups made comments relating to this. One was that the presbytery should virtually disappear – meaning 'have a very low profile.' Another suggested the presbytery could 'use the website better.'

9. Staff
Three out of twelve groups had ideas about how to support the work of the presbytery through the staff. Some comments were about specific staffing needs: positions for church development or COM. One group suggested the presbytery 're-evaluate staffs role' as well as 'figure out the role of the GP.' One person made the suggestion of letting go of all current staff and starting again from scratch.

10. Organization
Five out of twelve groups made mention of something related to the organizational system that supports the work of presbytery. Overwhelmingly the comments were about streamlining and focusing. One group called it being 'lean and mean.' In terms of making that happen, specific ideas included: 'dump the drawer out and only put back what is needed,' take a 'hard look at what we really need to do, what not, and get rid of what not need to do.'

11. Meetings
Four out of twelve groups offered suggestions about the meetings. Ideas included: meeting outdoors, 'making meetings more interesting', 'meet less often', and 'experiment with more effective plenary meetings.'

12. Miscellaneous
These comments did not fit the categories above, at least at first analysis. Please feel free to assign them anywhere you would like! One person suggested that you 'rename the presbytery.' Another said to 'stop funding synod.' Another wanted the presbytery to 'give CLP the vote.'

G. What Else Would You Like the Council to Know?

Most of the comments in response to this last questions repeated the themes heard already. The only new topic addressed was this process. Most participants were encouraged by the focus group meetings and the process in general. At the same time, a number of people expressed disbelief that anything new would happen, saying 'if nothing comes out of this, let's not do it again.' Advice to the council about the process included: 'don't rush', 'think outside the box', 'don't stop forward progress while we wait for a big final report', 'get transformation done before get a GP', 'use clear communications'. One group cautioned that the answer was not in reorganization.

II. FEEDBACK SESSIONS

Council's original plan was to run the focus groups only. However, a few standing groups requested time to be heard. Council agreed to run listening sessions for any group that signed up. These notes are what came from the time with those groups. Each group was asked to share only that which they were okay having published in the presbytery under their group name.

We asked each group the same question – to share the issues they saw as confronting the presbytery, what they thought presbytery needed to pay attention to, what any comments they had on what they hoped to see in way of staffing and structure.

Each groups comments have been listed as reported. Reports are arranged in alphabetical order.

Blue Ribbon Panel

1. we feel we are a metaphor for the presbytery – have greatest potential and greatest problem
2. TRUST: either none or at least not enough
3. need for open communication: between committees/groups as well as to and from presbytery
4. too much power in individuals at times
5. don't have clearly defined roles and responsibilities for committees : esp. around money
6. there is not a unifying vision for the purpose of presbytery
7. severe division exist and show up when folks aren't planning on it: e.g. language around the capital campaign created huge division
8. there is not a working committee for Christian education at the presbytery level (lots of ad hoc groups and no staff)
9. there was no staff to this panel – did not decide whether that was good or not
10. need to resolve / decide: what actions can an individual or committee or group take without presbytery action? need to clarify for future decisions (their experience on this revolved around the proceeds from the sale of the Wildwood camp and money spent to take care of other debts)
11. this presbytery is not good at taking responsibility for its actions
12. how to overcome inertia without becoming reckless?
13. need to have the right people in the right jobs (i.e. not 'J' folks doing 'P' work and vice versa)
14. do we need to look at the scheduling of committee meetings – especially when more than one committee has to weigh in on a decision?
15. lots of energy is being put into 'ad hoc / short term' groups and the real committees have been undercut: how to get that energy into standing stuff
16. we feel we've done a good job of using the internet for communication – how about the presbytery? can't we do better?
17. each committee seems to work on their own thing – there is no cohesive calling or vision and we have avoided the issue of what our true unity / cohesiveness can be (unity in Christ)
18. need to learn to find win-win solutions
19. the issue of big churches who can afford to go do something on their own versus big and medium churches coming together and supporting ministry that the smaller churches can participate in too (e.g. presbytery-wide camp versus church camp owned by one congregation): gets at partnerships: it is in our current mission statement to do this but we have no meaningful way to do it
20. need to learn better how to celebrate our unity and the uniqueness of each congregation – we have not gotten past fighting and have not found common ground
21. how to deal with fear (an enemy of trust)
22. we have not figured out what unity in Christ means

