



Lombard Mennonite Peace Center 101 West 22nd Street, Suite 206, Lombard, IL 60148

PHONE: 630-627-0507

FAX: 630-627-0519

E-MAIL: Admin@LMPeaceCenter.org

WEBSITE: www.LMPeaceCenter.org

PRESBYTERY MEDIATION PROCESS: FINAL REPORT

Presbytery of New York City – New York, NY

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Richard Blackburn, LMPC Consultant

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Contracting phase:

The Lombard Mennonite Peace Center (LMPC) was first contacted by Rev. Oscar McCloud, Acting Executive Presbyter of the Presbytery of New York City (PNYC), in late October, 2009. After I sent him information regarding the consultation process and further preliminary conversations, I was invited to meet with the General Council on December 8, 2009, to outline the steps in the mediation process and provide answers to various questions raised. That same evening, I attended the Presbytery meeting where the Special Administrative Review Committee of the Synod of the Northeast presented their report.

On January 19, 2010, I had a conversation with Rev. McCloud and Peggy Thomas, General Council Chair, wherein they reported that the General Council had voted to recommend that the Presbytery invite LMPC to facilitate the mediation process, having achieved the minimum two-thirds consensus that I had indicated would be required for me to accept an invitation to mediate.

I then attended the January 26, 2010, Presbytery meeting and outlined the mediation process and provided answers to questions raised by members and commissioners. A Presbytery vote indicated strong support for the General Council's recommendation to invite LMPC to facilitate the process. LMPC's standard survey was also distributed whereby people could indicate their level of support for inviting LMPC to facilitate the mediation process. The results indicated that 95.3% of those responding to the survey acknowledged the potential benefits that the mediation process could bring to the Presbytery. Additionally, 95.3% of those who responded to the survey question regarding participation indicated their commitment to participate in the process.

On February 8, 2010, LMPC received the official letter of invitation, confirming our fee schedule and recording the official action taken by the Presbytery to initiate the mediation process. It was signed by J. Oscar McCloud, Acting Executive Presbyter of the Presbytery of New York City.

B. Information-gathering phase:

In anticipation of receiving the official letter of invitation, LMPC sent a variety of materials to the Presbytery office to duplicate and distribute to members and commissioners. Among those materials was a questionnaire to be returned to LMPC by

February 22, 2010. A total of ninety-three questionnaires were returned to LMPC, with the majority being returned after the deadline.

On March 22, 2010, LMPC received names of persons to be interviewed over the phone. During the following weeks, I and Victoria Wilcox, LMPC Assistant Director, completed thirteen pre-mediation phone calls to gather in-depth information from a diverse range of viewpoints. Such conversations also helped us to gain an understanding of unresolved factors from the past that may have impacted recent tensions. We also reviewed several relevant written documents during that period, including the questionnaires as they were returned.

The information-gathering phase was brought to near completion when I – assisted by members of the Presbytery mediation team – facilitated a series of small group structured dialogue sessions. An initial session was held on April 30, 2010, with nine sessions being held on May 11-12, 2010. A total of seventy-six persons participated in one of the small groups.

The purpose of the small group sessions was to document the full range of interests represented in the Presbytery on the issues under consideration. Commonalities that serve to unite the Presbytery were also documented. The commonalities and interests are listed in the Appendices of this report. The interests are categorized under the workable problem areas that were addressed in the problem-solving phase of the process.

The small group sessions also provided an opportunity for participants to express some of the hurts that they had experienced within the context of Presbytery life. A number of people commented afterward on how helpful it was to be able to share such hurts and to have a sense of being heard.

C. Education phase:

In the midst of the information-gathering phase and prior to the small group sessions, two educational workshops were presented; the purpose of the workshops was to prepare people to participate in subsequent sessions in the mediation process in a healthy way. Thus, I conducted a *Healthy Congregations* workshop on March 12-13, 2010, with at least eighty-three people attending some portion of the workshop. On April 30-May 1, 2010, I presented the workshop entitled *Conflict in the Church: Entrusted with the Message of Reconciliation*; again approximately eighty-three people attended some portion of the workshop. The feedback received during and after both events indicated that many people found them to be valuable learning experiences.

D. Healing phase:

Sessions in the healing phase were held October 30 and November 6, 2010, as well as February 12 and March 26, 2011; an average of forty people attended one of the first three sessions, while 120 people attended the last session, which was done in conjunction with a Stated Presbytery Meeting. These sessions provided an opportunity to address unresolved hurts from both the distant and the more recent past in a healing manner.

E. Problem-solving phase:

A large group structured dialogue session in the problem-solving phase was held March 12, 2011, with forty-six people participating. In that session, proposals were developed for each of the workable problem areas by small groups. Each of the small groups assigned one of their members to type up their proposal for distribution to others in the Presbytery in preparation for a second session in the problem-solving phase, which took place on May 21, 2011, with approximately forty people participating.

