

**COM REPORT TO NCP LEADERSHIP COUNCIL**  
**June 2, 2021**

Setting the Scene:

The work of the Committee on Ministry continues to happen in the midst of a time of change in the life and ministry of the Christian Church in general, the Presbyterian Church (USA) in particular, and every individual Christian congregation. In short, we Christians continue to be swimming in waters of transition. This is especially so now as congregations begin to move from digital ministry during the pandemic into a kind of post-pandemic hybrid ministry that combines in person ministry with digital ministry. Here is the context in which we all seek to serve Christ and his church:

- All congregations, however stable they may seem, are nonetheless in **constant transition**
  - o This requires significant time and relational investment on the part of COM to help congregations follow paths which are pro-active, strategic, and healthy.
  - o We are in the process of designing programs, guidelines, and possible events to help congregations and pastors better appreciate this new reality of **constant transition for the church.**
- New models of church and staffing of church are more the future than traditional ones
  - o New Worshipping Communities and non-traditional congregations, immigrant fellowships
  - o Such new models of church invite us into balance: what are the appropriate levels of risk and accountability that ensure the most talented, capable, accountable leadership possible for a congregation.
  - o Greater use of stated supply, co-pastors, and designated pastoral positions as well as an increased number of part-time, tent-making, and shared pastoral positions.
- It is an era of **high anxiety**, which ratchets up conflict and dysfunction – we attend to that with as much calm and grace as we can muster.
- This time of transitioning into regathering for worship and in-person ministry, most of our congregations are at a spectrum of comfort levels with moving into an unknown future that will likely be simultaneously both familiar and strange.
- We are aware that our presbytery is now in the midst of a number of pastoral transitions due to retirement and pastors leaving for new calls, as well as due to changing congregational situations.
- This era of anxiety means the COM needs to be especially attentive to working as partners in connecting churches and their leadership to the various resources of the presbytery – including those beyond the COM itself.
- The demands on church leaders are many. The pandemic has left pastors and elders stressed, tired, frustrated, and burned out. We care for them and try to provide opportunities to attend to their welfare, their self-care, and to get them to maintain healthy boundaries.

As a COM, we are working toward creating a culture within our presbytery in which we can be seen as a partner to congregations, rather than a threat, coming alongside them as colleagues.

- We would like to shape a culture in which an **Administrative Commission** is not perceived as shameful and disciplinary, but as a significant and helpful investment by the presbytery in the life and ministry of a particular congregation who needs assistance in developing capacity for its future. We would also like to work with the Leadership Council to enhance the naming and the creation of Administrative Commissions in the future toward this end.
- We are continuing to work with congregations in our presbytery to work with **Holy Cow** and to analyze and communicate the results of diagnostic evaluations (called CAT scans) of a congregation's overall health, vitality and capacity. [www.ncptransforms.org](http://www.ncptransforms.org).
- We have offered and will continue to offer **training opportunities** – on staff supervision, dealing with church bullies, and other topics.
- We are requiring and enforcing requirements for **Healthy Boundaries** trainings which explore dynamics of power, raise awareness of sexual misconduct, and encourage healthy leadership, now with particular attention to making such training available digitally.
- We are investing time and money in providing opportunities for colleague groups, and especially for coaching for pastors serving in our presbytery. We are also putting together a special cohort of pastors who have begun their ministries in NCP during this pandemic.
- We hope to hold a meeting of representatives of the COM, the CDC, and Leadership Council to explore ways we can assist one another and work jointly to bring awareness of all possible presbytery resources as we work with our congregations and pastors.
- And perhaps most of all, we would like, in so far as it is possible, for every experience of COM – exams, pastoral transition, dissolution, etc. – to be one that is responsive, relational, gracious, and clear.

Our primary work is accountability to each other and to the presbytery – living out the ordination vows we've taken. Accountability in the most positive form -- continually forming and deepening healthy, vital, faithful leaders and congregations.

COM Documents - <http://www.thepresbytery.org/documents/committee-ministry-documents>

### Questions from the Leadership Council

#### 1. How does your committee support the presbytery mission?

NCP's mission statement reads, "We will provide care, oversight and accountability for teaching elders and educators." COM provides direct care, oversight, and accountability for teaching

elders, educators, and sessions so that congregations in our presbytery are well-poised to carry out their unique mission calling.

Currently in our presbytery there are:

103 congregations

8 fellowships

There are 337 Minister Members of the presbytery.

124 ministers in congregations

43 validated specialized ministries

55 at-large members

115 honorably retired

COM carries our work by empowering five different teams:

The **Examinations Team** examines candidates transferring into our presbytery or changing calls within our presbytery. These teams continue to work with candidates to ensure the theological and pastoral competence required for teaching elders in the variety of ministry contexts in this presbytery. Susan Querry Grayson serves as chair for the Examinations Team.

The **Care Team** is engaged in an ambitious listening project in which every minister member and certified educator in the presbytery is offered a listening ear by a trained member of the team over a four-year cycle. The Care Team provides grants for church leaders to attend continuing education events or facilitate colleague groups. The Care Team supports pastors by remembering clergy ordinations and showing compassion to those with illness or loss. The team conducts Exit Interviews with those leaving their current staff positions, and helps the executive presbyter welcome new clergy into the presbytery. The Care Team is also responsible for the annual clergy/educator retreat that was cancelled this year due to the pandemic. Plans are underway to offer this retreat again in 2022. Nancy Clark serves as the secretary for the Care Team.

