

*WHAT IF . . .*

OUR PRESBYTERY  
LOOKED  
LIKE THIS?

A Proposal of the Transformation Team  
for the Presbytery of Cincinnati  
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# UNITED IN FAITH

We affirm that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior and that he has commissioned his disciples to:

“Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I will be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20, *The Message*)

We believe that Christ Jesus calls us into relationship with God and with one another. In word and in deed Jesus proclaimed this gospel of relationships as both personal and communal. As Jesus promised to be with us, so we are called to a ministry of Christ’s presence, to be with each other as we reach toward those outside the church family.

As the Church seeks to fulfill Christ’s commission, organizational structures have been and are useful. Yet it is clear from the gospel of Jesus Christ that we risk getting our priorities reversed when we rely on our institutional structures to the lessening or exclusion of our relational nature. Therefore we seek a healthy balance between the two and strive to find structures which promote the priority of relationships.

Throughout scripture we learn that God calls a community of faith into being and nurtures that community. We believe that Christ calls us together as a community of believers— a living, growing, organic body.

Because we are Christ’s body in the world, we believe that we are called to a life of mission. As Christ gave himself for others, so we are called to give of ourselves—all that we have and all that we are—in joyful obedience to God and in loving service to the world God is redeeming.

## ❖ MISSION-SHAPED

Folks in emerging church conversations talk about “mission-shaped” churches. They say congregations can have many kinds of shapes, and even multiple shapes: tradition-shaped, Sunday-shaped, preacher-shaped, family-shaped, program-shaped, theological-identity-shaped, music-shaped, conflict-shaped, angry-at-the-denomination-shaped, one-issue-shaped, and so on. *The missional church is shaped by the understanding that God intends each congregation to represent and point toward the Reign of God in Christ in its particular setting.*

Presbyteries can have many kinds of shapes too: corporate-shaped, regulation-shaped, process-shaped, institutional-preservation-or-maintenance-shaped, us-and-them-shaped, power-shaped, conflict-avoidance-shaped, mission-doing-shaped and so on. But surely, God’s mission in Christ can and should shape everything in a presbytery—budget, staffing, priorities, decision-making, assigning resources, processes, how and which staff/pastors/leaders are called, and how conflict is handled.

Mission-shaped presbyteries recognize that their basic “unit of mission” is the mission-shaped congregation. Instead of living in a never-ending quest to secure money from congregations, recruit people for presbytery service, and create ideas to develop presbytery programs, services and resources, mission-shaped presbyteries turn their energies toward encouraging, empowering, and equipping congregations *to be* God’s mission in Christ.

## ❖ PERMISSION-GIVING

Can we be honest? Most presbyteries are low on permission-giving and high on process, regulation and control. A non-technical definition of permission-giving might be: if someone has a good idea that will move God’s mission forward, they ought to be able just to do it without securing a bunch of permissions from multi-layered, overly-processed governing bodies. Many fine leaders avoid presbytery committees because it takes too much work to accomplish so little that matters. A permission-giving presbytery will *receive*, more than decide upon, and *participate in*, more than implement.

Paradoxically, the two keys to creating a permission-giving culture are 1) building trust among ourselves so that we will say “no” to bad and non-missional ideas, and 2) building trust so that we will hold people and groups accountable for their behavior and their outcomes. That kind of mutual trust in a Presbytery will mean considerable change for most, and lots of risk. Yet the missional call to follow Jesus Christ is always a risk.

## ❖ OUTCOME-ORIENTED

One of the things we do best as Presbyterians is have good processes that help God’s people work together, inclusively, and to do God’s will. Who wants bad process? No one. However, *what we are after is not great processes but faithfulness in mission!*

In a post-modern world of discontinuous change, a strategic “plan” makes less and less sense. Long range planning takes too much time and energy and the plans can be outdated before they are implemented. The real task is to engage in actions that, over time, create a missional culture; i.e. a culture that makes it more likely that a presbytery’s pastors and elders, educators, leaders and members will bear missional fruit. A strategic process is a sequence of actions that when used repeatedly allows for groups to learn as they go by reflecting on and evaluating their experiences, to make adjustments and to experiment with new behaviors—and to see how God creates some outcomes that matter in mission to communities and persons.

# WHAT A MISSION-SHAPED, PERMISSION GIVING, OUTCOME-ORIENTED CINCINNATI PRESBYTERY MIGHT LOOK LIKE

## *Mission-Shaped Transformation*

- ◆ A Presbytery of healthy, vital congregations that lift up Christ:
  - by becoming mission-shaped instead of institution-focused
  - by growing disciples instead of seeking members
  - by becoming communities of care instead of depending on pastoral care.
- ◆ Presbytery that is able to seek, respond to and nurture Spirit-driven *kairos* moments leading to renewed commitment to mission in pastors, leaders and congregations.
- ◆ A Presbytery that is able to let go of old ways, programs, structures, and congregations that are no longer effectively advancing the *Missio Dei* (God's mission to the world for reconciliation).
- ◆ A Presbytery that directs its re-sources (staff, money, energies) to mission-shaped congregations.
- ◆ A Presbytery Council and Presbytery Committees that pray for congregations at every one of their meetings.
- ◆ A Presbytery with a re-formed staffing pattern, including redefined responsibilities that reflect the missional orientation of equipping congregations.
- ◆ A Presbytery where congregations that face the possibility of dissolution are able to give the gift of life by releasing their resources to fund new church developments and new mission initiatives in transforming congregations.

