

PRESBYTERY OF GREATER ATLANTA

Long Range Planning Team Report

INTRODUCTION

Guiding Vision:

Called to make disciples of Jesus Christ, therefore, we baptize, teach, and seek to nurture all children of God. We proclaim the gospel of salvation; we promote social righteousness, and exhibit the Kingdom of Heaven to the world. In our worship we give thanks and praise to God. In our life together, we seek to preserve the truth. Echoing the teachings of the Apostle Paul in the first four chapters and chapter twelve of his first letter to the church at Corinth, we affirm our belief in and commitment to the core values of trust and faithfulness, connectedness and interconnectedness. We celebrate the diversity of the members of the church of Jesus Christ. *For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body* (I Corinthians 12: 13). The Presbytery website boldly declares, “Together, we are Christ’s Body.”

History and Process:

In 2000, the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta completed a long-range planning process and adopted the following mission statement: *The Presbytery of Greater Atlanta is a supportive network of churches determined to help each church be the best it can be to connect, equip and empower congregations to carry out their missions especially those objectives particular churches can't accomplish alone. The focus of the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta's missional life is connecting congregations to each other and to the larger church of Jesus Christ.* Over the last few years the Presbytery has sought to live out this vision.

By early 2005 it became evident that the Presbytery should enter into another evaluation and planning process. Accordingly, in the spring of 2005 the Presbytery’s Coordinating Council recommended we embark upon a long-range planning process that would evaluate the accomplishments of the previous five years and give direction for the next several years.

Subsequently, Council engaged the Reverend. Jill Hudson, a nationally known consultant and former Presbytery Executive of the Presbytery of Whitewater Valley, to lead a task group in a long-range planning process. Council invited twelve persons to serve on what became known as the Long Range Planning Team:

Elder Florida Ellis, Moderator of Presbytery, Atlanta First
Elder Marilyn Borst, Director of Global Ministries, Peachtree
Elder Anna M. Brown, Certified Christian Educator, Pleasant Hill
Reverend Thomas Daniel, Associate, North Avenue
Reverend Matthew M. Fry, Pastor, Norcross
Reverend Insick Jang, Member-at-Large
Carol A. Johnson, Financial Officer of the Presbytery

Elder Walter K. Krauth, III, Newnan
Elder Forrest Palmer, Executive Associate Presbyter
Reverend Lucas Pina, Immigrant Ministries Coordinator
Reverend Marvin L. Simmers, Parish Associate at Hillside
Reverend Paul Roberts, Pastor, Church of the Master
Reverend Yolanda Thompson, Member-at-Large
Reverend Dr. Jerry Dean Weber, Presbyterian Homes of Georgia.

During the spring and summer of 2005 the Team met in order to determine a process by which we could evaluate the past, survey the present and gauge the future visions of the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta. Early on, we determined that we would utilize a process for collecting data that is based upon Appreciative Inquiry. Appreciative Inquiry asks questions that draw participants into the process, energizes participants, and helps them generate new images of the future. It recognizes the best in people and the world around us, affirms the past and present strengths, successes, and potentials, in order to give life to a future we do not yet fully know. The Holy Spirit beckons us toward that future, a future to which God calls us all.

Throughout the fall and winter of 2005-2006 we solicited and collected data from all corners of the Presbytery. An online survey was created and placed on the Presbytery website. The Team developed a Bible Study based upon Ephesians 4:1-6, 11-16, that focused upon gifts and giftedness. Surveys were distributed at presbytery meetings. In each instance we asked everyone to join in envisioning our future.

During the fall of 2005 we held focus group meetings with more than ten distinct constituent groups from across the Presbytery. We also began an evaluation of past goals/priorities and submitted our report to Council in May of 2006. In January 2006 we invited the leadership from across the Presbytery to join us in a retreat that was held at Johnson C. Smith Seminary. At the retreat and in our focus group meetings we used the Appreciative Inquiry process to gauge the range of possible priorities for the future life of our Presbytery.