At the May 21, 2011, session each small group presented their proposal to the larger group, after which I facilitated further problem-solving until all present were able to affirm the proposals as win-win agreements. Those agreements were distributed in preparation for the July 23, 2011, Stated Presbytery Meeting, where official action was taken to affirm them. The agreements are recorded in Appendix 3 of this report.

F. Closing phase:

With this report, we signal the conclusion of the mediation process. As part of the closing phase, I participated in a closing reconciliation worship service that was held on July 23, 2011, in conjunction with a Stated Presbytery Meeting, in order to ritualize the healing that has occurred and to signal the potential for a new beginning for the Presbytery of New York City.

In order for the new beginning alluded to above to fulfill that purpose, much work remains for all parties to work diligently at implementing the new learnings and the agreements that emerged from the mediation process. I will be in touch with Presbytery leaders periodically over the next several months to monitor the implementation of the agreements and to be of assistance in any way I can to help them stay on course toward that end.

The Presbytery is to be commended for their commitment to undertaking the mediation process and seeking healing of relationships. I particularly want to commend those who gave freely of their time to participate in the various components of the process and those leaders who devoted time to coordinating the logistics involved in seeking to invite full participation. This report represents a summary of the steps undertaken in the mediation process, the information gathered, the agreements reached, our analysis and findings, and several recommendations for working at preventing destructive conflict in the future.

G. Additional items to note:

It was reported to me by many people who participated in the mediation process that their belief is that the process has had a significant impact on how the Presbytery functions, particularly in regard to the functioning of those who attended the mediation sessions.

However, participants also periodically noted the concern that certain key individuals were choosing not to participate in the process, thus hindering the opportunity for healing for the Presbytery as a whole. Moreover, toward the end of the mediation process, I was informed that a group, largely composed of those not participating in the mediation process, had formulated a proposal to restructure the Presbytery, a step that was seen as a violation of the spirit embodied in the mediation process by those who had participated in it.

It's unfortunate that the framers of that proposal did not seek to address their concerns through the mediation process, rather than in a way that was perceived as undermining the process. If they had sought to address their concerns via the mediation process – and would have worked to develop their proposal in a win-win manner that pursued their interests, while also seeking to address the interests of others – there's a strong likelihood that an agreement could have been reached on a restructuring proposal that "pleased the whole community" (Acts 6:5).

Instead, that proposal was developed outside of the mediation process and ultimately brought before a Called Meeting of the Presbytery on June 6, 2011. It's my understanding that the outcome of that meeting was to refer the proposal to the General Council for further processing, with the potential for revising the proposal, while taking into account the agreements that emerged from the mediation process, as well as the report of the Synod monitoring/observation team and the strategic plan.

It's anticipated that a report with recommendations regarding the restructuring proposal will be presented at a Stated Presbytery Meeting in November, 2011. It is hoped that the November, 2011, report and the actions taken at that meeting will draw heavily upon the learnings and agreements that emerged from the mediation process. Such consideration will be important, particularly given the fact that a solid core group of members and commissioners have prayerfully and faithfully invested their time and energy in the mediation process out of their commitment to Christ's sacred ministry of reconciliation. Such people could feel further disempowered, if the restructuring proposal does not sufficiently take into account the learnings and agreements from the mediation process.

II. INFORMATION GATHERED FROM QUESTIONNAIRES

The questionnaires were filled out during the period from February 1-22, 2010 with many being returned afterward. The following information reflects people's views at that time. The numbers indicate how many responses there were in each category or for each idea.

A. Background information on respondents:

1. Number of questionnaires returned – 93.

2. Size of the church you represent:

100 members or less	=	33	35.47%
100 to 200 members	=	12	12.91%
200 to 300 members	=	5	5.37%
300 to 400 members	=	2	2.15%
400 to 500 members	=	2	2.15%
Over 500 members	=	14	15.06%
No response	=	25	26.89%

3. Years attending Presbytery meetings:

1- 5 years	=	28	30.11%
6-10 years	=	20	21.51%
11-20 years	=	18	19.35%
21-30 years	=	7	7.52%
31 or more years	=	14	15.06%
No response	=	6	6.45%

4. Frequency of Presbytery meeting attendance:

Regularly, rarely miss	=	59	63.44%
3 to 4 times per year	=	21	22.59%
2 to 3 times per year	=	7	7.52%
Less than twice a year	=	6	6.45%
No response	=	0	0%

B. Responses to *“What are the current strengths of this Presbytery?”*:

1. Mission, outreach:

- a. Disaster aid work / social justice work / compassion for the marginalized / mission work throughout all five boroughs – 35
- b. Commitment to the gospel – 2

2. Presbytery members:

- a. Racial and ethnic diversity – 35
- b. Inclusivity / international / ecumenical / tolerant / warm and welcoming / loyal friendships – 35
- c. Strong commitment to Presbytery / people dedicated to working hard – 25
- d. Strong spirituality / well intended Christians – 16
- e. Experienced and talented leadership – 14
- f. New member energy – 2