The **Ministry Relations Team (MRT)** blends care, oversight and accountability for members of the presbytery and congregations through its work in crisis engagement and conflict management. The MRT has spent a significant amount of energy this year in working with congregations and pastors on negotiated dissolutions of the pastoral relationship, including a revision of that policy to make it clearer for all parties involved. When conflict is present in a congregation, MRT offers listening sessions -- a process through which the hopes, and concerns of a congregation can come to the fore for processing. The MRT also takes the lead in working with a congregation in need of an administrative commission. Finally, the MRT oversees the expenditure of the Clergy Crisis Funds to support pastors and their families in particular hardship. Aaron Fulp-Eickstaedt and Juli Wilson-Black co-chair the Ministry Relations Team.

The **Congregational Transitions Commission** provides oversight to every move made in, out, and within a congregation. The CTC works with congregations from the moment a pastor communicates her intention to leave a position through the calling of a new pastor. CTC works through liaisons who become the face of the CTC to the session and congregation and work with them to determine the appropriate type of call (installed, designated, stated supply, etc.), ensure good fit, healthy financial picture (including minimum salary requirements and benefits), and all the appropriate legal and immigration requirements have been met. This includes overseeing the process for receiving ministers from other denominations. CTC works with Gap and Interim pastors to ensure that congregations have the appropriate pastoral coverage during times of transition and offers scholarships for interim ministry training. Mary Austin and Michael Volpe co-chair this commission.

The **Specialized Ministry Team** deals with all the transitional and maintenance issues pertaining to minister members who are:

- serving in validated ministries
- at-large
- honorably retired, and
- parish associates.

The Specialized Ministry Team is working to build relationships with these teaching elders and provide support to them. They are responsible for validating specialized ministries within the bounds of the presbytery, receiving yearly specialized ministry reports, overseeing parish associate relationships, and ensuring IRS-related matters for specialized ministers are recorded properly. This team began its work in earnest in February and will continue to get clarity about its role as time passes. Shelby Etheridge Harasty is chairing this team.

### **What were the significant events for your committee last year?**

The COM has undergone some transition in its leadership during the past year, with new chairs of the Examinations Team and the Congregational Transitions Commission. We were blessed to have Joan Erickson, a ruling elder who has formerly served as a general presbyter, serve as our transitional COM Administrator. Earlier this year, we welcomed Dina Bickel as our new COM Administrator and she has quickly jumped in and already made a difference in enhancing the work of the COM.

We continue to address the new reality of transitional ministry across the church. Recently our denomination has revamped the training process for transitional (formerly known as interim) pastors. Previously, the model for pastoral transitions held that there were more or less fixed transitional goals for “interim” pastors to lead a congregation through before they call a new pastor. However, over the last ten years or more the new reality is that each congregation has different and often unique needs for a positive pastoral transition that do not necessarily line up neatly with even relatively fixed transitional goals. What’s more, even congregations with stable

pastoral situations are undergoing change and transition. All this was true before COVID and it is now even more true as we move through this pandemic into the “new normal” for ministry.

Therefore, led by the COM Chair and General Presbyter, our COM Coordinating Commission and the Congregational Transitions Commission are working toward a more flexible model of working with churches in pastoral transition that is more attentive to the specific context of each congregation. We hope to recognize and work with healthy congregations in a way that honors their health while assisting those congregations with specific challenges or special needs in a manner that directly addresses those challenges and needs so that all churches, whatever their context, are poised for a future ministry that looks with fresh eyes at how God is leading them.

All of us who serve on the COM are very much aware that it is through the work of this body that congregations often have their most significant and impactful encounters with the presbytery. It is our hope and prayer that those encounters are positive and serve to help congregations enhance their respective ministry.

### **What issues are most pressing on your committee’s docket right now?**

Because of the cultural trends mentioned above, the COM is working hard to respond to all the arising needs in our congregations, and are, at times, stretched thin.

- We notice that even in the circumstance of “normal” pastoral transitions (retirement or pastor leaving for another call), congregations are interested in exploring options beyond simply calling another full-time, installed pastor and we are seeing a rise in the use of designated and stated supply pastorates.
- In light of the options now afforded in our Book of Order for pastoral transitions and the reality that the needs of congregations are increasingly varied related to pastoral searches, the Congregational Transitions Commission has begun to utilize its process for congregations requesting exceptions to normal procedures.
- In general, we are working to operate out of a position of being pro-active rather than re-active in our ministry and work with pastors, sessions, and congregations. It is our intention to utilize all the different “networks” we can access to help to pro-actively discover good pastoral matches for our congregations and their ministries.

Finally, we are acutely aware our presbytery and the church in general is entering into a major ministry transition into a post-pandemic context. There will be no going back to how we used to do ministry in the “before times.” As COM chair, I want our COM to assist congregations in reflecting on what has been gained during the pandemic, what has been lost, what new ministry gifts, skills, and programs need to be carried forward and what familiar ministry gifts, skills, and programs need to be left behind. There is always room for improvement. We will seek to continually work for our COM to be nimble and effective in

our ministry. The COM stands ready to assist both the Leadership Council and the General Presbyter in these challenging times that are also full of possibility and promise.

**How can the Leadership Council be of help to your committee?**

We continue to be grateful to the Council for working with COM on behalf of our congregations. We hope that we can continually be seen by Council as a positive and trusted resource in the presbytery to be partner with the Leadership Council and Church Development (CDC) in coming alongside congregations in National Capital Presbytery who are seeking to find new ways of being church in the twenty-first century, a pastoral presence for those congregations who are coming to the end of their life-cycle, and a helpful resource for lay and clergy leadership who seek to be open to the guidance of the Spirit and to grow in their ability to lead the church in this time of change.