

Notes (FINAL DRAFT)
Active Listening Session
Washington Presbytery Meeting—September 13, 2011
Executive Presbyter Search Committee

I. Spiritual Concerns:

Need for UNITY through the power of the Holy Spirit/ We need to follow the “Biblical Jesus”/ Making disciples not issues/ Presbytery meetings more “Spirit-filled less like a business meeting”./ that we be Biblically faithful, theologically Reformed and Christ honoring/that God glorify Himself through our work and worship / that the Holy Spirit will show us the way/ that we will have the faith to see our best days lie ahead/that what we say and do will surprise us and delight God/ how do we remain faithful both to the PC (USA) and to scripture?/ that we remain faithful to the dictates of scripture/ that we remain UNITED in the love of Christ/we won’t compromise God’s Word in the decisions before us/ need new life, greater compassion reflecting Jesus Christ/be creative but don’t lose our grounding in scripture/remain loyal to each other in our UNITY through Jesus Christ/ Remain loyal to God’s Word/ grow and become stronger through God’s wisdom/ keep eyes fixed on God/ driven toward UNITY/Unity within the belief structure of the PC (USA)/courage to stand firmly for faith and Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church/deepening trust in the sufficiency of scripture/move beyond “mere religious unity” and be more genuine in life and witness/healthy desire for God’s vision/ continued vision of respect, mission and collegiality (unity in the Body of Christ)/ commitment to praying together/ how do we remain faithful to PC (USA) and to scripture?/ prayer support for ministry of presbytery and its churches/concern about giving up our beliefs in order to bring people into the church/UNITY –we could present that to our world as who we are as a presbytery/GRACE –God loves me as I am so I can love you as you are/ define where WP stands in relation to Biblical Authority/

Summary: It is amazing how many times people mentioned “unity” within these conversations. People’s insights include that our unity comes from God and the Spirit and being united around Jesus and spiritual matters such as prayer. Also, important is the need for Washington Presbytery, quite apart from what may be going on elsewhere, to begin a process of defining the place of scripture in the life of our presbytery. There is a heartfelt desire to stay together as the Body of Christ if we are able to be clear what this means.

II. Issue of Churches Leaving:

Need active strategy to keep churches from leaving/ our association with the PC (USA) harms our / outreach in community and world/ new ways of doing church and being church be explored/ energy drain of conflict prevents us from pursuit of the Great Commission/our divisions over nFOG and Amendment 10-A (there are many other issues far more important/congregations leaving rather than working to make things better/ new EP can bring the two sides together so we can bring people to Christ/ Presbytery and GA the cause of churches leaving/ stay unified as we have been in the past/ strife and fragmentation taking priority over business of being church/ we don’t leave the presbytery because of what has been discussed recently/the direction the national church is taking which is against scripture/ we follow our procedure to amicably dismiss those churches seeking to leave/proactive position addressing the problem rather than a passive one/Problems of churches leaving needs to be solved inside Washington Presbytery (rather than in the denomination as a whole)/keep the friendly atmosphere in Washington Presbytery –don’t lose that!/not give up who we are/who is staying and who is leaving (concern)?/concern for “divisiveness”/lack of church unity is because we are not united in Christ/Presbytery honors the consciences of congregations in their decisions to leave/how best can we glorify God in Christ by what we do and is that a priority?/ concerns about nFOG, 10-A and “gracious

separation churches”/ take the strife and fragmentation but keep us focused on what’s more important/ we want to influence PC(USA) on Amendment 10-A issues/resolve and reach settlement on Peters Creek situation/who is staying and who is going –we don’t know/we have a fear of conflict/ we have an aversion to change/concern with direction of PC (USA) nationally/

Summary: Even though the committee sought to direct people away from this particular conversation it clearly is a first level priority in people’s thought process. The largest number of comments are directly related to this issue. There are comments about taking steps needful to keep churches together (making a case why they should not leave); there is a hope that if churches leave they would do so amicably (there is nothing articulated that points to taking drastic measures to harm pastors or churches who are in the process of leaving). There is no heart for anger or divisiveness articulated. There is clearly a request for knowing who is in the process of leaving --communication. There is a sense that there is a request for an active rather than passive strategy related to these issues.