3. Leadership within Presbytery:

- a. Dedicated staff / lay ministry – 35
- b. Increase of younger pastors – 1

4. Other Assets:

- a. Good physical presence serving five boroughs – 25
- b. Strong financial endowment – 16
- c. Abundant resources – 15
- d. Diversity of theological thought – 9
- e. Unlimited potential / wealth of wisdom – 9
- f. Large membership – 8
- g. Presbytery Day / Leadership Development Day / Lay Person Program / Officers Training Day – 8
- h. Grant funding – 6
- i. Excellent locations – 5
- j. Commitment to Book of Order and polity – 3
- k. Diverse economic resources – 2
- l. Near United Nations – 2
- m. Repair funding – 1

C. Responses to *“What are the current challenges of this Presbytery?”*:

1. Money and facilities:

- a. The economic disparity between larger and smaller churches / economic division between avenue and smaller churches – 34
- b. Major repairs needed / declining facilities of churches / aging structures – 10
- c. Churches need to pay apportionments / churches are withholding money – 8
- d. Clarity of endowment usage – 4

2. Conflict:
 - a. Polarization / lack of love for one another – 20
 - b. Racism and classism issues – 20
 - c. Lack of healthy communication – 9
 - d. Staffing issues – 9
 - e. Opposition toward / attacks on Stated Clerk and other Presbytery Staff – 9
 - f. Deep roots to issue of inability to make concrete decisions – 8
 - g. Lack of trust for Presbytery and committees – 8
 - h. Division of allegiance to Presbytery– 7
 - i. Secrecy and gossip / hidden agendas – 7
 - j. Homosexual issue – 6
 - k. Differing theological views – 5
 - l. Arrogance about New York City status – 5
 - m. Lack of acceptance of change – 4
 - n. Denial of issues of power imbalance – 4
 - o. Not able to use diversity to Presbytery’s advantage – 3
 - p. Our long history of conflict – 3
 - q. Lack of willingness to be accountable regarding one’s part in conflict – 3
 - r. Lack of positive attitude toward Presbytery – 2
 - s. Bullying – 2
 - t. Lack of clear boundaries – 2
 - u. People unwilling to support the mediation process – 2
 - v. Lack of compassion / lack of listening – 1
 - w. Cliques within committees – 1
3. Mission and vision:
 - a. Lack of a coherent mission plan / shared mission plan – 17
 - b. Not able to enhance a sense of mission within the community / outreach with the community – 4
 - c. Visibility analysis required – 1
4. Programs and activities:
 - a. Long Presbytery meetings – 14
 - b. Lack of many voices being heard at meetings / a few voices that can be disruptive – 13
 - c. Lack of clarity of meeting content / lack effective moderation of meetings / lack politeness at meetings – 5
 - d. Christian education / Sunday school issues within churches – 1
 - e. Some do not have time to travel to meetings – 1
5. Leadership:
 - a. Over-focus of leaders on avenue churches – 10
 - b. Pastors overworked – 5
 - c. Lack of respect and trust for leadership within Presbytery – 4
 - d. Pastors not acknowledging and enhancing work of lay ministers – 2
 - e. Too many restrictions – 2
 - f. Churches without pastors need to receive interims – 1
 - g. Leadership to be more humble / less ego-centric – 1

6. Presbytery governance:
 - a. Lack clarity of Presbytery's role / Stated Clerk's role / Synod's role – 8
 - b. Presbytery personnel and committees need to be more transparent / face current issues – 3
 - c. Presbytery's records not readily available to all – 2
 - d. Presbytery needs to be more inclusive / less of a "club" atmosphere / less regulation – 3
7. Presbytery growth and membership:
 - a. Fear of churches being closed due to small size / fear of loss – 6
 - b. Loss of membership / decline in membership – 4
 - c. Smaller churches lack sense of security / financial resources – 3
 - d. Lack of management / too many churches – 3
 - e. Some churches doing poorly, but resistant to being closed – 2
 - f. Lack of sense of community due to large size – 1
8. Spirituality:
 - a. Lack of spiritual presence in the city – 5
 - b. Presbytery meetings need to be less business and politics / more about God's work than business – 4
 - c. Not putting Christ first – 1
 - d. Forgiveness and reconciliation to guide justice vs. injustice and legalism – 1

D. Perception regarding stress and intensity:

The perception of the stress level at the time the questionnaires were filled out averaged 5.88 on a 7-point scale with seven as high. Over three-quarters of those who responded rated the stress level as 5 or higher, while some did not answer the question.

