

Purpose Statement

The General Assembly Council, led and empowered by the Triune God, provides visionary leadership in the development and implementation of the General Assembly's mission directives, supports governing bodies in our common mission, and acts on behalf of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) on policy matters when the General Assembly is not in session. (adapted from the Book of Order)

Vision Statement

We envision our congregations, presbyteries, synods, General Assembly and ecumenical partners, singly and together, being so inspired and nurtured by the gospel of Jesus Christ that ministries are vibrant and inviting. We pray that all will be drawn irresistibly into ministries reflecting the love and justice of Jesus, with immediate neighborhoods and the whole of the world as arenas in which the gospel is to be proclaimed and lived. (adapted from the Organization for Mission)

Mission Statement

The mission of the General Assembly Council, with congregations and governing bodies, is to offer the world a visible witness of Jesus Christ through (1) the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; (2) the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; (3) the maintenance of divine worship; (4) the preservation of the truth; (5) the promotion of social righteousness; and (6) the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world. (adapted from the Book of Order)

Presbyterian Church (USA): Context for Mission Work Plan

The Presbyterian Church U.S.A., like all other denominations, is in a time of tremendous change and soul searching. There is a well worn phrase among historians that “The past is prologue.” What factors in the recent past serve as prologue for our life together in the 21st Century? What has changed over the last half century and what will it mean for the future of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.? What follows describe some key dynamics in what it means to be a denomination in the United States today, dynamics that are part of the context in which we develop a mission work plan for 2007-2008.

- **Christian Consensus to Disestablishment** – Fifty years ago Christianity was the dominant religious force in the culture. Non-Christians of whatever ilk, and even some Christians with what were considered “fringe” beliefs, were given scant attention or voice. Institutions from schools, to government, to service organizations, to media, could all be counted on to be supportive of many of the same values embraced by Presbyterians. Now, more attention and credence, warranted or not, is given to a multitude of beliefs, and institutions have become less inclined, unable or unwilling to deal with the multiplicity so they do nothing or even appear hostile to the point where the language of religion and faith is not the lingua franca it was in the past.
- **Institutional Loyalty to Choice** – Fifty years ago there was high commitment to institutions in everything from the civic organizations we joined to the kind of ketchup we bought. It was not uncommon for people to spend their whole lives working for one employer. Now we have become a consumer driven society. Consumers have more access to information about decisions. They switch brands with ease depending on how they perceive the benefits. This mindset is pervasive in our culture as people go “church shopping.” Denominational labels usually mean little.
- **Cultural Homogeneity to Cultural Pluralism** – Fifty years ago the nation was clearly dominated by Anglo-American culture and ethnic or minority voices were largely muted. Since then, the number of the ethnic groups and size of the overall ethnic minority population has grown. This has meant a growth in the diversity of expressions within Christianity as well as growth in non-Christian traditions.
- **Information Gate keeping to Information Overload** – Fifty years ago, information came through a narrow filter and access was limited to a handful of sources. Because of denominational loyalty and limited access to competing information, denominations could expect some “brand loyalty” from their congregations. Now with internet, cellular technology, and host of other advancements, information bombards us, and we are skeptical of all of it.

Denominational goods and services compete in an open market against those provided by other denominations or para-church organizations. Increased information has created awareness of the many causes to which funds can be contributed and givers are more discriminating, preferring to give directly to particular initiatives instead of umbrella ministry operations.

The dynamics of these changes has several implications for the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. Among the challenges the denomination will face are to:

- **Define what Presbyterians (individually and corporately) have to offer that the world can't live without?** The word "Presbyterian" means little to our culture. Denominational loyalty is all but gone. We will only draw people if we connect with them in some way that is meaningful to them.
- **Discern how to retain a culturally unified inclusive approach to ministry in a fragmented culture.** The culture is so fragmented that no one institution is recognized as having legitimate authority to speak to the entire culture. This is even truer for denominations as organized religion has become more marginalized. This has implications for how we view social action and how we speak to the culture.
- **Expand our vision and mission in greater partnership with the global church.** The world is getting smaller and more interconnected. Our actions no longer have impact on our culture alone, and vice versa.
- **Learn how we can better share our faith in the 21st Century.** Sharing our faith takes on new forms as we move into an increasingly post-Christian era with cultural fragmentation. The Great Commission is always culturally contextual and we need to better understand our changing context.
- **Find ways to retain members and re-engage inactive members.** One report indicates that nearly two out of three former Presbyterians are not attending church elsewhere or have not joined churches elsewhere. We need focus on how to better retain those within our communities.
- **Continue the expansion of ministry with people outside of the traditional Euro-American heritage.** Populations show the United States becoming more culturally diverse over the next few years. The denomination has nearly achieved a goal 10% racial-ethnic membership in 2005. This is still below the diversity in the larger culture.
- **Discover how we can create healthy congregations and strengthen existing ones.** To whatever degree that people ever connected with denominations, they no longer do. They connect with congregations. Congregations are the first and foremost focus of ministry.