III. Diversity:

Need to look for members who don’t look exactly like us/lack of women teaching elders/we might provide diversity of thought/Unity in our diversity/are there irreconcilable differences across our denomination?/ “us versus them mentality”/with all our diverse opinions we keep our focus on God and Jesus’ love/ divisiveness across theological lines/how do we stay together?/need RESPECT in our conversations with one another/

Summary: We might have expected larger numbers of comments in this area. Most concerns seem linked to the church leaving issue, rather than the larger issue of diversity itself. The concern mostly is to acknowledge that we have diverse opinions (rather than other forms of diversity) and then it is linked to how we stay together.

IV. Ministry:

Need the CPM to focus on providing ministers for parish ministry not other ministry/ new EP cannot solve everything, need to recognize our own leadership/ our member churches continue to reach out through disaster relief and food banks/ not meeting major social problems in our communities/ build more international missions/growth in mission giving/ growth in evangelism/ meet needs in community/ to meet the needs in our communities/ we try new things as we reach out to the community around us/ support of pastors/ fellowship of pastors/ address financial struggles in every church in presbytery/ having skills and tools to manage conflict/need ways to increase our abilities at Spiritual Direction/we minister with God’s love and compassion to our community/ be effective together/move beyond the walls of the church/consider employing fulltime teaching elder to help support young clergy/that we would not ignore culture but engage it/leaders who open us to love, listen and care across theological divides/ need to respond to people in crisis/support for clergy/declining membership needs a “coach” with proven success/need mediation skills –listen, guidance, options/concerns for support of pastors in increasingly difficult church culture/ connections outside the church give us opportunities to share/ Importance of Church Discipline “Spiritually accountable to one another, subject to scripture”/ need to encourage and support young clergy/ we need “tools” as guidelines in the midst of conflict/do ministry “beyond our walls” and out into community/

Summary: Ministry to our communities is the major underlying theme here. Support for pastors is another important theme. A sub issue is the support of young/ new pastors in our presbytery. The idea that the presbytery is here to resource churches and pastors in their ministry is clearly an underlying theme. Growth in mission giving and the funding of local and church mission is a theme, as is doing

ministry cooperatively and together. Conflict management tools and the importance of church discipline were also articulated themes. Duly noted is an absence of articulation of themes such as social justice, peacemaking themes for the church.

V. Demographic shifts:

Concern for decline of aging membership/ declining membership/absence of younger adults to move into leadership positions as older ones retire/shrinking pool of ruling elders in presbytery/lack of Teaching Elders, especially women/ churches dwindle instead of merging/increasing poverty/ increasing biblical illiteracy/ in 1960's there were 30K members and 90 churches and today there are 9K members and 60 churches/

Summary: Concern is clearly articulated here for numerical decline, leadership decline. Also, issues in our community such as increased poverty are noted. Biblical illiteracy is noted as a church demographic shift. The committee notes that there were not many comments on how our communities have changed and how our churches have not changed in relation to those shifts.

VI. Communication Issues:

Keeping the churches informed what is going on/ need to clear communication on churches leaving issue/ better communication patterns/which churches are leaving and which are staying?/use the gift of communication at all levels, in all ways, don't assume people know/open lines of communication between presbytery, churches, individuals/there is an "invisible wall" between what we should know and what we actually know/

Summary: A new EP will need to work on this area as a source of unity.