E. Responses to the question regarding historical factors, "secrets," and patterns:

Comments from this section have been incorporated into the *Current Challenges* section of this report. While the items noted by respondents to this question reflect individual perceptions, there were some common themes mentioned that suggest the potential presence of unhealthy patterns that would need to be addressed. Such themes include:

1. A perceived pattern of racism and classism within the Presbytery and its churches.
2. A perceived pattern of lengthy and ineffective Presbytery meetings; too few voices being heard, hard work of others being overridden by those with power.
3. A perceived division between wealthy churches and poor churches.
4. A perceived pattern of over-focusing on Presbytery staff.
5. A perceived pattern of a lack of mutual respect and trust between Presbytery and its churches.

F. Responses to the question, "Are there any persons in the Presbytery with whom you think you may have a 'broken relationship'?"

The majority of respondents answered that they do not have a broken relationship with anyone in the Presbytery. For those that did respond that they had a broken relationship, most indicated a desire to bring healing to that relationship.

G. Responses to “*Make any comments you wish, not covered in the survey, which might give light to understanding this situation.*”:

Comments from this section are incorporated into the *Current Challenges* section of this report.

III. LEARNINGS FROM THE WORKSHOPS

During the educational workshop, *Conflict in the Church*, participants were asked to reflect on the Presbytery’s functioning in regards to unhealthy conflict patterns and feelings of powerlessness.

A. Presbytery responses to conflict:

After input was provided on unhealthy conflict norms, people formed small groups and were asked to identify which conflict norms seemed to be a pattern within PNYC. The responses are organized according to topical headings; the number after each category indicates the frequency of how often a comment along those lines was mentioned in the various small groups.

1. Issues and people are frequently confused – 14
2. Conflict is viewed as wrong or dangerous – 13
3. Disagreement means a lack of respect or caring – 11
4. Leaders discourage differences – 11
5. In conflict situations, only a few vocal leaders are heard – 17
6. Individuals react defensively or explosively to others – 6
7. Discussion focuses on the solution – 7
8. Timing is uneven, decisions are delayed or rushed – 8
9. A low tolerance of uncertainty – 6
10. People repress inner conflicts of past and project them into current conflict – 6

B. Feelings of powerlessness:

After input was provided on the topic of powerlessness during the *Conflict in the Church* workshop, a small group exercise was facilitated whereby people were asked to reflect on their experience within PNYC and complete the phrase “I feel powerless when....” The responses are organized according to categories, with the numbers again indicating how often the comment was listed in the various small groups.

1. Structure: Leaders being unqualified for positions / do not accept their responsibilities / “get rid of them all” mentality toward staff / unclear about roles / do not know who to go to with questions / unclear about full background history on issues / feel uneasy about asking questions / information not properly explained / reasons behind decisions

not explained well / not received on time / leadership not using their power to guide and instruct / information regarding leaders actions are not shared / staff's actions are unjustly second guessed / staff not being defended by Presbytery – 17

2. Feelings of invalidation: Feeling left out at meetings / not empowered / talents not used / no power to vote / lack of concern for smaller congregations / ageism – 11
3. Communication: People not listening to committee reports, than asking questions later / hard work is not recognized / Presbytery not taking committee reports seriously / meetings are too long / should be time limits on debates / unhealthy triangling / reports ill-prepared and unorganized / directories-ministers list not current / no results / nothing accomplished / same issues discussed over and over / issues discussed even after vote / rules and procedures not communicated or explained well / new members not educated on Presbytery procedures – 18
4. Passive and active symptoms: Same voices heard all the time / silencing others not as assertive / not being recognized to speak / passive aggressive / attacked or ignored depending on comment made / threatening language used to prevent voices to be heard / people shout comments out / not controlled / personal agendas against success of Presbytery / complaints are politicized for personal agendas rather than good of Presbytery / inconsistency in actions when they are not carried out / irregular attendance by those attempting to overturn decisions made in prior meetings / pretense of community a hypocrisy / too much business not enough spirituality / lack of grace – 17
5. Conflict: Lack of trust / cynicism allowed to prevail / criticized for not being well informed on procedures that are not shared – 4
6. Decision-making: New issues arise that should be tabled for next meeting / unilateral decisions about docket items / decisions voted on, no follow through / parliamentary procedures used to cut off debate / Robert's Rules discussion prevails / Presbytery issues dealt with as priority / uneven concern about issues / decisions made behind closed doors by Presbytery / Presbytery dissects committee decisions – 12

IV. SUMMARY OF INFORMATION GATHERED FROM INTERVIEWS, ETC.

LMPC asked that the Presbytery identify people we could interview over the telephone in order to gather more in depth information than is possible through the other tools used. We requested that the persons to be interviewed be a diverse group, representing a variety of perspectives on the issues under consideration. The list was to include individuals who have had a long-term history in the Presbytery, which is particularly important, since some of the focus for such interviews is to learn about the background history of the Presbytery in an effort to discern patterns of functioning over the years. Additional sources were consulted as well. The following represents a summary of those findings.

