

**STRATEGIC PLANNING 2015**  
**SUMMARY OF INPUT FROM PRESBYTERIES,  
CONGREGATIONS, MINISTRIES AND INDIVIDUALS**

*The General Assembly has asked the Assembly Council to develop a strategic plan for the national church to encourage, support and strengthen congregations. As an early step in this process, the Strategic Planning Subcommittee of Assembly Council is seeking broad input to help develop the plan. In addition to input from presbyteries, our colleges, the Elders' Institute and the Life and Mission Agency, your input will be appreciated. What are your suggestions for how The Presbyterian Church in Canada could better equip and strengthen congregations?*

Heather Crisp, Strategic Planning Committee of Assembly Council

**Participation:** There was excellent participation and thoughtful input to the strategic planning questionnaire from courts and individuals. Each synod had at least one response: 28 presbyteries, 10 congregations, one camp, one college and 42 individuals contributed.

**1. How does the national church through the national offices, best help the local congregations become stronger and more vital?**

There is very strong support and appreciation for the work of national church, through its offices and for the vital role it plays in serving the collective needs of the denomination, undertaking the programs and services that would be beyond the ability of the local congregation to undertake. The people who work in the national offices are knowledgeable, helpful courteous, competent and demonstrate a genuine desire to help congregations and leaders.

- The national offices has an essential role in articulating our Presbyterian **theology and identity** and presenting a cohesive denominational face to global and ecumenical partners.
- The national office staff provide a **crucial supportive and administrative role** serving the whole church: Consultation with the Clerks of Assembly, financial services, workshops, legal support, pension, health and dental, etc.
- **Programs that enable local congregation to engage in mission and ministry beyond the local church:** PWS&D and Presbyterians Sharing, mission, mission education and trips, Justice Ministries and refugee support.
- **Workshops and Visits from Staff:** Treasurers Workshops and the Treasurers Handbook.
- **Stewardship by Design and Planned Giving** were programs that congregations thought demonstrated a successful model. It is suggested that the “by design” model might be expanded to address other congregational needs such as Evangelism by Design or CE by Design.
- **The website and web page support is good and has been improving.** It is hoped that the website will continue to be enriched and made even more easily navigated.
- **The PCPak** has a lot of good content but it is overwhelming. The national office is encouraged to be more strategic in what is mailed out in printed form and would like to receive more information by electronic correspondence. Other resources could be distributed electronically including, The Record (free on line), and training workshops.
- **The national offices should be on the cutting edge of technology.** Leaders have appreciated the webinars and would like more live streaming of conferences. Continued development of social media, and technical support (technical ministers) and the creation of a web-based library would be helpful. The church will need to find ways to help people who are not on line.

**2. What current practices or programs of the national church are most in need of improving in order to help local congregations become stronger and more vital?**

**Improve Communication:** Communication with the national offices is in general timely and good. At times it is challenging to reach staff by phone and email. It was noted that customer care, service and communication need improving.

It is generally acknowledged that many congregations and leaders have not tapped into the sources for support offered nor the resources prepared. Many resources and programs offered by the church are not communicated to the congregation through the clerks and clergy. There is a desire to build a stronger relationship between the congregations and the national offices. Congregations would like staff to be more visible, spend time in the field, lead more workshops and be more transparent. A clear directory or organizational chart of the staff and offices would be helpful.

**Focus resources on local church** as a priority of expenditure to strengthen local congregation. Everything the national church does must support local congregations. Not the other way around. Many of the programs are judged irrelevant to small congregations. The national office staff are encouraged to listen to congregations, be sensitive the needs of the local-small and rural congregations, identify the real needs and then act on these identified needs.

#### **Resources:**

- Create tools to help congregations conduct audit to identify resources that could support the local church to equip congregations to deal with challenges of the times.
- Support for children, youth, young adult and family ministry: curriculum evaluation, VBS materials, children with special needs, profession of faith resource.
- Worship: Resources that express Joy! Less traditional, more blended worship, intergenerational worship, , worship materials designed to be led by lay leaders, worship music resources/contemporary music, more accessible language, preaching, use of technology in worship.
- Resources that reflect our multi-cultural and multi-language denomination: resources with cultural content/support of ethnic congregations,
- Ecumenical and interfaith resources for congregational level, welcoming newcomers, information about Muslim beliefs and how to relate to our neighbour,
- Ministry and reconciliation, inclusive and welcoming.
- Provide critical reviews of books and resources for congregational development and consultants to work with individual congregations to address specific needs and provide support.

**Governance:** Do not be bound by the current structure. Re-form polity to make the PCC more effective and streamline. Decision making can be long and difficult and described as “The Presbyterian Wall”. Congregations need more flexibility to deal with membership and rules: re-vise, re-name or even get rid of the Book of Forms. There is desire to reform the courts and congregations to make them less rigid and more permission giving.