From January thru June the Team collated, read, re-read, and digested the data collected. The Team determined that there were three Core Values (Trust, Connectedness, and Diversity) and five Priorities (Communication, Relationships, Leadership Training, Evangelism, and Social Witness) that define who we are and what we feel called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to seek to live into as a Presbytery over the next several years. During April and May we shared these preliminary core values and priorities, sought feedback, and solicited further input from Council and the Ministry Teams.

It was clear from the feedback that the current structure and staffing of Presbytery are serving the needs of the congregations. There is no need for major change, but rather movement toward an even better and more faithful Presbytery. Following the September 9, 2006 Presbytery meeting, where we heard many comments, we revised the plan as presented in September in ways that are responsive to what we heard in the Presbytery meeting and in keeping with what we heard from the Presbytery over our 18-month process. After much prayerful consideration, lively and Spirit filled discussion we present the following mission statement, five priorities, and four recommendations to the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta.

RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES FOR THE PRESBYTERY OF GREATER ATLANTA

Recommendation number 1:

Mission Statement

The Team recommends:

- That the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta adopt the following mission statement:

The mission of the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta is to witness to the transforming power of the Gospel and to connect and empower congregations in their local and global ministries.

Recommendation number 2:

Priorities

The Team recommends:

- That the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta adopt:
 - Communication
 - Relationships
 - Leadership Training
 - Evangelism
 - Social Witness

as priorities for our corporate life over the next several years.

● Communication:

Our vision for Communication is that we will celebrate our ministries and break down the barriers by making members of all congregations aware of what God is doing in our midst.

Rationale: We discerned from the data a real hunger for stronger relationships and better communication with the Presbytery and among our member churches. One of the true benefits of the connectional church is that we can look to one another for strength, encouragement, and new ideas. The Apostle Paul reflected this clearly in his ministry among the early churches.

• Relationships:

Our vision for Relationships in the Presbytery is to build up the body of Christ by providing for inclusive spiritual fellowship, personal and communal nurture, and mutual support of one another.

Rationale: The New Testament image of the Church as the body of Christ in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and Colossians 3 explicitly describe the importance of healthy relationships for advancing the mission, witness, and harmony of the church. The data gathered express strongly a desire for the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta to make the building of relationships--congregations with congregations, members with members, leaders with leaders, and presbytery with other Presbyterian, ecumenical, and interfaith bodies--a priority for the next several years. In a world of fragmented relationships, the church is called to provide for "the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God." (*Book of Order G-1.0200*)

• Leadership:

Our vision for Leadership is that members of all ages are inspired to recognize, celebrate, develop and nurture their gifts and offer them for the benefit of the church and the world; we will also be inspired to identify and call forth gifts in one another.

Rationale: Leadership development is essential for the vitality of the Church. All generations are called to utilize and develop their gifts for ministry. Elders, Deacons and laypersons are all called to be partners in ministry with pastors and educators in leadership development. The data collected from surveys from our congregations and individuals indicate a strong interest and need to further develop our leadership development efforts.

• Evangelism:

Our vision for Evangelism is to enable our communities of faith to joyfully witness to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, by sharing the Good News, being open and inclusive, and honoring diversity as a visible sign of our new humanity in Christ.

Rationale: The data collected reflected a longing to be more effective at sharing the Good News. A desire to strengthen Presbytery's witness through assisting congregational commitment and ability to engage in evangelism to both new believers, as well as those seeking a new church home.

• **Social Witness:**

Our vision for Social Witness is to discern what God is already doing in the world and where God calls us, to join in that work joyously and tirelessly.

Rationale: The promotion of social righteousness is one of the Great Ends of the Church. The data collected reaffirmed our tradition and commitment to continue to social witness. These strategies will allow us to broaden and deepen our social witness.

Recommendation number 3:

Tri-Presbytery Recommendation

Our vision is that the three Presbyteries working together can do more of what God is calling us to do than any individual Presbytery.