- A. As we entered the process, PNYC found itself in a time of heightened tensions; in assessing the anxiety level, it seemed to be apparent that:
 1. The reactivity that PNYC has witnessed over the past few years seems to have been disproportionate to the missteps that have occurred during this period, whether by the Executive Presbyter, the Stated Clerk, or others in the Presbytery. This suggests.

- a. The potential presence of chronic anxiety in the Presbyterian system; that is, the residue of anxiety related to unresolved issues from the more distant past;
 - b. The potential presence of acute anxiety being projected into the Presbyterian system by members from their personal lives and from their own churches;
 - c. The potential impact of broader societal anxiety, including anxiety related to the broader denomination, on the Presbyterian system.
2. The multiple sources behind the anxiety seem related to a variety of complex factors.
 - a. Long-standing patterns of functioning within the Presbyterian system.
 - b. A series of past and potential changes and losses, creating anxiety throughout the system.
 - c. A mutually influenced cycle of reactivity and distancing focused on various Executive Presbyters and Stated Clerks who have served over the years.
 3. Given the multiple stressors suggested above, it is not surprising that the Presbytery found itself at such a heightened point of anxiety – indeed, given everything that’s happened, the heightened anxiety can be seen as having been predictable.

B. Factors within the Presbyterian system that contributed to the recent anxiety:

1. In gathering information about historical patterns, it should be noted that no individual had a full picture of the details recounted below.
 - a. Different individuals and various other sources brought forth different parts of the puzzle.
 - b. It is the composite picture gathered from the full range of people interviewed and other sources consulted that seems to point in this direction.
 - c. Moreover, there are periods in the Presbytery’s history when the patterns outlined below were more prevalent than at other times; so one needs to be cautious about denying the existence of such patterns, just because exceptions can be cited.
2. In gathering and assessing information about historical patterns, it needs to be acknowledged that we “see through a mirror dimly.”
 - a. For any of us to understand even our own functioning is a life-long project. Certainly a Presbytery with a long history involving many individuals is a complex organism about which we must speak with the utmost humility when assessing historical patterns.
 - b. Nevertheless, it can be useful to reflect on some of the documented or oral history of the Presbytery, especially as it may shed light on ongoing patterns of functioning that will continue to impact the Presbytery in less than healthy ways, if they are not brought into the open.
 - c. Special attention has been given to the way anxiety seems to focus on the Executive Presbyter and Stated Clerk; however, the summary found below simply touches on key points where anxiety seems to have manifested itself; it does not presume to reflect the total picture of how such staff have functioned or been perceived.

C. A brief history of leadership tenures and challenges experienced during those times:

1. There seems to be a pattern of anxiety expressing itself periodically via those serving in the Executive Presbyter role developing physical symptoms:

- a. October, 1967 to April, 1973 – The tenure of Rev. Robert P. Johnson, about whom it was reported that he developed cancer and died during his tenure.
 - b. September, 1973 to December, 1984 – The tenure of Rev. Harry P. Phillips, about whom it was reported that he developed Parkinson’s disease during his tenure.
 - c. 1984-1988 – The tenure of Rev. George Todd, about whom it was reported that he had a short tenure because he had triple coronary bypass surgery.
 - d. July, 2003 to July, 2009 – The tenure of Rev. Arabella Meadows-Rogers:
 - She developed cancer during her tenure and died soon after her term of office was completed.
 - Many reported the belief that the various conflicts during her tenure contributed to her illness.
 - Several reported that they believed that she internalized the anxiety within the Presbytery, with one person stating that “it took her life.”
2. There also seems to be a pattern of anxiety surfacing periodically in the form of criticism or more overt conflict focusing on the Executive Presbyter.
- a. January, 1990 to November, 1992 – The tenure of Interim Rev. James G. Speer, about whom there was a perception among some that “he did not have strong leadership qualities.”
 - b. December, 1992 to May, 1999 – The tenure of Rev. Spencer Gibbs:
 - It was reported by some that he was not supported from the very beginning of his tenure.
 - Several people reported that he was forced out in the midst of the criticism focused on him.
 - Some perceive that he was not supported and became the focus of criticism because he was the first African-American Executive Presbyter.
 - One person noted that he had become a scapegoat for other issues within the Presbytery.
 - c. June, 1999 to June, 2003 – The tenure of Interim Rev. James F. Reese, about whom it was reported that he was affable, but “did not do anything to address the conflictual issues within the Presbytery.”
 - d. July, 2003 to July, 2009 – The tenure of Rev. Arabella Meadows-Rogers:
 - Some perceived her as being controlling and not able to listen to criticism.
 - It was noted that she became the focus of the conflict that ensued when there was an effort to close smaller churches that were no longer seen as viable by some in the Presbytery.
 - Although not the focus of some conflicts that were rocking the Presbytery, it was noted that she was still caught in the middle of other areas of tension within the system; for example, it was reported that a sexual misconduct charge against a pastor in the Presbytery “sapped her energy” and resulted in a large financial judgment.
3. Anxiety has also seemed to surface periodically in the form of conflict between the Executive Presbyter and the Stated Clerk.
- a. December, 1992 to May, 1999 – The tenure of Rev. Spencer Gibbs:
 - It was reported that he did not get along with David Meerse, who served as Stated Clerk from 1988 to April, 1997.

