

Final Report

Presbytery of Des Moines

Interim General Presbyter Jim Koopman

As your Interim, the **overall goal** for the work I was hired and commissioned to accomplish is:

“The Purpose of the position is to be a Facilitator in Guiding the Presbytery so that all voices will be heard in Discovering its Mission and in helping the Presbytery Identify the Organization and Staffing Structures necessary to execute that Mission. Further, the individual will Guide the Presbytery through Changes to its Mission, Organization, and Staffing.”

This Purpose Statement incorporates the word “Mission” three times. This Statement grabbed my mind, heart, and soul. It still does. I believe I was called to helping the Presbytery accomplish this ministry and for a large part, serving God and serving you has been a labor of love. This Purpose Statement has been like a lighthouse for me during the day and at night.

Living out the Purpose Statement and the Position Description brought to me a great deal of joy. At the same time, it has been my observation that there has been confusion and disagreements as to the “what” and “how” I was to live out the Purpose Statement and Position Description.

This report is made up of my observations. I pray it will become a helpful tool for the Presbytery to move to greater clarity and more deeply into its mission, health, and effectiveness. I pray that this report can encourage fresh expressions of faith, and address places that need yet to be resolved, healed, and “Let Go”. I pray that this report can help the Presbytery “Let Come” the vision and mission of the Presbytery following the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

A. About the Interim Process:

As for any trained Interim in the time of transitions time, six things need to begin immediately:

1. To quickly build relationships and rapport in all aspects and facets within the Presbytery, its pastors, congregations, and Committees
2. To create places of intentional and deliberate listening to “all of the voices” within the Presbytery
3. To create and offer safe space for people to decompress, shed off, and heal grievances within the system and with each other
4. To get to know and come to an understanding of the inner workings of the Presbytery’s system, of its past and current structure and health
5. To get to know and understand the work of the staff (including the missions)
6. To mirror back expressions and of faith and hope

B. The 3 Phases of the Interim and Transition period:

1. “Letting Go:” of the past and of current dynamics of organizational deficiencies; (releasing reactivity, grief, and conflict; resolve and reconcile; build trust; celebrate Bright Spots, heal, and bring closure.
2. “Letting Come”: Surface and clarify the organizational culture and identity; move the organization from identified actual values to preferred and aspirational values; and preparation for what comes next.
3. “New Beginning”: Capture a God sized Vision; gain unity and ownership; make adjustments to structure around that vision, and put a Strategic Plan in place.

C. In Listening:

- I met with pastors and teaching elders in 1:1 and in small group settings
- I met, worked, and worshipped with churches
- I conducted Listening Sessions with Sessions and congregations, PNCs
- I regularly met and worked with nearly all the Committees and Task Forces

in order to:

- a.) build relationships,
- b.) address hurts and places in need of help and healing,
- c.) carry out intentional guided listening sessions,
- d.) offer coaching and tools as needed, and
- e.) cast a vision for a hopeful future.

In addition to this listening process, my work with individual pastors, Sessions, congregations, Committees, and the Missions where I learned what was happening and what was being accomplished throughout the Presbytery.

D. During our time together:

- I got to experience an unbelievable amount of Yea Gods and Bright Spots; especially in ways where congregations are carrying out their mission in their communities.
- I was inspired by the stories of pastors, Sessions, and congregations engaged in disciple-making and shared mission together.
- I learned how the three missions (CROSS, Compañeros that became OSP, and the Sudanese) were making a difference.
- I observed sacrificial giving of so many serving on the Councils, Committees, and Task Forces (CCTFs) of the Presbytery. God bless you.
- I learned about how you think and hope the Presbytery can come along side and offer assistance to those carrying out the Mission of Christ in their communities and beyond.

E. Early on, I observed the Presbytery that was:

- Filled with strained and broken relationships, anger, hurts, and pain
- In a state of significant disconnection, anxiety, and mistrust of one another
- Suspicious of any kind of leadership or authority
- Suffering from clashes of values and the jockeying as to whose values would prevail

I found myself absorbing and apologizing for numerous ills or broken relationships within the various facets of “the Presbytery”.

F. Over time, some of the challenges I observed:

- Structural confusion, ambiguity, and competition regarding lines of reporting and authority of the Committees of the Presbytery
- Looking for technical solutions over seeking adaptive approaches to change
- Misunderstandings and dynamics of power, control, and “turf”
- Confusion around the nature of the relationship of the Missions and the Presbytery

G. Also, over time, it has seemed to me that:

- The anxiety in many areas within the system has diminished and things have calmed down for people, congregations, and members of the Presbytery; yet hurts needing healing still exist.
- I found people and congregations moving towards a growing sense of readiness to engage and be challenged to alter the current reality, identity, and future for their congregations and for the Presbytery.