The Team recommends:

- That the Coordinating Council formally communicate with the Councils of Cherokee and Northeast Georgia Presbyteries and express the willingness to expand on any current or new ministries that might further enhance the effectiveness of the mutual witness of the three Presbyteries in our geographical areas.

Recommendation number 4:

Accountability

We believe that what we have heard from our members and from the discernment process is worthy of following and not being forgotten.

The Team recommends:

- That the Coordinating Council instruct each ministry team/committee to report to Council, beginning with the April 10, 2007 Council meeting and at each successive meeting, how each team/committee is fulfilling the Recommendations of this Long-Range Planning Report.
- That the Coordinating Council create a Long Range Planning Task Force that would be charged with review and implementation of these recommendations. The task force would report to Presbytery annually.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES TO IMPLEMENT THE PRIORITIES FOR THE PRESBYTERY OF GREATER ATLANTA

COMMUNICATION:

- That the Coordinating Council formalize the Ambassador Program and request every member of a Ministry Team or Committee to report information about the work of the presbytery to her or his home church, develop ambassador contacts with our congregations and immigrant fellowships, and initiate a strategy for collecting and reporting stories of congregational celebrations, upcoming events, and past successes
- That the Coordinating Council request each session to appoint one person from each congregation as a communication link with Presbytery for the next several years. This person would ideally have access to e-mail addresses of members of the congregation and would serve as a conduit for communications to and from Presbytery.
- That the Coordinating Council create a Task Team to meet with representatives of other language congregations and immigrant fellowships in order to identify materials that need to be translated and to report to the Coordinating Council by April 2007.
- That the Coordinating Council, beginning in 2007, provide foreign language translators, e.g., Korean, Portuguese, Spanish, and other languages as requested, at all Saturday meetings of Presbytery for the next several years.
- That each Ministry Team develop a written job description for its members, including the responsibility for being an ambassador to her or his own church, and give the job description(s) to the Nominating Committee by June 2007, in order to assist the Nominating Committee in recruiting new members.
- That the Operations Ministry Team/Technology Committee redesign the presbytery website so that it incorporates the Presbytery priorities.
- That the Operations Ministry Team develop and budget for a plan to enhance communication, with particular focus on the younger generation, and report to Coordinating Council by June 2008.
- That the Presbytery adopt the model of meeting around tables at Presbytery meetings in order to foster relationships and facilitate discussion.

RELATIONSHIPS:

- That the Coordinating Council arrange for stories/case studies of congregations that are building relationships with one another, with special groups, with presbytery, and within the congregation to be shared at each meeting of Presbytery.
- That the Coordinating Council plan a fifteen-minute presentation at each Presbytery meeting, that would highlight a resource of Presbytery for congregations (e.g., help with preparation of a child protection policy).
- That the Coordinating Council provide for “booths” for congregational sharing and networking at Presbytery meetings.
- That the Coordinating Council through the Worship Committee include the new members of the Presbytery—both clergy and educator—in leadership roles in the worship services at presbytery meetings.
- That the Coordinating Council include symposia for shared dialogue as well as information-giving options (e.g., best practices for capital campaigns) at major presbytery events, i.e., Fall and Winter Leadership events.
- That during lunch at Presbytery meetings, the Coordinating Council arrange to have some planned seating around interest subjects, and resourced by a facilitator.
- That the Committee on Ministry, through the Pastoral Care Team, expand efforts to establish fellowship groups among clergy and educators, and that the present number of groups be doubled by 2010.
- That the Committee on Ministry inform pastors and educators about the variety of personal/spiritual renewal opportunities available annually, with a goal of attendance by a minimum of ten persons per year.

LEADERSHIP

- That the Coordinating Council identify one Presbytery meeting per year to focus on the theme of “Challenges to the Postmodern Church.”
- That the Coordinating Council identify and invite seven churches each year to engage in an intensive partnership with the Presbytery for congregational transformation.
- That the Coordinating Council explore sources for obtaining non-Presbytery budget funds for leadership development, technology, programming, and scholarships.
- That the Coordinating Council invite within the year the moderator of the 217th General Assembly to host a retreat for prayer and renewal within the bounds of the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta.