23. comment on this process: use whatever special meetings of presbytery are needed to do this well

Clergy Women's Group

1. concern that some congregations, some members of COM, some clergy colleagues reluctant to acknowledge much less support clergy women and CLP's as equal leaders
2. presbytery not always sensitive enough about language in worship (inclusive language about people and / or about God) when this is the only time some folks might experience it
3. concern about a backlash against a feminist, collegial working pattern in among the staff
4. don't assume we must have a male GP because we have so many women on staff now
5. hope the new GP will not have a hierarchical style
6. consider a co-GP model
7. presbytery needs to discover ways to be pro-active about working with congregations on issue that come with smaller size or rural locations: low-pay, part-time, isolation
8. pay attention to redevelopment as well as transitional dynamics: take needs of the congregation seriously
9. need presbytery leaders (volunteer and staff) who understand the complexity of the dynamics of organizational change and how to work with congregations that might need to face change
10. would like to see COM trained and equipped for effective organizational change work
11. pay attention to issues around interim pastors: part or full time, pay level – learn to work well with congregations on these
12. train the COM on the role of clergy women interpreters in the PNC process
13. what about having CLP interpreters? Interim interpreters?
14. don't lose sight of the sexual misconduct prevention policy stuff –
15. need a directory of who is doing what – no one knows anymore!
16. explore ways to empower / encourage / support clergy in finding support
17. financial support for continuing education for those in lower paying positions: also ideas and networking
18. continue looking at representation issues on various committees
19. it's a shame that the Christian education and youth stuff on presbytery level is being done by volunteer group
20. does presbytery need to look at the disparity of salaries between head of staff and associates?

Committee On Ministry

1. concern over the care of pastors: need consistent, dependable, predictable way to be sure pastors are supported (various ideas for this were mentioned: staff person (like used to have), retired clergy person to be pastor to pastors)
2. EPC does well as can – have deacons, but still might need some kind of coordinating person
3. in some situations pastors want to talk to another pastor
4. sometimes the deacon is not the right 'match'
5. what happens when pastors then needs the COM in on the issues: there is a distinction between personal care versus congregational stuff

6. many people do not know what EPC has to offer
7. EPC is at the COM meeting – good thing
8. need on-going training of COM and triennial visit folk
9. how build trust so that relationships between individual churches / pastors and presbytery are strong?
10. perception of presbytery is that 'we major in the minors' – where are we when they are hurting?
11. presbytery work asks folks to cut into their own congregational time – what do we do about that?
12. we are scrambling for members of the committee (this true all across the board)
13. how might we use smaller teams
14. need better use of the expertise have at hand: financial, group dynamics, conflict mediation etc.
15. our structure does not deal with the process problems we have: they are cross –functional
16. need clarity on: Book of Order requirements, Presbytery of Cincinnati policies
17. how address what is not currently addressed?
18. should we evaluate why we have so many Administrative Commissions? probably
19. how be preventive rather than reactionary
20. are we struggling to maintain something that is going under?
21. presbytery needs a clear mission and that we all know and say yes to
22. need inter and intra committee communication: COM and EPC, CPM, Trustees, cluster, ECD
23. make presbytery meetings fun
24. pay attention to orientation of new clergy
25. really hard to get list of trained, available interims
26. process of filling vacant positions takes too long – is cumbersome and how good is our track record? evaluate this