H. I also observed the following desires (with amazing energy and passion):

- a longing for spiritual nourishment and connection (from silo's to spiritual community)
- a spirit of encouragement, adventurousness, and openness over fear, judgment, and cynicism;
- of hope, trust, and generosity winning the day over possessive, hierarchical, authoritative, and distrust
- For greater health and vitality, stronger relationships, and better team work and communication
- and a strong desire of honest disclosure and transparency.

These are *adaptive* challenges. If the Presbytery pursues these kinds of things, what can the Presbytery culture and identity look like - to God, to your neighbors, and for each other? How does the Presbytery foster that, practice mutual accountability, and fully live into that? What will need to be let go of? What will be needed to take on? What outcomes and results will be gained?

I. Words and Phrases I heard often:

Below are quotes, words, and phrases I heard regularly in my Listening Sessions. As you read them, ask: "what does this mean and what can this look like?"

- *"Foster Christ centered spiritual communities of faith that bless others"*
- *"To equip and empower pastors, Sessions, and congregations to be vibrant and thriving"*
- *"Be 1 church in 54 locations", "working and partnering together as one for the glory of God"*
- *"Kingdom focused - beyond a focus on churches"*
- *"To start new churches or help churches birth new missions"*
- *"to inspire and resource every congregation to be an embassy of Jesus in their community"*
- *"If it's about helping churches thrive and new missions to begin, how we fund that is huge"*
- *"what is most important is to resource leaders and congregations to think and behave missionally"*
- *"our shared mission together yet in 54 locations is our unifying force."*
- *"Can we excel in 'Social Justice and Evangelism'" "to reach the poor and hurting"*
- *"Service and Mission accomplished only by leaders, congregations, and Committees all working together"*
- *"thriving representations of Christ in God's Kingdom"*
- *"What-ever we do, let's make sure we do it Together" "We are better together"*
- *"Transformed and transforming"*
- *"to care for the poor and needy"*

What can "daring", "courageous", "risk taking" "permission giving" "empowering" "unified" "together", "vibrant", "transformed"... look like?

J. Stories of Mission and kingdom impact

I can tell you all kinds of Yea God ministries that I witnessed in my Listening Sessions with Sessions and congregations. I have been keeping a log of God stories that I hope to share with you; great stories of faith and resiliency, even in the midst of discouragement and fatigue.

For instance, at Creston, First, when I asked about their Bright Spots, one half hour later, I had filled up three pages of notes. You saw at Bedford, United last August the kinds of mission work they are carrying out. At Centerville, First – they have an after-school ministry for needy children, and Des Moines, Highland Park hosts a Friday night youth ministry. The SW and Two Rivers Partnerships are doing all kinds of mission together; First Arabic, Central, and Westminster are serving immigrants; Monroe and Greenfield, First have food and hygiene pantries.... Keep it up!

K. People started to articulate hopes and dreams and aspirational goals for the Presbytery:

In this interim period, some similar hopes and dreams surfaced. They are:

- For 54 transformed communities: where each congregation can play a significant role of doing God’s kingdom work through the church, not for the church
- For strengthened pastors: creating Networks or cohorts based on geography or affinity; provide/ offer coaching, support, learning resources (retreats, seminars, events), and prayer
- For revitalized churches: through health assessment tools like CAT, NCD, or MissionInsite; Trainings, seminars, workshops like elder training; Visioning and strategic planning...
- For the planting of new churches and empowering in missions in local churches: to develop a church planting and church multiplication strategy; and foster means of the support for churches to the start of new mission-oriented ministries out of their churches and in their communities
- For support of new mission partnerships: like the women’s shelter in Creston or the emerging state wide Presbyterian effort for better mental health in Iowa
- Create Presbytery meetings that: are transformational, not just transactional; have less information sharing and more time for relationship building, networking, and being a spiritual community; and offer resources such as bringing provocative speakers; breakout sessions and other ways to strengthening leaders, teams, and congregations

L. There were four *themes* or “*major identified needs*” I consistently heard and in this order to this question: “We’d like the Presbytery to:

1. Foster Leadership and Spiritual Development:

- a. Provide ways to raise up and strengthen the spiritual lives of pastors, elders, and churches
- b. Provide ways for pastors to fellowship, support, and learn together
- c. Host pastor cohorts and create learning communities, provide events, perhaps retreats, for skill and spiritual development for pastors
- d. Provide coaching relationships for all parish pastors
- e. Provide trainings and support for elders and deacons via trainings, workshops, events,
- f. Provide coaching for Sessions and PNCs
- g. Provide support and training for Presbytery Committees in their work as spiritual leaders
- h. Provide helpful guidance and governance for Presbytery Committees

