



The Presbytery of West Jersey

Presbytery Initiatives

Presbytery Transformation

In November of 2006, Presbytery Council approved unanimously the recommendation that WJP become a transformational presbytery with a Transition Team in place to initiate the process. In its stated meeting later that month, the presbytery approved the actions and committed us to an ongoing transformational outlook and process. We understand that we will continue in this process of change and development for the foreseeable future.

Congregational Transformation

The Presbytery of West Jersey invites its member congregations to enroll in its Congregational Transformation Program. Congregations accepting this invitation enter into a covenant with the Presbytery to intentionally engage the five dynamics of transformation: Creating spiritual energy for transformation; Coming to terms with the congregation's past and present identities; Re-engaging the community around the church; Building a ministry plan; and Funds development. A representative visioning team leads the congregation through the process. The Presbytery assists the churches by providing training, coaching, and support. The Program is staffed by two Consultants for Congregational Transformation, the Revs. Wendy Boer and Eloise Cowherd. Twelve churches are currently enrolled in the program and several others are considering whether to become transforming congregations.

Emerging Hispanic Ministries

Our one fully Hispanic church is Bet-El Presbyterian in Vineland, and Bet-El is currently reaching out by holding mid-week services and gatherings in First Presbyterian Church, Bridgeton. The small city of Bridgeton has a growing population of immigrants, mostly from Mexico, but also from other Latin American countries, and an increasing number of those attend Sunday services at Bet-El in nearby Vineland. So, the Bet-El Church's outreach into Bridgeton is seen by both sessions and both pastors as a partnership and not merely a matter of building use. First Presbyterian in Bridgeton also has an English Tutoring Program during the school year for adults and students, led by an elder who is an ESL supervisor in a public school system.

The Hammonton Presbyterian Church has had a Hispanic ministry for years and has recently called a Hispanic associate pastor to lead and expand that ministry. The pastor of the church also speaks Spanish,

and their shared hope is to move from having a Hispanic ministry and congregation to being a truly multi-cultural congregation. Services, Bible studies, etc., would continue in Spanish, but the goal of the pastors' team ministry would be to draw the two groups into a truly unified congregation.

Other churches in the presbytery are also at least in talking stages about Hispanic ministries. Bet-El Presbyterian Church is interested in enabling outreach in other areas of the presbytery as well as in Bridgeton.

Immigrant Probes and Nested Ministries

In order to make the Word available to all of God's children and to respond to the changing racial and ethnic mix of the population of the area of the Presbytery of West Jersey (WJP), the Presbytery has launched a series of ministries aimed at immigrant communities that are ethnically different from the White, Non-Hispanic groups that predominate in southern New Jersey. Since these efforts began about a decade ago, so-called "immigrant probes" have been targeted at immigrants who speak Spanish, Telugu, Korean, and Southeast Asian. It was envisioned that services would be provided in the native language of the congregants for those, especially first-generation immigrants, who do not speak English well and/or who are not comfortable with American customs.

A variety of models for immigrant probes can be envisioned. The least demanding for the probe, organizationally, are "nested ministries" in which the immigrant probe is organized as a segment within an existing church, and the latter has major responsibility for the finances and governance of the nested ministry. Next in complexity are immigrant probes that make use of the building and facilities of an existing church but are otherwise independent of their host church, though dependent on outside sources for much of their funding. Finally, one might have an immigrant probe that has its own building and facilities and is responsible for its own governance and finances.

All three models have been tried by WJP, with mixed results. At one extreme, one probe no longer is functioning (though efforts are under way to revive it). At the other extreme, one probe has its own building and session but remains financially dependent on WJP. The remaining probes lie somewhere between these extremes and remain works in progress.

Working with immigrant probes will be one of the challenges for WJP's next executive presbyter.

New Church Development

In 2006 the NCD Committee applied for and received the maximum amount of \$100,000 Mission Grant from the MDRC. Immediately after the full funding was in place the Presbytery formed a PNC for the Mullica Hill New Church Development. The PNC is has hired an organizing pastor for Mullica Hill.

The NCD Committee has also been in conversation with a non-denominational church that is considering becoming Presbyterian! We have utilized PERCEPT to help explore the church's future mission. Several Pastors and members of the NCD have been meeting regularly in a fascinating dialogue and conversation that has lasted for over 5 years as the small congregation (12 members) contemplates the Reformed Tradition as expressed in our PC(USA)

Cuba Partnership

Since 2000, WJP has had a partnership with the Presbytery of Matanzas in Cuba. Each year, we send a group of WJP adults to Cuba to visit many of the 16 Presbyterian churches in Matanzas in order to share our faith with each other through worship services, Bible studies, music programs, and other activities.

Under the umbrella of this presbytery-to-presbytery partnership, we also have a handful of church-to-church partnerships. WJP's participation in this activity is governed by U.S. Treasury licenses.

Appreciative Inquiry

In the spring of 2004, the presbytery was introduced to the concepts and processes of Appreciative Inquiry. Since then, AI has been identified as one of the priorities of the presbytery. It is used by the Committee on Ministry for Triennial visits to churches. The presbytery participated in an AI Summit: "Faithful Vision and Holy Discoveries." The Summit allowed the presbytery to identify four aspects of our corporate life that are most valued: Worship, Mission, Connectionalism and Order. It also produced a mandate for growth in each of those areas. The most immediate change has been in the new and varied patterns of worship at presbytery meetings. Proposed changes in mission funding and in our order and connectionalism are among the many issues being considered by the Transition Team and, probably, in subsequent transition processes. The Appreciative Inquiry philosophy and process is now also a key ingredient in the Congregational Transformation Program of the presbytery.

Urban Mission

After decades of urban mission of various types in Camden and Atlantic City, the presbytery is in a time of transition. Future directions in our two cities should emerge from the presbytery's transformational process as part of our rethinking and redevelopment of the presbytery's total mission.

Hunger Action

The Presbyterian Hunger Program is committed to "alleviating hunger and eliminating its causes." Many of our efforts as Christians focus on alleviating hunger--soup kitchens, food pantries, and other feeding ministries. This is admirable and important, but does not begin to eliminate the causes of hunger. The Church must not only feed the poor, but be bold in speaking a prophetic word against the root causes of hunger. To this end, Christians must be engaged not only in direct service to those who are hungry, but also in advocacy in governmental and corporate spheres to seek to change those systems and circumstances which give rise to hunger and poverty. The Presbytery of West Jersey has an active Hunger Action Enabler in place.

Resource Center

At the presbytery office, WJP maintains the Educational Service Center with a director on staff. The center has three dimensions plus an advocacy function. It offers (1) a consultant service, (2) curriculum development assistance, and (3) educational, theological, and ecclesiastical resources. The director also advocates and supports Christian educators and Christian education throughout the presbytery.

For consultant services, the center maintains a roster of certified consultants for churches, teachers, and decision makers in the congregations, so every church has access to a professional Christian educator. For curriculum development, the center provides samples of PCUSA and other curriculum materials. Key to the curriculum development process is assistance to churches in assessing their goals and needs so they can select materials and use them successfully. For resources, the center maintains more than 4,000 pieces (books, periodicals, videos, DVDs, etc.) on an array of subjects for use by churches and presbytery committees.