## *Permission-Giving Structure*

- ◆ A Presbytery that redefines *connectional* from being part of a denominational structure to being *relational* with and among member congregations.
- ◆ A Presbytery that is not afraid to risk how ministry emerges, is done, or is financed.
- ◆ A Presbytery that is willing to invest its endowment funds for missional change (transformation, projects, experiments).
- ◆ A Presbytery budget that commits resources to congregational mission initiatives.

- ◆ A Presbytery with only the following standing committees — Council, Trustees, Permanent Judicial Commission, Committee on Ministry, Nominating, Personnel, Preparation for Ministry, Committee on Representation, Ecclesiastical Affairs — reducing the number of persons to be elected to serve on committees.
- ◆ A Presbytery Council that welcomes the formation of ministry teams which:
  - are clear about what their mission is and how it matters for the mission God gives in Christ,
  - are responsible for recruiting their own members,
  - can apply for funding through Presbytery budget.
- ◆ A Presbytery with meetings that use consent agendas for most business so that focal points of the meeting are worship, celebration, relationship-building, and learning, including:
  - celebration of ministry milestones,
  - theological reflection (presentation and discussion),
  - stories from congregations about new experiences with Session meetings, new outreach efforts, and ways God's Spirit is leading.

### *Outcome-Oriented Leadership*

- ◆ A Presbytery that asks of all of its programs and activities:
  - Is this helping congregations fulfill their mission? If not, why is Presbytery doing it?
  - Is this a work that individual or groups of congregations could or should be doing? If so, why is Presbytery doing it?
- ◆ A Presbytery that constantly communicates the vision of healthy vital congregations as a challenge and encouragement.
- ◆ A Presbytery Council whose central task is to envision and guide the Presbytery's ongoing missional engagement and transformation.
- ◆ A Presbytery staff with job descriptions and responsibilities which are matched to staff gifts in that area.
- ◆ A Presbytery which receives an annual “State of the Presbytery” presentation from its staff on the signs of vitality, based upon reports from sessions and congregational visits from the past year.
- ◆ A Presbytery Committee on Ministry that is proactive about working with Pastor Nominating Committees to help them identify pastors with the competencies for missional change in their particular setting (rural, urban, multi-staff, transitioning, etc.).
- ◆ A Presbytery where all ministers and other church professionals have access to pastoral care and are engaged in small groups for mutual support, study and accountability.
- ◆ A Presbytery that provides coaching for ministers, candidates, church professionals and congregations.

## WHERE TRANSFORMATION IS ALREADY HAPPENING

- ❖ Approved a shared practical vision that by 2010 the Presbytery of Cincinnati:
  - will be “a vibrant community made up of growing, vital congregations and passionate people working together”
  - will have a “culture of respect that is lived out among all entities and people”
  - will be “an effective, responsive organization, known for promoting *koinonia* among pastors and church professionals and for equipping all leaders for transforming ministry.”
- ❖ Approved the strategic directions of *Building Trust, Connecting Congregations, Empowering and Nurturing for Energy and Wholeness, and Creating* that have begun to shape our life together
- ❖ Presbytery Mission Teams from multiple congregations, led by individual congregations and supported by Presbytery Mission Committee
- ❖ PresbyMADE Day
- ❖ Presbytery meetings that are ordered and shaped by worship.
- ❖ A gathering of over 1000 Presbyterians for a Presbytery “Meeting” at the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center.
- ❖ The emergence of ministry teams like Eastern Area Council, Council of Urban Churches, Presbytery Youth Connection, and the Young Adult Volunteer Oversight Team.
- ❖ Transformation resourcing through the Jill Hudson Workshops and ECD’s Transformation Event with Len Sweet.
- ❖ New leadership bubbling up from Gen-X pastors and elders in the Presbytery.
- ❖ Individual congregations that are experiencing transformation through new styles of worship, new outreach ministries to youth, and seeking missional culture change.

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## RESOURCES (Available at the Presbytery Resource Center)

Borden, Paul. *Hit the Bullseye*. Abingdon. 2003.

Made us aware of the importance of accountability and expecting congregations to seek transformation.

Guder, Darrell. *Missional Church*. Eerdmans. 1998.

The definitive text on the missional church. Theologically suggestive.

Hudson, Jill. *When Better Isn’t Enough*. Alban. 2004.

Helped us understand the need for congregational transformation in our post-modern setting.

Presbytery of New Brunswick. *An Action Plan for Transformation*. 2005.

Pointed us in the direction of specifically *missional* transformation.

Pittsburgh Presbytery. *Missional Turnings*. 2005.

This description of Pittsburgh’s transformation process, one of several we examined, most shaped our report.

Sterner, John. *The Missional Church*. Unpublished. 2005.

An excellent brief summary of and apologetic for the missional church. A great place to start reading.