Eastern Area Council

1. folks out here do not identify with the name of Cincinnati – might we change the name? issue behind this is that they are not part of Cincinnati nor even greater Cincinnati in mind set
2. we experience the presbytery trying to pull us in and push us away
3. presbytery will not give CLPs the vote on the floor – consequently CLPs less likely to make the long trek in and then elders less likely to come as well
4. presbytery did come out and try and sell team/parish/cooperative ministry (shared leadership) and churches did not want to touch it
5. is a difficulty in getting churches to consider different paradigms: grows out of history of independence
6. presbytery has ruled out CLPs serving a yoked parish
7. presbytery has ruled out CLPs serving along side a pastor – limits cooperative leadership options out there.
8. mixed messages from presbytery: think outside the box, but puts limits on that
9. this area suffers from all the typical small church issues: difficulty in attracting and retaining clergy, running a Sunday school, having youth ministry, aging members

10. concern over churches looking outside the PCUSA system for leadership
11. need better relations between churches and COM – but COM needs to take the initiative
12. COM perceived as police and enforcer
13. perception is that presbytery committees and staff want to close all small churches
14. presbytery has been supportive of the EAC
15. if you have not grown up in Appalachia or really understand it, you don't get it
16. the big question is how to bridge that divide?
17. dealing with poverty in the countryside
18. we need an NCD half way between Mt Orab and Sardinia
19. need to find ways to empower people who feel powerless
20. celebrate that EAC is doing co-operative ministry to a certain degree and doing it well

Equipping and Pastoral Care

1. need better working relationship with COM – lines of communication not good
2. EPC rep goes to COM meetings, might need to do reverse?
3. can cite examples of pastor not contacting deacon or asking for help
4. can cite examples of COM not communicating to EPC a pastor might be needing support
5. concern about deacons relationship to pastor – is it superficial? not taken seriously? why is that?
6. staff would be helpful: used to have full time (dedicated?) person in Wayne
7. turnover does affect ability of deacons to do their job
8. training important – not happening as much now
9. also knowing what is the role and limit of deacon's work: not counselors, yet…
10. confidentiality issues
11. staff needs: two different kinds: coordination and connecting which is different than actually doing the pastoral care
12. we do co-opt people but have no connection with them
13. have folks who want to help without being a deacon
14. how do we know who needs what level of care?
15. only pastors in churches get deacons
16. recognize that subgroups of this group have different levels of need for support and help
17. explore model once had: conflict team with staff: work to be invited in to situations that are brewing trouble: proactive: included extensive training, connection … eventually became so passive that things have been left to deteriorate in congregations too long
18. how deal with conflict of interest: presence of pastors who have moved within presbytery on COM and COM clusters
19. use training handout better?
20. evaluate effectiveness of equipping conferences (Pastoral Institute)
21. lack of trust

Ethnic Church Affairs

1. hope presbytery is sincere about being inclusive
2. pay attention to minority-majority dynamics: how minority concerns get lost in process of tallying things (if not get majority of 'votes' it is lost)
3. why has the presbytery come to this point again – our track record in implementing what we say is not very good
4. we have not been serious about what we say
5. we as a presbytery have not done a good job of owning our diversity – talk it but not live it
6. we are primarily a suburban and rural presbytery, so the urban churches feel left out
7. no urban strategy so we have to keep validating ourselves
8. about this process: after the two presbytery meetings, will there be further opportunity for dialogue in the data and results? please keep coming back to the groups
9. need an action plan this time
10. consider the need for pastoral nurture: what about a pastor to pastors on the staff
11. concern over the budgeting process – last few years it has changed such that the committees are not represented – mission committee has been ignored – appearance is that each year more money is taken from the mission partner congregations and either redistributed elsewhere or put into salaries
12. 'partner' does not mean recipient: what should drive presbytery is the ministry and mission, not the declining dollars
13. mission partners are competing for the pot of money that presbytery holds: on display and have to perform – a demeaning position to be in
14. the budget shows our priorities: what are they?
15. what is the process for deciding what groups or issues to get involved with or taking a stand on an issue?
16. leaders through out our system need to be trained in trans-cultural group development (i.e. how to work with groups that are racially or ethnically mixed to keep the majority from inadvertently sidelining the minority) – keep that in mind for the September and November presbytery meetings
17. no validation for the council of urban churches
18. who the GP is matters – esp. in terms of their ability to be trans-cultural and model and teach that across the board
19. what ever happened to the idea of putting the funds from the sale of urban churches into urban ministry and church development?
20. communication is essential
21. it is time to recognize and value for real the diversity here
22. time to prove you mean it
23. people have withdrawn because they are tired of the same old, same old
24. plan for a process of continual feedback on this transition process
25. be flexible
26. build meaningful and real relationships
27. who is missing from these group discussions? the young adults
28. trust level is very low