- Several also noted that there was conflict between him and Diana Austin, who served as Stated Clerk from November, 1997 to May, 1998 – that they had a “rocky relationship,” characterized by a lack of mutual respect.
- b. July, 2003 to July, 2009 – The tenure of Rev. Arabella Meadows-Rogers:
 - Several people reported the perception that there was conflict between her and Cornell Edmonds, who began serving as Stated Clerk in April, 2004.
- 4. Anxiety also seems to have focused, particularly in the recent past, on the Stated Clerk:
 - a. October, 1998 to March, 2004 – During those years, the records indicate that five people served in the role of Stated Clerk, either in an interim role or on a brief *pro tempore* basis, suggesting that there may have been general anxiety during that time surrounding the office and the challenge of filling the position.
 - b. April, 2004 to present – The tenure of Cornell A. Edmonds as Stated Clerk:
 - In various ways the current anxiety has polarized around the functioning of the Stated Clerk.
 - Some perceive him as having been scapegoated, with some suggesting that such scapegoating is, in part, racially motivated.
 - Others perceive that his performance in the role of Stated Clerk does not meet their expectations and that his functioning has heightened the anxiety within the Presbytery.

D. Analysis of information gathered from interviews, etc.:

The main impression conveyed by the telephone interviews and other sources is that the Presbytery seems to have a history of: a) over-focusing on Presbytery staff; b) not dealing with conflict in healthy ways. Such patterns can express themselves in varying ways.

1. Pattern of over-focusing on Presbytery staff:
 - a. Over-focus is most obviously expressed in regarding Presbytery staff as being primarily responsible for what happens in the Presbytery.
 - b. Over-focus results in diminished capacity to see how other forces and people contribute to what is happening.
 - In the midst of anxiety, there’s a tendency to blame people in key positions of leadership on the staff, rather than share responsibility.
 - The multiple sources of tension within the system are ignored, denied, or minimized, as people focus the anxiety on key leaders.
 - c. Over-focus on Presbytery staff results in diminished capacity to focus on mission.
 - Presbytery focuses less on who they are and where they’re going.
 - Focuses more intently on who the Executive Presbyter or Stated Clerk is and what they do.
 - d. Over-focus on staff members is typically expressed in one of two ways:
 - Either idealizing staff members (the saints).
 - Or negative focus and growing dissatisfaction with staff members (the goats).
 - e. Staff-focused systems display other characteristics:
 - Inflexible roles – there’s a prescribed way of functioning, often based on people’s perceptions of how “idealized” staff of the past functioned.
 - Polarizing behaviors permitted – ultimatums, threats, bullying, etc.
 - Closed system – new ways of doing things are rejected; feedback is rejected.

2. Pattern of denial and “family secrets” within the Presbyterian system:
 - a. Denial of painful experiences from the past
 - Denial by some that the Presbytery ever experienced conflict in the past or a belief that all conflict in the past was handled well and was not disruptive.
 - Lack of clear strategies for talking about painful losses and processing them in a way which facilitates healing – the impact of such losses is denied or smoothed over.
 - b. Secret meetings, behind the scenes maneuvering.
 - c. People are not provided with clear information regarding the rationale for decisions.
 - d. Impact of secrets:
 - Create and perpetuate destructive triangling and rumors.
 - Divide a group between those who are and aren’t “in on the secret.”
 - Distort perceptions such that people see only part of the picture.
 - Keep anxiety at intense levels and lock in pain.
3. Pattern of unhealthy conflict norms:
 - a. Conflict avoidance, rather than facing conflict before reaching high levels of intensity – or in the presence of high levels of chronic anxiety, the intensity seems to escalate almost instantaneously when a moment of acute anxiety surfaces.
 - People distance from the Presbytery when upset, fail to attend meetings, or withhold funding, rather than hanging in there to work at things in a problem-solving manner.
 - Communication breaks down.
 - Avoidance pattern results in conflict becoming explosive; finally comes out when intensity level is so high that there is little openness to problem-solving.
 - b. Being hard on people, rather than focusing on problem-solving.
 - Personal attacks; pattern of blaming rather than sharing responsibility.
 - Efforts to intimidate others, pressure, coerce, etc.
 - Reactive emotional outbursts from key parties representing all perspectives.
 - c. Destructive triangling that serves to spread anxiety within the Presbytery.
 - Behind the back criticism becomes the norm.
 - As triangling process spreads, tends to distort or magnify the facts.
 - The Presbytery divides into camps.
4. Solution focus, rather than process focus:
 - a. Little patience with process because solutions are predetermined in people’s minds.
 - b. Often change in personnel is seen as the only possible solution.
 - c. Efforts to impose one’s solution through threats, ultimatums, withholding funds, procedural maneuvering, or withdrawal, etc.
 - d. Demand immediate solutions – or that processes be unrealistically speeded up.
5. Pattern of anxiety over change:
 - a. Between those who prefer to maintain the status quo and those who prefer new directions.
 - b. Between those who want to hang on to the “golden era” of the past and those who want to focus on present realities.