**Presbytery Renewal:** Presbyteries are the first in line to help struggling congregations and need to be the place to offer support for congregational renewal. Presbyteries need to take responsibility and leadership, particularly with oversight and visitation. It is difficult for lay people to serve at presbytery when it gathers during the day. Presbytery is “perceived as clergy controlled making decisions about clergy that would appear to be biased in favour of clergy”

*Presbyteries are the place where individual congregations encounter “the wider church”, it should also be the place where ministers – new and seasoned, together with their elders, can look for support, advice, sounding boards in time of stress, opportunities to test new ideas, challenge the boundaries – in short – a loving, spirit-filled environment. Too often presbytery becomes the place where rules are passed.*

Lynda Forbes

### **3. What are the most important new initiatives that the national church should undertake to help local congregations become stronger and more vital?**

The PCC recognizes significant challenges lie ahead and that change will be required. A common and well-articulated vision will help identify key areas that energy and resources should be focused. As a

denomination we need to find new ways to accomplish the many tasks the church requires more efficiently. Some programs may need to be dropped.

*The strategy for the PCC needs to be simultaneously bold, simple, profound and clear. It must be based on the core of who we are, and what makes us distinctive. It must set out energizing objectives that will stem decline and build growth. It must clarify our voice. It must embrace the full social diversity of the population of Canada. And it must do these things under the umbrella of our faith.*

Board of Governors and Faculty of Knox College

**Spiritual Renewal:** Any strategic plan needs to begin with spiritual renewal and be guided by discernment and prayer. As a denomination we need to deepen spiritual Christian practices of prayer, worship, Bible study, disciple making, service and outreach. We also need to identify leaders and help them develop into spiritual leaders.

*Renewal can only come from the bottom up and only as congregations are renewed spiritually. Programs will not help us. Only real spiritual formation will. Do we see that in our clergy, our elders, our laity? I can think of no significant movement of church renewal or revival that did not arise from a congregational thirst to know more of God.*

Neal Mathers

**Create an atmosphere that encourages initiative and risk taking.** Local churches need to focus less on their own survival and more on reaching out to their community.

**Focus on outreach and evangelism at the congregational level.** The work of evangelism is for the whole church but the national office staff can lead the church guided by a “missions and a strategy that re-orientes and re-shapes the life of our local congregations from focusing on growing churches to changing the world.”

Equip Local Congregations to engage their community. Local congregations need help to reach out and engage the local community where they are located, not simply to bring people in to fellowship but to share their personal joy and the Gospel – The Good News! Local congregations are seeking resources and training to equip local leaders in evangelism.

**As a denomination we need to re-think our church theology for today.**

How can we be church in a new age?

Church is more than the congregation’s ministry and more than the buildings.

*The national church NEEDS to take leadership AND provide models to congregations in order to help them “take on their buildings”. Most of our buildings do not serve us and many of them imprison us, making it impossible for us to make the changes in our worship, ministry and mission required by the needs of the 21st century.*

Lynne Donovan

Support new communities of faith that are non- traditional such as regional churches ecumenical ministry, clustering and multi-point and provide new models for ministry.

Mandate presbyteries to do strategic work looking at number and location of congregations and developing a real plan to future that might include amalgamations, closures, opening of regional congregations – consultants ( it is best if they are from outside the presbytery) to help in this process and guide.

**The relationship between clergy and the congregation is under stress.** The cost of doing ministry in the congregation is too high. Especially concerning cost of sustaining full-time ordained minister and the

benefits such as continuing education, health care and pension. Make it easier to have part time clergy. Identify and help leaders develop and move forward to become clergy – grants to help.

**Focus on the local church.** Only so much change can happen from top down, individuals and congregation have to want to grow. The strength of the church as a whole is reflected in the health of local congregations.

- Create tools to help congregations conduct an audit, to identify resources that could support them and equip the congregation to deal with challenges.
- Support children, youth, young adult and family ministry.
- Worship Resources: less traditional resources, blended worship, intergenerational worship, worship materials designed to be led by lay leaders, worship music resources/contemporary music, more accessible language, preaching, and use of technology in worship.
- Resources that reflect our multi-cultural and multi-language denomination: resources with cultural content/support of ethnic congregations.
- Ecumenical and Interfaith resources for congregational level, welcoming newcomers, information about Muslim beliefs and how to relate to our neighbours.
- Resources to help congregations be more welcoming and inclusive.
- Provide critical reviews of books and resources for congregational development.

**The congregations and presbyteries have appreciated grants for New and Renewing Congregations, New Initiatives and support of local (presbytery) missions.**

**Support innovation and risk taking through grants:**

- Use grants for the national church to encourage and support local missions and fund local initiatives that reach out into the community.
- Re-examine grant policy. Consider larger grants to foster independence, support of capital grants for facilities and the requirement that an initiative has to have presbytery financial support.
- Strengthen the policy to give grants only when there are local matching grants.
- Encourage clear objectives, clear cost analysis, and accountability for continued funding of projects.
- Create a catalogue of available grants that is user friendly.
- Grants for new congregational planting need to include funds for training of leaders in church planting and for strong leadership (clergy and worship arts).