- **Learn how we can promote the development of more new congregations.** Denominations that are growing are active in church planting are growing. New congregations are highly energetic at reaching people and have the residual effect of inspiring other congregations into out reach. New congregations are also an effective means of reaching minority cultures.
- **Investigate what is working for other denominations.** Many denominations are trying a variety of innovative strategies of organizing and doing ministry. We need to learn from what others are doing that might have application within our context.

Core Commitments for Mission of the Mission Work Plan Team, 2007-2008

Called by our common baptism to faith in and service of our Lord Jesus Christ and nurtured at his table wherever it is set in the world, we commit ourselves through the 07-08 Mission Work Plan to:

- Work in partnership with validated missions ecumenically and internationally.
- Link closely to the governing bodies of the church.
- Exercise good stewardship of the time, talent and resources generously entrusted to us.
- Witness prophetically to the church, nation and the world.
- Celebrate our oneness in Christ in all of its diversity.
- Nurture and empower servant leadership throughout the church.
- Live in an ever-changing environment in contextually sensitive ways.
- Give faithful witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Guiding Principles of the Mission Work Plan Team, 2007-2008

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) provides the world a vision for responsibly living a life of gratitude for God's grace in Jesus Christ.

While being grounded in history and tradition, Presbyterians are also open to God's new things in the world.

We respond to God in worship and discipleship and seek to empower each believer through a continuing commitment to education.

Presbyterian mission is centered in justice and evangelism and is supported by abundant resources. Based on our belief in the strength of being connected with one another, this mission is done in partnership with other denominations, other cultures and other faiths.

Unfortunately, the strength of Presbyterian witness is sometimes muted or limited by a tendency to regulate and intellectualize. We often fail to engage in healthy celebration and sharing of the good that we do in the power of the Spirit.

Our challenge for the future is to build on our strengths and overcome our weaknesses to enable us to understand the world around us, our place in it and represent God's grace to it.

Priority Goal Areas

Adopted by the 216th General Assembly

Evangelism and Witness

Goal: We are called to invite all people to faith, repentance, and the abundant life of God in Jesus Christ, to encourage congregations in joyfully sharing the Gospel, and through the power of the Holy Spirit to grow in membership and discipleship.

Justice and Compassion

Goal: We are called to address wrongs in every aspect of life and the whole of creation, intentionally working with and on behalf of poor, oppressed, and disadvantaged people as did Jesus Christ, even at risk to our corporate and personal lives.

Spirituality and Discipleship

Goal: We are called to deeper discipleship through scripture, worship, prayer, study, stewardship and service, and to rely on the Holy Spirit to mold our lives more and more into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

Leadership and Vocation

Goal: We are called to lead by Jesus Christ's example, to identify spiritual gifts, and to equip and support people for faithful and effective servant leadership in all parts of the body of Christ.

Objectives

Evangelism:

Equip Presbyterians, governing bodies and others to witness locally and globally to the Gospel of Jesus Christ with an emphasis on those with no active church affiliation. (Evangelism and Witness)

RATIONALE: Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20)

Multicultural:

Support presbyteries' efforts to develop congregations and fellowships that will enable them to reflect the multicultural makeup of our society. (Evangelism and Witness)

RATIONALE: After this I looked and there was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. (Revelation 7:9)

Poverty:

Enable partnerships with governing bodies and others to actively address the causes and effects of poverty locally, nationally and globally. (Justice and Compassion)

RATIONALE: Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, "open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land." (Deuteronomy 15:10-11)

Peace:

Encourage and support presbyteries and congregations to be active in seeking non-violent solutions to conflict in their own communities and in the communities of the world. (Justice and Compassion)

RATIONALE: Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. (Matthew 5:9)

Reformed Identity:

Encourage and support presbyteries and congregations to further develop their members' ability to appreciate and understand their Reformed identity, experience and practice disciplines of reformed spirituality and apply them in today's world. (Spirituality and Discipleship)