While it seems that many of the typical patterns identified above may be relevant to PNYC, there may be some that do not specifically apply. Still, my assessment is that the overall

impression resulting from the information-gathering tools is that a number of the above unhealthy patterns in how systems deal with conflict do have relevance for PNYC.

While it would be easy for some people to say that evidence of any such patterns at PNYC reflects the style of leadership brought by a particular Executive Presbyter, Stated Clerk, or someone else in leadership, such an assessment ignores the role that all members of a Presbytery play when conflict becomes divisive. One of the keys, if PNYC is to learn from its recent experience and minimize the potential for such patterns to continue into the future, will be the capacity of all parties to take responsibility for the role that all play when conflict becomes unmanageable.

That is, there will be an ongoing need for all parties to do serious self-examination, to move beyond blame, and acknowledge ways that “I also contributed to the conflict, whether it was by things I said or left unsaid, things I did or left undone.” There will also be a need to make the establishment of healthy conflict norms – and ongoing strategies for equipping members in skills for transforming conflict – a central part of the Presbytery’s planning for the future.

V. A SYSTEMS THEORY VIEW OF PRESBYTERIAL FUNCTIONING

The history of the Presbytery of New York City is a testament to the spiritual gifts and the faithful dedication of many generations of both clergy and lay leaders. Since its beginning, it has been a center of faithful discipleship.

This report bears witness to the fact that PNYC has many strengths that have contributed to key areas of effective ministry. There have also been times of stress and strife that have been mutually experienced. Family systems theory offers one way of thinking about such times. It’s a way of thinking that is quite different from our natural tendencies to oversimplify our problems by blaming one person or group, or by focusing only on the most recent events.

No one can claim to fully understand a relationship system as large and complex as a Presbytery. If this is true of the members within the Presbytery, it’s even more true of outside observers. Any one person’s understanding of the facts of a Presbytery’s history is always both flawed and incomplete. Nevertheless, this report is an invitation to members of the Presbytery of New York City to “think systems” in reflecting upon your history.

In understanding the course of events in a Presbytery’s life, the ebb and flow of anxiety is a significant factor. Simply put, when anxiety goes up, people tend to function in less mature ways. Among other things, this means that, when anxious, people have greater difficulty: 1) defining themselves; 2) staying in emotional contact; 3) managing anxious reactivity; 4) maintaining their own boundaries. When things calm down, people do better.

Losses in membership or changes in key leaders can trigger heightened anxiety. Other factors both inside and outside the Presbytery can contribute to heightened anxiety as well, such as financial pressures, demographic changes, the impact of denominational anxieties. Furthermore, secrets can also serve to contribute to heightened anxiety.

In the *Healthy Congregations* workshop presented March 12-13, 2010, it was noted that there

are ten common triggers of anxiety in church systems, with many being relevant for judicatory systems as well:

- Money
- Type of Worship
- Issues Involving Sex / Sexuality
- Leadership Styles
- Old Versus New
- Growth / Survival
- Staff Conflicts / Resignation of Staff Member
- Internal or External Focus
- Major Trauma, Tension, or Transition
- Harm Done to a Child / Death of a Child

In the questionnaires, the telephone interviews, and in the small group structured dialogue sessions, members of the Presbytery mentioned many of the common triggers of anxiety listed above. With so many of the common triggers present in the recent past in the life of PNYC, it would be surprising if the anxiety level were not elevated.