Evangelism and Church Development

1. we need and want a staff person who works on this area: conversations and plans had been laid but were put on hold with the transition time
2. we are starting to revitalize this committee
3. we have a daunting task and can we really do the ground-breaking work necessary? and what would that work really be?
   we need a way of knowing where each church is: growing / plateau / declining – health?
4. need to be thinking bigger than currently are
5. some way to have committees interact
6. need streamlining
7. maybe a joint committee chairs meeting help
8. need to go to the churches with some kind of organized campaign for folks to serve on this level
9. hard to say more without presbytery having a vision and direction
10. how do we reach populations we are not currently reaching?
11. how do we effectively use grant money?
12. how do we effectively equip churches?
13. are there things being done that are not effective we need to stop?

Justice for Women

1. have become very active in area of Domestic Violence especially in the region
2. are better received regionally than in this presbytery
3. see this as the huge need of this presbytery: finding an approach together that is mutual and not adversarial
4. overriding sense that such a shift would be most important work that faces presbytery
5. see the need for the voice of this committee as critical as advocating and training for mutual ways of working together is our speicalilty
6. yet, hard to find people for this committee
7. support from staff was strong until Jean retired – not so good now
8. in transition to new chair, have lost ground in recruiting new members
9. use us – we think we can be helpful in the work we must all face together
10. possible idea: have a JFW advocate on each committee instead of in own enclave

Mission

1. what do we do about the continued downward trend of financial support for mission?
2. many people in the pews think that mission is the most important part of the work presbytery does
3. need to pay attention to the continued trend of designated giving
4. definition of mission varies
5. still experience support for Guatemala partnership

6. presbytery values its connection to mission partner congregations, even though they give less money
7. mission money is kind of the 'what's left' category
8. presbytery has a hard time deciding priorities
9. mission partner congregations are carrying out many of the priorities that presbytery said it wanted to do
10. communication is a problem – knowing what the money is doing
11. we need to look at denominational as well as non-denominational agencies who get money
12. would like to see participation by supporting partners in mission partner churches in person
13. concept of mission in presbytery has been marginalized – budget setting a good example: we do not participate in the discussion much less the decisions about financial priorities because do not sit on council and they do not invite us
14. frustrated in way we establish partnerships with ministry partner congregations but then can't help move them to having a vital congregational presence
15. we have maintenance partnerships really
16. absence of leadership – we focus on maintaining 'the umbilical cord' not developing leadership
17. constituent congregations unaware of what is being done
18. need the newsletter again
19. see a trend of more and more congregations not even wanting to be connected to the good that the PC(USA) is doing
20. people not pay attention at presbytery meetings if their agenda not on the docket
21. lack of central communication
22. no voice at presbytery since council sets agenda – forgets mission a lot or puts it at the end a lot
23. where is the opportunity for dialogue about priorities, not just 'shared pain' of budget cuts – not sure it is happening anywhere
24. dogmatic leadership may have been a problem in past – legacy of bad feelings in some cases
25. presbytery thinks churches are here to serve the presbytery rather than presbytery here to serve the churches – if we take that seriously, then our job as mission committee is to work with congregations to help them do mission
26. maybe need to work more closely with evangelism committee
27. our model is sending money from organization to organization – do we want to create hands on experiences?
28. have not had time or moments to relate across structural divisions
29. there is no shared vision
30. what about mandatory joint meetings to facilitate communication?
31. there is no systematic way of sharing information

Personnel

1. need to look at other models at other presbyteries for patterns of staffing and structure
2. heard desire for pastor to pastors at program level
3. we need to answer this question: do we need staff presence at every committee?
4. council needs to be enlarged