- That the Ministry Teams collect “best practices” in their content area and disseminate this information to congregations in a timely manner.
- That the Camp and Conference Ministry Team initiate retreats for pastors and educators for personal and spiritual renewal.
- That the Christian Education Ministry Team offer officer training in different geographic areas of the Presbytery, utilizing the gifts of pastors and educators as leaders.
- That the Christian Education Ministry Team develop an online skill bank.
- That the Congregational Ministry Team develop a strategy for encouraging more congregations to elect high school youth as elders, with a goal of fifty congregations having youth serving as elders by 2010.
- That the Nominating Committee intentionally identify and enlist more young adults between the ages of 20 – 30 to serve on the committees of Presbytery, with a goal to have at least one on each team/constitutional committee by 2009.
- That the Nominating Committee devise a strategy to ensure that every congregation has at least one person serving on a Ministry Team, commission, or committee of Presbytery.
- That the Resource Center and the Technology and Communication Committee, in cooperation with other Ministry Teams and committees, develop online resources for leadership development.
- That each Fall and Winter Leadership Event from 2007 – 2009 offer a workshop on the topic: development of elders and deacons as spiritual leaders.

EVANGELISM

- That the Presbyterian New Church Development Commission develop a strategy for initiating nontraditional NCDs with an emphasis on reaching new believers, and report to the presbyteries by November 2007.
- That the Presbyterian New Church Development Commission develop a more supportive partnership with emerging nontraditional Presbyterian worshiping groups, with a view toward formally recognizing these groups and to chartering at least one of them within the next several years.
- That the Presbyterian New Church Development Commission initiate at least one multicultural NCD during the next three years.
- That the Congregational Ministry Team develop a Worship Consulting Team to assist congregations in exploring alternative forms of worship.

- That the Congregational, Christian Education, and Outreach Ministry Teams form an inter-team committee to assist congregations in becoming more effective in multicultural outreach and inclusion.
- That the Evangelism Committee develop a Presbytery team to assist congregations to become more welcoming and visible.
- That the Evangelism Committee develop a plan for equipping members of congregations for personal evangelism and report the plan to the Congregational Ministry Team by June 2007.
- That the Evangelism Committee develop a strategy for doubling the number of adult baptisms in the Presbytery during the next several years.
- That the Presbytery affirm Immigrant Ministries as an essential component of the Presbytery's evangelism strategy and that the Operations Ministry Team seek funding for coordinating these ministries.

SOCIAL WITNESS

- That the Christian Education Ministry Team identify and support ways in which the Presbytery can help our congregations engage in interfaith dialogue and respond to interfaith issues.
- That the Outreach Ministry Team design a strategy to expand, implement and measure the long-term effectiveness of anti-racism/anti-sexism training.
- That the Outreach Ministry Team form a Metropolitan Planning and Development Task Team to develop a strategy for engaging in dialogue and cooperative action with planning boards, secular organizations and agencies, community organizers, and ecumenical and interfaith partners regarding the future of the Atlanta metropolitan area and the role of the church.
- That the Outreach Ministry Team, in coordination with other ministry teams, make concerns for children a priority over the next several years, with special emphasis placed on foster care, residential care, and child protection. This would include development of model child protection policies for use in all congregations.
- That the Outreach Ministry Team create an annual Hospitality Award for a congregation that demonstrates the values of inclusiveness, anti-racism, anti-sexism, and anti-ageism.
- That the Outreach Ministry Team conduct a survey of congregational involvement in social witness activities in order to help congregations further address the social needs in their neighborhoods.

- That the Outreach Ministry Team engage in dialogue and coordination with ecumenical and interfaith partners about unique ways Presbyterians can assist immigrant populations.