2. Empower Church Revitalization and Renewal:

- a. Help congregations grow in their capacity to function healthily, offer vibrant worship, and enhance their capacity for discipleship
- b. Assist the congregations in intentional acts of revitalization such as visioning and strategic planning...
- c. Employ assessment tools and coaching/consulting for even greater church health
- d. Equip and resource congregations in evangelism and social witness
- e. Provide further guidance for PNCs and their search processes

- f. Offer tools, trainings, workshops... for congregational vitality and spiritual renewal
 - g. Provide further guidance for PNCs and assist in their search process
 - h. Perhaps attempt to reignite collaborative partnerships (like SW Partnership, DSM small church forum, confirmation classes...)
 - i. Use Presbytery meeting time to enhance spiritual and church vitality; skill development
3. Resource the creation of **New Missions and Witness**
- a. To create a Church Multiplication and Evangelism Committee to provide training and the mobilization of congregations and the Presbytery for greater witness. The desire for this was very high.
 - b. Resource congregations to identify and enhance their hospitality, outreach, and service to their communities
 - c. Resource congregations to enhance their care for the poor in their communities
 - d. Help strengthen congregation's connections to work together in service and witness to meet needs in their communities like the women's shelter in Creston, summer lunches in Ankeny, VBS in urban and rural settings, or even a statewide initiative to address matters related to mental illness.... Pretty cool!
 - e. Create/resource a more intentional effort to start new churches and new mission initiatives that reach new people groups (like reaching more immigrants or the planting of new growth communities like in Altoona or Jordan Creek...)
 - f. For CP&J to play a more active role – especially in helping congregations (and the Presbytery) advocate for social witness and social justice
 - g. To more fully integrate PW into the Presbyteries mission and outreach plans
4. Support ministry to **Children and Youth**
- a. This voice is one that I heard everywhere, but it was under the radar.
 - b. Equip and resource children and youth volunteers, CREs, and staff positions in congregations that enhances congregational discipleship for their own children and youth, but equally that reaches children and youth in their communities as well.
 - c. Host trainings, create cohorts, provide support and resources for youth leaders and staffed positions...
 - d. Advocate and better assist congregations to sponsor kids for camps and missions (projects, mission trips...)
 - e. Develop retreats, seminars, classes, events, Sunday School, midweek programing, outings, Confirmation, mission trips, collaborative partnerships with nearby churches...

M. Discerning Change and the development of a Mission Statement:

As your Interim, my role and commitment is to midwife the emergence of the Mission and Vision from within you; a high calling from God that is already placed in you - by God; with a future that God has been preparing for you.

KJ version translates Proverbs 29:18 as, “without a vision, people perish”. The NIV translates this verse, “where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint”. With either definition, both say something about the followers of God need for divine wisdom and purpose that comes from God; along with a clear sense of direction and a guiding light unto its path moving forward.

All Christian organizations need a clear mission and a guiding vision that gives power and hope to godly intentions. Mission identifies “why we exist” which then leads to a conviction of “where God is calling and leading them to go”.

In his book “The Advantage”, Patrick Lencioni writes: “*An organization’s core purpose as to why it exists has to be completely idealistic. I cannot reiterate this point enough. All people of the organization and at every level need to know that at the heart of what they do lies something grand and aspirational.*”

At our Presbytery meeting on Tuesday, we are going to explore three questions.

1. First is a question about **Change**. In your opinion
 - “*Does the Presbytery want change? And if so, “What might that change look like?”*”
2. The Second question is about the **Mission of the Presbytery**.
 - “*Why does the Presbytery exist?”*”
 - “*What is the Presbytery’s core Mission, its compelling Purpose and Calling; its Reason for being?”*”
 - “*How does the Presbytery contribute to a better world and its redemption?”*”
3. The third question is: In your opinion,
 - “*Is God calling for change in the Presbytery in order to live out more fully its core Mission and Purpose?”*”

I invite you to prayerfully consider these questions.

In closing I ask, as you look to the future, “What are to be the pursuits of the Presbytery?” “What do you hear the Holy Spirit saying through this report?” Dare to dream. Dream Big! God’s already there. The Holy Spirit has given you what you stand in need of.

My encouragement is to tenaciously think and pray in imaginative ways where and how the Presbytery can help the 54 congregations thrive in God’s kingdom, especially in their communities and also beyond.

God bless,
Jim