5. there is a perception that COM needs to do more to help pastor the pastors
6. might we utilize the specialized and retired clergy to help with pasturing the pastors?
7. feedback we have gotten about presbytery meetings: they are boring, some folks like the singing but not the worship
8. need small groups at presbytery for discussion
9. personnel networking on synod level might be helpful
10. we need to work with council on what amount of the budget will be available for all staff positions in the next 5 years and what that can get us
11. educate congregations and sessions on what presbytery is – use clusters for this maybe?
12. feedback from one PNC: needed more support from presbytery
13. chairs of committees need training
14. members of personnel know personnel stuff – not necessarily know specific presbytery protocol and process
15. hard to unearth history of personnel decisions
16. role of personnel committees is sometimes unclear and uncomfortable – complicated relationships between supervisor and committee
17. we would like to be more helpful to local congregational personnel committees
18. provide training to pastors on employment issues
19. we might research insurance information on lay employees for the churches

Presbyterian Youth Council

1. there is interest and need for youth connections across the presbytery (esp. for churches with smaller youth groups)
2. in our first year of activity – have had 100-150 kids at some events
3. really great as a youth to be able to meet folks from other churches and serve on this level and to have a voice
4. things got rolling with personal connections between youth leaders in a few churches
5. frustration that there was not support from presbytery level in way of staff
6. got recognition but the question is 'placement' in the system for connection and accountability
7. have no one place to meet – constantly searching out places to meet for the numbers we are starting to draw
8. should we be 'reporting to' or connecting with another group?
9. where do we go for help in finding places to house our events (esp as they get larger)?
10. now have graduates and nothing on the presbytery level for college / post-high school (though there is one campus minister, it is not enough)
11. PYC not a have a voice beyond itself – it is possible to have that? where?
12. need help in expanding leadership core because the program is growing so much
13. how does a grass roots, bubble up group become real?
14. how does a group like this one gain the support of presbytery?
15. how network the youth workers, might staff help?
16. communication
17. could use leadership development help: training, decent resources, ideas, curriculum, helping churches get groups started

18. PYC really promising – lots of youth out there
19. youth are the now of the church

Small Membership Church

1. two cultures at work in this presbytery – Cincinnati and rural
2. needs of rural congregations not same as suburban, urban etc and presbytery not seem attuned to those differences
3. we-they mentality
4. presbytery appears selective: slanted towards larger church
5. presbytery agenda seems to be to ignore the small church
6. maybe need to create meaningful dialogue between different elements of all this
7. is there an agenda? if so, share it
8. empower this committee to be force for change and support
9. need someone in leadership who advocates for smaller churches (some disagreement among members on whether had this in the past)
10. maybe we don't communicate what we need as well
11. many small congregations discount presbytery – makes relationship building difficult
12. lack of coordination between ECD and this group
13. this group could do more to help small churches find pastoral leadership – difficult issue to solve
14. a few examples of churches being told to close were shared – and resulting bad feelings towards presbytery
15. need to take seriously calling small churches to health
16. if target churches to close, need to be clear on the criteria – share them and dialogue about them
17. need to wrestle with wisdom of targeting to close churches and how do it
18. missing staff bridge
19. larger churches need training on how to help smaller churches
20. need more interaction and conversation
21. learn how to avoid the current situation of leadership vacuum (no GP) and being 'choked on Wildwood'
22. lack of financial transparency
23. we've lost our goodwill and respectful attitude used to have at meetings
24. how get members of small membership churches involved in presbytery level?
25. CLP's are only allowed to serve on committees as elders – yet the major vacancies on this committee are for clergy slots – why can't CLP's serve as clergy since are the spiritual leaders of their congregations?
26. presbytery web page not updated much

Stewardship

1. what to do about committee members who never come?
2. too large a number is needed on paper to do this job