VII. EP Search Itself:

Look for a younger EP with fresh vision and new ideas/Find an EP like Perrine with compassion, mediation skills/ new EP a person who honors God's Word/new EP should have a "resource style" rather than an advocacy style/EP would support CLP's in ministry/someone with creative vision in tune with God's vision/EP has heart for meeting needs in our communities/new EP is conservative in their thinking/ establish good two way communication between EP and staff of presbytery/ EP is true to scripture/new EP address the issue of churches leaving directly and the underlying issues in the denomination/use gift of communication/the effect of churches leaving on per capita and our ability to fund the new EP position/ concern about funding the position/EP needs to be team leader of staff/ staff needs full information/ needs an EP with technical savvy/ EP needs to "think outside the box" not be from Washington presbytery/EP needs to be aware of Constitutional/ Polity issues/ some connected to the larger PC (USA)/ new EP needs to be able to work with people of varying opinions and theological perspectives/Good communication person/ Good Public relations person/EP with "encouraging, creative spirit"/ someone who won't compromise God's Word/ someone who has a heart for the lost/ EP leads WP in building and rebuilding congregations/ EP brings fresh, helpful perspective/EP engages pastors, congregations, unifies those with deep concerns, is creative in changing landscape/ EP comes up with creative solutions/ proactive who resolves issues before a breach occurs/EP expectations on all of us not just EP/EP relates to everyone in presbytery/ Hope: new EP not take sides but help us to listen to one another/EP who doesn't lead by the numbers –more people, more money/new EP encourages "respect" for one another/Answer question: is this a fulltime position or not?/ new EP needs to understand the "gravity" of the situation; how the ways of being church together are rapidly changing into new forms/

Summary: The EP needs to be a person gifted at bringing people together around spiritual and ministry and mission ideas. They need to be relational and good at relating to people and drawing them together. "Doesn't take sides" but works to be the pastor of everyone. Needs to be a good communicator, have technical savvy and work with a gifted presbytery staff. They need to be creative and someone who is spiritual and biblical with concerns for issues such as evangelism, resourcing churches and pastors and developing community ministries. They need to be a turn-around person, turning around years of perceived decline. They need to build upon prior successes in the presbytery. Strategically, they need to understand and go with the flow of emerging new patterns and new polity models of being Presbyterian. They need to be in tune with what God is doing, be a person of prayer, and one whose spiritual authority is respected.

VIII. Strategic Issues:

Inward versus outward focus/Presbytery needs to resource local congregations and this is emphasized as its main mission/ ability to adapt and change with the culture/ our member churches find new ways to attract new members/connect churches together in mission/ Can we grow our financial resources?/do self-examination and develop new perspectives/explore shared leadership with Redstone and other presbyteries/become a theological and biblical "think tank" (at other times than when just voting on overtures)/ lack of evangelism/structures in presbytery suited to 25 years ago but very different environment today/clear confessional identity of Washington Presbytery/the Presbytery would be more relational and less bureaucratic/ we do everything we can to keep alive the ministries of Camp Pine Springs/connecting more effectively in community/ connecting more effectively in evangelism/ consider sharing resources, ministries with other presbyteries/EP needs to look at things with fresh eyes and new perspective/some churches in presbytery are disconnected and more "isolationist"/ work of presbytery moved from view of "interference" to one of partnership and support/keep support for Ignite ministry strong and ongoing/ongoing care of the Presbytery building headquarters/need to advertize more/churches meet the needs of their communities/shared leadership with Redstone presbytery/share vision along churches have churches "partner" with one another/ Improve witness in our communities/ inward looking rather than outward looking/God's vision equals being effective together/do theological and biblical studies as part of presbytery not just debate/changes not our sole focus/creative ways to use the gifts of those preparing for ministry/Safety –creating safe spaces in the presbytery where we can have deep conversations, even when we might disagree/ Spiritual Growth and lack thereof/ Lack of Evangelism/geographical attention –too focused on Washington not enough on the Mon Valley and elsewhere/increase our mission support for worthwhile organizations like Resurrection Power/Need for interaction between us and other denominations/ churches/ other Christians/ Looming issues in finances and raising of per capita/ Rethink how Mission and the Presbytery is FUNDED.

Summary: The Presbytery, its churches and pastors, need to become more outwardly focused. Community based ministries and evangelism need to be stressed. We need to grow the idea of churches working together cooperatively. We need to work on the issue of mission funding. Presbytery should be less debate and more discussion around biblical and theological matters (can we create safe spaces where these conversations can occur?). There is a desire for connection with one another and this should be fostered. Being relational is important to us. Isolationist churches need to be drawn together and parts of the presbytery that feel neglected need to become emphasized. We need to become more connected with other denominations, churches, and other Christian groups in our area. Ministries like Camp Pine Springs and Ignite (young adults) need to be supported and continue. Presbytery needs to be supportive of churches rather than interfering in the internal life of congregations. Developing a clear identity of Washington Presbytery that might include confessional statements is likewise important.

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