RATIONALE: In (its) confessional statements the church declares to its members and to the world who and what it is, what it believes, and what it resolves to do ... Central to the Reformed tradition is the affirmation of the majesty, holiness and providence of God who creates, sustains, rules and redeems the world in the freedom of sovereign righteousness and love. ... Related to this central affirmation of God's sovereignty are ... the election of the people of God for service as well as for salvation (and) covenant life marked by a disciplined concern for order in the church according to the Word of God. (Book of Order, G-2.0100, 2.0500)

Families:

Enable presbyteries and congregations to ground families, in all their manifestations, in Christian discipleship that helps them confront and resist the idolatries of society today. (Spirituality and Discipleship)

RATIONALE: The sovereign love of God, the gracious lordship of Jesus Christ, and the empowering fellowship of the Holy Spirit ground our lives as Christians; yet we are also rooted in family structures that evidence the corrosive pressures around and within us, as well as the failed relationships among us, even as they remain sites of God's gracious presence and activity. Our family lives, like the other spheres of our existence, need transformation by the Holy Spirit; and our world needs the transformative agency of families that understand the breadth of their vocation as disciples of Jesus Christ. ("Transforming Families," adopted by the 216th General Assembly (2004))

Vocation:

Equip presbyteries and congregations to help members discern that their vocation is a call from God to Christian witness in society and the church. (Leadership and Vocation)

RATIONALE: The Lord bids each one of us in all life's actions to look to God's calling ... The Lord's calling in everything is the beginning and foundation of well-doing. And if there are any who will not direct themselves to it, they will never hold to the straight path...(Calvin, Institutes, 3.10.6)

Small Churches:

Facilitate the exchange and development of alternative models for pastoral and mission leadership in small churches. (Leadership and Vocation)

RATIONALE: A small membership congregation is healthy when it is open to a variety of models of pastoral leadership and care, and is willing to make changes in ways that help it meet the needs of the people in worship, education, nurture, fellowship, evangelism and mission. (Partners in Small Church Strategy, report approved by the 201st General Assembly (1989))

Definitions

Role/Purpose Statement: defines the purpose of the General Assembly Council, its responsibilities, and the role it plays in the life of the Presbyterian Church (USA)

Vision Statement: describes the organization and its impact in the future. A vision is guided by dreams, not constraints – it is what an organization hopes will happen.

Mission Statement: the expression of the need the organization meets, and a brief summary of what the organization does to meet that need.

Core Commitments: define the essential and enduring character of a particular organization. Core commitments are the glue that holds an organization together. They are principles, not practices – beliefs, not ministries – and they are few in number.

Goals: state in broad terms the principal program, development, administrative or other major accomplishments the organization hopes to achieve to realize its vision and fulfill its mission.

Objectives: the primary foci or themes around which the programmatic work of the General Assembly Council will be organized. The nature of the objectives are such that all programmatic areas should be able to modify their particular work in ways that will enhance the thrust of the objective and will provide opportunities for increased coordination of the work of the GAC.

Mission: God's saving and reconciling work in the world for which the church is called into being.

Ministries: Modes of presence, service or work that provide nurture, care and worship in the name of Christ.

Outcomes: Statements of intended programmatic achievements.

Programs: Named sets of activities and resources designed to further stated goals and objectives authorized by the General Assembly

Restricted funds: to be used for specific purposes and programs, generally at the direction and wish of the donor

Unrestricted funds: do not have restrictions on their use and are given to support the mission of the whole church.

Timeline

2006

Feb. 7: Presentation of Mission Work Plan to elected General Assembly Council.

Feb. 10: GAC vote on Mission Work Plan

Feb.13: GAC staff receives plan and begins building specific budgets and programs to recommend to elected members.

April 26-29: GAC meeting during which final plan, with accompany budgets and specific programs, is adopted for recommendation to General Assembly.

June 15-22: 217th General Assembly approves 2007-2008 Mission Work Plan

Sept. 27-30: GAC reviews progress and evaluates 2005-2006 MWP and hears reports on progress to preparing for 2007-2008 implementation.

2007

March 21-24: GAC evaluation of progress to date on 2007-2008 MWP.

Sept. 26-29: GAC evaluation of progress to date on 2007-2008 MWP.

2008

Feb. 6-9: GAC evaluation of progress to date on 2007-2008 MWP.

April 23-26: GAC evaluation of progress to date on 2007-2008 MWP.

June 21-28: 218th General Assembly.

Sept. 24-27: GAC evaluation of progress to date on 2007-2008 MWP.