3. only one clergy member attends regularly
4. we get excited and put resources together, then offer them to the pastors and not taken up as much as hoped would be
5. materials we provide just sit there
6. we see ourselves as a resource to stewardship chairs – how do we make a better connection with them?
7. stewardship is more than just getting in money and we need to teach this
8. we highlight the four denominational offerings – but are not sure if presbytery wants that
9. ever since reorganization, council is isolated from committees
10. our staff is really effective and responsive
11. have had fun and kept our spirits alive by finding creative ways of getting our message across at presbytery meetings
12. need to use technology more effectively
13. recently realized we could develop more resources for kids and youth
14. have a systemic problem in that clergy not help the congregation understand and use our connectional system
15. a greater number of smaller churches responded to our survey than larger churches
16. a large percent told us networking would be useful
17. how do we work with youth advisors to reach the youth?
18. we've asked ourselves if we are really needed? think so, but our message is either not being received or it is and we do not know it
19. how do we find our more about what individual churches think stewardship is?
20. we are all too busy
21. flaw in our system is that we do not pray together and don't really know each other
22. might be helpful is the staff person for Stewardship is the same as for Mission

Trustees
1. we keep feeling like we are the target of the anger and frustration in the system
2. we would like to have the members of presbytery know that we are all on the same team
3. the time it takes to make some decisions really bogs things down
4. need to know that we (trustees) are responsible for all of presbytery's assets and its financial health
5. past decisions and more recent ones do indeed affect the choices we know have
6. people need to speak carefully: check your facts and don't assume
7. need to define and clarify lines of authority
8. we have the 'when the cat's away' syndrome going on: people stepping into leadership vacuum (no GP) and working wrestling for 'their thing'
9. communication on what is happening at the presbytery level is nil
10. not using the tools of mass communication at our disposal: what about pro and con forums on the website; issue message boards, voices from the churches
11. need to make mission known better
12. need a strong GP: who can inform and communicate well, keep on eye on the whole, and not 'hold cards too close to the chest'
13. how do we have the Blue Ribbon Panel, the trustees and rest of presbytery act in collaborative way to sort out the Wildwood stuff?

14. it is difficult to find people to serve on this group: esp. with the skills we need in finance, law, facilities
15. might training the trustees help?
16. decision needs to be made (not by trustees) if presbytery is going to be in the camping business or not
17. seems to be energy in the short term groups rather than the long term ones
18. lack of trust in presbytery focused on us
19. transition in financial staff has meant the loss of history and in depth knowledge of the presbytery finances
20. major transition of every major player in this committee in 6 month time frame: treasurer, GP, and chair of trustees.
21. pay attention to the making of the docket for the meetings: if have big things, don't put them at the end
22. there is a lot of ascribing bad motives happening all over the place

APPENDIX A

Everyone who attended a focus group was invited to complete two grids which contained 20 words to describe the Presbytery of Cincinnati. 94 people handed in completed grids. The first grid represented how the participants feel about the Presbytery of Cincinnati now. The second grid represented how the participants feel the Presbytery of Cincinnati should be in the future. Each participant placed a checkmark in one of seven spaces for each item. Responses were coded from one to seven with a score of one as the most positive. The average of all responses was calculated for each item and the items placed in rank order from most positively evaluated to least positively evaluated (see Table 1).

In evaluating how the presbytery is now, none of the twenty descriptive words averaged 'one', the top score possible, or anything between 1 and 2. Only one of the twenty words landed in the 'positive' range (an average score of 2.0-3.5). That word is friendly. The seven descriptive phrases that participants placed in the 'neutral' range (an average score of 3.5-4.5) included: helpful, accessible, supportive, future oriented, organized, inclusive, and adequate resources. The remainder of the phrases landed in the negative range (an average of 4.5 or more).

The second column lists the rank order of items from the second grid, how participants feel the Presbytery of Cincinnati should be in the future. These items represent many of the kinds of attributes the participants most value in terms of the policies, practices, and programs of the presbytery. Since all the items are considered positive attributes for any organization, the scores are much higher than in the first grid for all items. The most highly valued attributes include: supportive, high quality, helpful, promotes dialogue, accessible and responsive.

Responses were analyzed to calculate the largest difference between average scores on how participants described the Presbytery of Cincinnati now and their description of what the Presbytery of Cincinnati should be like in the future. The rank order of differences between responses from the two grids from the largest to the smallest difference is shown in Table 2. The four phrase with the largest difference (over 3 points) were: active, reaches out, efficient, and exciting.