**The national offices can foster networking opportunities** to connect and create meaningful discussion across the denomination and the sharing stories of hope and best practices.

Congregations can help support each other but may need help to connect. Link small congregations with larger churches, dying congregations with healthy churches, churches of similar size in different parts of the country, even encouraging partnering around the world – face time.

*That a growing, comprehensive online library be created for our congregations and presbyteries to share descriptions of successful new practices for all aspects of congregational life. These stories and overviews will provide ideas, insights and encouragement to other congregations that may be seeking change. This will be a vehicle to help the church learn from others at the grass roots, and to support each other as we move together as a denomination into the future.*

Peter Coutts

**Focus on leadership development and training for elders, leaders and clergy:** Identify gifts. Identify expertise. Identify leaders and invest in their formation as healthy spiritual leaders. Promote accessible affordable continuing education for clergy and lay people and equip them with resources, support, leadership skills, and opportunities to engage in theological reflection.

**Focus on supporting clergy/teaching elders:** Teaching elders are the key to strength and health of the congregation. Support life-long continuing education. Provide mentors from outside the presbytery who are able to be honest and candid.

- Support developing organizational skills for ministers / virtual organizer
- Tool kit for new ministers
- Help ministers transition from new geographic location, new congregation and new to the denomination
- More support for interim moderators
- Skills such as palliative care, pastoral care, conflict management new forms of teaching ministry and session leadership.
- Support programs like pastor of excellence

**The role of the colleges:** The colleges play a valued and crucial role in training ministers and elders (certificate programs), distance education and mentoring. The denomination needs to continue support of theological education and encourage more training of well-equipped clergy, specialized ministers (youth) and elders. The role of clergy is changing and the PCC will need to work along with the colleges to develop curriculum, re-define regulations, definitions and education standards for ordained ministry and be open to ordination to different types of ministry.

*We therefore urge the PCC to support its colleges as they continue to review and develop their curricula. Encourage the colleges to provide degree and certificate programs that advance new and changing purposes within the PCC. We also believe that the PCC needs to think in new and creative ways of working with people who might need to lead churches in part-time, or “tentmaker” ministries, and what different kinds of theological education methods and requirements will be needed to respond creatively and faithfully to our new situations.*

Knox College

**Decentralize** resources, emphasis, mission and people. The work that is done by national office staff could be decentralized with the aid of electronic communication.

Presbytery is the natural place to offer services, resources and effective support to congregations. Presbyteries need personnel to mentor and develop relationships with congregational leaders and help Interim moderators and the work they do.

**Invest in Regional – Coaching and People Resources:** Consultants or coaches based in different parts of the country are better able to communicate and serve local congregations. Churches and leadership need consultants to provide support and to address specific, individual needs.

- Regional support staff focused on Youth/PYPS
- Regional support staff focused on leadership development, pastoral skills for lay people
- Reconstitute former superintendent of mission model
- Shepherd for the shepherd – mentorship for leadership –outside of peers
- Base consulting staff in Presbyteries. i.e. Executive Presbyter, General Presbyter
- Develop a network of volunteer coaches
- Natural Church Development Coaching
- Mentor new congregations and help new PCC congregations connect more fully with the PCC (cultural)

*Offer Coaching: Resourcing should include formation in relationship, not just information by shifting focus towards initiatives like coaching. Coaching should be broadened to include any who want it by using national funds to train volunteer coaches, and creating a service to connect willing coaches with congregational leaders who want them.*

Jeremy Bellsmith

**Strategic plan is not the goal in and of itself but rather a tool to help accomplish the goal.**

There was some pessimism about this strategic planning process and the value of the questions asked. It was noted that in the past the church has undertaken other studies and questionnaires but even with best intentions they have been fully acted upon.

**Too important need outside help.**

*There are extraordinary tools and consultants available. I would like to know why we are not (at least that I have heard) using professional qualified advisors in this vital matter?*

*We need vital energy devoted to congregational ministry in all aspects. I believe that this requires our best minds and the most effective leadership that we can find.*

Brooke Ashfield

**A Good Question.**

*If we were beginning a brand new denomination in 2015 in this post Christendom reality and we knew it would have about 106,000 members with a budget of \$8 million what would it look like? How big would the national office be? What could we do and what could we not do? Where would we partner with other denominations?*

Neal Mathers

This is an important time and opportunity for The Presbyterian Church in Canada to discern a new plan. Let us approach this process with openness to change, with creative thinking and ready to embrace reformation work God is able to accomplish in our church and with joy and thanking for the many gifted people in local congregations and in the national offices.

Ms. Kathy McKay is currently the convenor of the Strategic Planning Committee of Assembly Council (October 2015)