

NEW CASTLE PRESBYTERY
9/18/2018

CARING FOR CONGREGATIONS

A recommendation on providing care for congregations that may be nearing the end of congregational life.

In 2015 the Presbytery Council convened a task group to bring a recommendation to the Council for establishing a structure to (1) identify congregations likely to require presbytery support either for preservation/maintenance of physical facilities or for congregational sustainment and (2) develop a principled, proactive response that recognizes congregational needs but also fits within other priorities for the use of presbytery funds and people. The task group brought its report to the Council, which adopted the report's recommendations in December 2015.

The presbytery's Committee on Ministers and Congregations, and Trustees and Financial Resources Committee have studied the report and present the following recommendations for consideration and further action.

Biblical Reference

Ecclesiastes 3 Common English Bible (CEB)

There's a season for everything

and a time for every matter under the heavens:

- ² a time for giving birth and a time for dying,
a time for planting and a time for uprooting what was planted,
- ³ a time for killing and a time for healing,
a time for tearing down and a time for building up,
- ⁴ a time for crying and a time for laughing,
a time for mourning and a time for dancing,
- ⁵ a time for throwing stones and a time for gathering stones,
a time for embracing and a time for avoiding embraces,
- ⁶ a time for searching and a time for losing,
a time for keeping and a time for throwing away,
- ⁷ a time for tearing and a time for repairing,
a time for keeping silent and a time for speaking,
- ⁸ a time for loving and a time for hating,
a time for war and a time for peace.

Theological Reference (from the Book of Order)

F-1.0301 The Church Is the Body of Christ

The Church is the body of Christ ^c. Christ gives to the Church all the gifts necessary to be his body. The Church strives to demonstrate these gifts in its life as a community in the world (1 Cor. 12:27–28):

The Church is to be a community of faith, entrusting itself to God alone, even at the risk of losing its life.

The Church is to be a community of hope, rejoicing in the sure and certain knowledge that, in Christ, God is making a new creation. This new creation is a new beginning for human life and for all things. The Church lives in the present on the strength of that promised new creation.

The Church is to be a community of love, where sin is forgiven, reconciliation is accomplished, and the dividing walls of hostility are torn down.

The Church is to be a community of witness, pointing beyond itself through word and work to the good news of God's transforming grace in Christ Jesus its Lord.

F-1.0302 The Marks of the Church

d. *The Apostolicity of the Church*

Apostolicity is God's gift to the Church in Jesus Christ. In Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God sends the Church into the world to share the gospel of God's redemption of all things and people.

Because in Christ the Church is apostolic, it strives to proclaim this gospel faithfully. The Church receives the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ through the testimony of those whom Christ sent, both those whom we call apostles and those whom Christ has called throughout the long history of the Church. The Church has been and is even now sent into the world by Jesus Christ to bear that testimony to others. The Church bears witness in word and work that in Christ the new creation has begun, and that God who creates life also frees those in bondage, forgives sin, reconciles brokenness, makes all things new, and is still at work in the world.

To be members of the body of Christ is to be sent out to pursue the mission of God and to participate in God's new creation, God's kingdom drawing the present into itself. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) affirms the Gospel of Jesus Christ as received from the prophets and apostles, and stands in continuity with God's mission through the ages.

The Church strives to be faithful to the good news it has received and accountable to the standards of the confessions. The Church seeks to present the claims of Jesus Christ, leading persons to repentance, acceptance of Christ alone as Savior and Lord, and new life as his disciples.

The Church is sent to be Christ's faithful evangelist:

- making disciples of all nations in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit;
- sharing with others a deep life of worship, prayer, fellowship, and service; and
- participating in God's mission to care for the needs of the sick, poor, and lonely; to free people from sin, suffering, and oppression; and to establish Christ's just, loving, and peaceable rule in the world.

Polity Reference

"The presbytery is responsible for the government of the church throughout its district, and for assisting and supporting the witness of congregations to the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that all congregations become communities of faith, hope, love, and witness." Book of Order, G-3.0301.

"The presbytery has responsibility and power to provide that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard. This responsibility shall include organizing, receiving, merging, dismissing, and dissolving congregations in consultation with their members." Book of Order, G-3.0301a.

"Presbytery,...has a particular responsibility to coordinate, guide, encourage, support, and resource the work of its congregations for the most effective witness to the broader community. In order to accomplish this responsibility, the presbytery has authority to...control the location of new congregations and of congregations desiring to move, as well as to divide, dismiss, or dissolve congregations in consultation with their members." Book of Order, G-3.0303b.

Recommendations

First level – review. The presbytery's Committee on Ministers and Congregations, and Trustees and Financial Resources Committee, working with the Connectional Presbyter, will co-operate in conducting reviews of congregations. These reviews will seek to identify congregations which may require attention or resources, either for the preservation or maintenance of physical facilities or for congregational sustainment. The Committees may, but need not, request participation from other presbytery committees or individuals.

In conducting reviews, the Committees will consider the following attributes or characteristics:

- Decrease, or serious consideration of a decrease, in the level of pastoral service.
- Absence of a minister of Word and Sacrament to provide pastoral care and leadership for the congregation
- Inability to satisfy presbytery minimum compensation standards or to provide regular cost of living increases for pastor and church staff.
- Decrease, or lack of participation in ministry to the surrounding community.
- A request for reduction of per capita or withholding of per capita
- Serious consideration of dissolution of shared pastoral ministry with another congregation
- A known need for significant building repairs or maintenance
- Failure to participate in life of the presbytery, including by attending presbytery meetings
- A history of involvement with the Committee on Ministers and Congregations or the Trustees and Financial Resources Committee indicating persistent congregational distress
- Substantial decrease in membership
- Substantial decrease in attendance
- Substantial decrease in members' contributions
- Substantial decrease in benevolent contributions, including Presbyterian missions
- Repeated failures to complete and submit required statistical information

This list is not intended to be exhaustive and the Committees may consider other factors as they feel appropriate. In all situations, however, the Committees will make and preserve adequate records of their considerations.

Second level – response. If the Committees determine that a congregation may require attention or support, either for the preservation or maintenance of physical facilities or for congregational sustainment, representatives will meet with the pastor (or moderator of Session) and the Session for discussion and to obtain further information, where appropriate. The Committees will then take one or of the following steps:

1. No immediate action
2. Hold for possible future action
3. Initiate a plan with remedial steps including but not limited to the following:
 - a. Development of training for session
 - b. Joint visit between COM and Trustees to Session
 - c. Request for Administrative Commission
 - d. Consideration of a change in pastoral leadership
 - e. The use of evaluative tools such as North Star Strategies or Holy Cow Consulting
4. Initiate a plan for hospice care
 - a. Consultation with pastoral leadership, if present
 - b. Consultation with session, and possibly congregation
 - c. Appointment of Administrative Commission, if necessary
 - d. Checklist of building and closing concerns
 - e. Plan for pastoral care of members prior to and beyond dissolution of congregation.
 - f. Plan for celebration of ministry.
(Liturgy for Vacating a Church Building and Dissolving a Congregation p. 550-555, Book of Common Worship.)

Any congregation of the presbytery, whether or not concerns have been raised, may request the assistance of the presbytery in reviewing the health of its finances, leadership, facilities and mission. The moderator or clerk of session may contact the Connectional Presbyter or COMC to request assistance.