Listed below are words that might describe the Presbytery of Cincinnati. Note that the words on the same line have the opposite meaning. To the left, place a checkmark in one of the seven spaces that represents how you feel the Presbytery of Cincinnati IS NOW. Then do the rating on the right side for how you feel the Presbytery of Cincinnati SHOULD BE in the future.

Presbytery of Cincinnati IS NOW								Presbytery of Cincinnati SHOULD BE							

Helpful								Not helpful	Helpful								Not helpful
Accessible								Inaccessible	Accessible								Inaccessible
Friendly								Not friendly	Friendly								Not friendly
Cutting edge								Old fashioned	Cutting edge								Old fashioned
Responsive								Non-responsive	Responsive								Non-responsive
Supportive								Non-supportive	Supportive								Non-supportive
Practical								Impractical	Practical								Impractical
Exciting								Boring	Exciting								Boring
Efficient								Inefficient	Efficient								Inefficient
Future oriented								Past oriented	Future oriented								Past oriented
Cooperative								Competitive	Cooperative								Competitive
High quality								Inferior quality	High quality								Inferior quality
Personalized								Institutionalized	Personalized								Institutionalized
Reaches out								Waits to be contacted	Reaches out								Waits to be contacted
Organized								Disorganized	Organized								Disorganized
Inclusive								Exclusive	Inclusive								Exclusive
Adequate resources								Inadequate resources	Adequate resources								Inadequate resources
Active								Reactive	Active								Reactive
Promotes dialogue								Controls communication	Promotes dialogue								Controls communication
Team-oriented								Individually-oriented	Team-oriented								Individually-oriented

<p style="text-align:center">**TABLE 1**</p>

Presbytery of Cincinnati NOW Rank		Presbytery of Cincinnati SHOULD BE Rank
1	Friendly (3.46)	7
2	Accessible (3.84)	5
3	Inclusive (4.2)	8
4	Organized (4.34)	9
5	Supportive (4.37)	1
6	Adequate resources (4.38)	14
7	Cooperative (4.46)	11
8	Helpful (4.46)	3
9	High Quality (4.52)	2
10	Team oriented (4.53)	13
11	Practical (4.54)	16
12	Promotes dialogue (4.61)	4
13	Responsive (4.62)	6
14	Future Oriented (4.85)	17
15	Personalized (4.92)	19
16	Efficient (4.92)	10
17	Active (5.27)	12
18	Reaches Out (5.28)	15
19	Exciting (5.3)	18
20	Cutting Edge (5.32)	20

1	Supportive (1.46)
2	High Quality (1.53)
3	Helpful (1.57)
4	Promotes dialogue (1.58)
5	Accessible (1.6)
6	Responsive (1.62)
7	Friendly (1.63)
8	Inclusive (1.65)
9	Organized (1.73)
10	Efficient (1.74)
11	Cooperative (1.76)
12	Active (1.83)
13	Team oriented (1.84)
14	Adequate resources (1.85)
15	Reaches Out (1.96)
16	Practical (2.09)
17	Future Oriented (2.23)
18	Exciting (2.24)
19	Personalized (2.41)
20	Cutting Edge (2.46)

TABLE 2

Rank order of largest differences between NOW and SHOULD BE

1	Active (3.44)
2	Reaches Out (3.32)
3	Efficient (3.18)
4	Exciting (3.06)
5	Promotes dialogue (3.03)
6	Responsive (3.0)
7	High Quality (2.99)
8	Supportive (2.91)
9	Helpful (2.89)
10	Cooperative (2.70)
11	Team oriented (2.69)
12	Future Oriented (2.62)
13	Organized (2.61)
14	Inclusive (2.55)
15	Adequate resources (2.53)
16	Personalized (2.51)
17	Practical (2.45)
18	Accessible (2.24)
19	Cutting Edge (1.86)
20	Friendly (1.83)

APPENDIX B
Complete Focus Group Notes
(See separate document)