A. Given the above, it's important that members of PNYC understand the impact of anxiety:

1. Anxiety magnifies differences and distorts people's perspectives:
 - a. It promotes polarized thinking.
 - b. It increases the negative diagnosis of others and fixes the resulting stereotypes.
 - c. Relatively minor grievances are blown out of proportion.
 - d. It magnifies the perception of others' weaknesses, while minimizing their strengths.
2. Anxiety leads to reactive responses:
 - a. Reactivity leads to less openness and tolerance of differences.
 - b. It leads to personal attacks, often focused on leaders.
 - c. It promotes defensiveness, whereby people take on a victim mentality.
 - d. It fosters secrecy and covert activity.
 - e. It fosters a pattern of distancing and cut-offs in important relationships.
3. Anxiety is contagious:
 - a. It promotes destructive triangling.
 - b. It leads to herding, whereby people take on the hurts of others.
 - c. It infects others who have little or no direct experience of the situation.
 - d. It becomes cancerous and quickly spreads out of control.
4. Anxiety leads to blame displacement:
 - a. Blaming is expressed when people focus on the faults of others.
 - b. People refuse to acknowledge their own role in contributing to the anxiety and reactivity.
 - c. People fault others for their unhappiness and areas of discontent in their lives.
 - d. It diminishes self-examination and the commitment to learn how to function in more healthy ways for the future.
 - e. It leads to rejecting people who challenge or introduce change.
 - f. It ultimately leads to scapegoating.
5. Anxiety promotes a quick-fix mentality:
 - a. It seeks to relieve anxiety by forcing persons seen as responsible for "the problem" to leave.
 - b. It intensifies the demand for certainty; it cannot accept ambiguity.

- c. It seeks symptom relief; it cannot be patient with processes designed to surface and address root causes.
 - d. It escalates the demand for immediate resolution in order to bring short-term relief.
 - e. It results in turning away from opportunities to address the underlying sources of anxiety, such that unhealthy patterns remain in place and long-term growth is short-circuited.
 - f. It constrains the capacity for imagination.
 - g. It empowers those who insist on getting their own way and who engage in threats and willfulness.
6. Anxiety ultimately promotes a lack of trust in the transcendent power and providential care of God.

B. Factors contributing to heightened anxiety:

One of the most interesting questions to raise when a Presbytery experiences a time of tension and conflict is “How is it that this is happening *now*?” The history of PNYC over the past several years has been marked in obvious ways by some growing tensions and by explanations for those tensions that focus on the failures of particular persons or groups. In less obvious ways, however, PNYC has experienced a number of changes that, once appreciated, can offer a less blaming way of understanding those rising tensions. Some of those changes have to do with factors contributing to the rising levels of anxiety.

As noted above, when anxiety increases, almost everyone has a tendency to function in less mature ways. Recognizing factors highlighted in the information gathering process, as noted in the preceding pages, which have contributed to higher levels of anxiety, can offer PNYC another way to understand how it is that things have played out the way they have when they have, without blaming one person or group.

C. Characteristics of mature leadership:

The leadership of a Presbytery is diffuse. Leadership is spread out among various people (Executive Presbyter, Stated Clerk, Moderator, members, and commissioners) and groups (General Council, committees, program staff, office staff, etc.). Leadership includes both those in formal leadership roles (Executive Presbyter, Stated Clerk) and those who are informal, but nevertheless “weighty” leaders – whose opinions and feelings matter to the whole group. The functioning of all of these leaders contributes to the way the whole system gets along.

In the application of systems theory, the term “mature” is used here to describe leaders who have four characteristics. They are able to:

1. Define self – Mature leaders know what they believe and where they are headed. When needed, they can articulate a vision. Their actions are based on their beliefs and their vision, and are not merely reactions to what others have to say. They speak and act without attacking others or seeking to compel the agreement of others.
2. Stay in emotional contact – This is not the same as getting stuck to or merging with others. It means being able to be present and in contact with important others, even when they disagree. Mature leaders do not withdraw when anxiety increases.

3. Manage their own reactivity – The ability of leaders to manage their own reactivity helps others to function more maturely. By maintaining and modeling a non-anxious presence in the face of anxiety triggers, mature leaders provide a calming influence on the system as a whole.
4. Maintain own boundaries – Mature leaders can “define self,” yet they are also “self-contained.” They know where one self ends and another begins. They respect others’ right to have their own thoughts and make their own decisions. They are not invasive of administrative or personal boundaries.

The optimum for a Presbytery would be to have the functioning of all key leaders demonstrate all of these characteristics, both in their relationships to one another and in their relationships with members of the broader Presbytery. Were this the case, the course of Presbyterial life would be quite stable over time and highly resilient through changing circumstances.

D. Moving PNYC toward greater maturity:

Rather than wondering how to get others to be more mature, anyone – official leader or member, clergy or lay – who wishes to lend greater maturity to PNYC will make the most progress by focusing on their own capacity to: 1) define themselves; 2) stay in emotional contact; 3) manage their own reactivity; 4) maintain their own boundaries.

The various phases of the Presbytery mediation process, facilitated by the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center, were intended to provide opportunities for all participants to focus on their own functioning in these ways, and to take the first steps toward a new phase in the life and ministry of PNYC.

VI. SUMMARY OF SMALL GROUP SESSIONS

A series of small group structured dialogue sessions were held to conclude the information-gathering phase of the mediation process. An initial session was held on April 30, 2010, with nine additional sessions being held on May 11-12, 2010. Thus, we met with ten groups with a total of seventy-six people participating.

The primary purpose of the small group sessions was to give people an opportunity to share their concerns in a relatively safe environment, to listen to such concerns, and to document the basic interests behind such concerns. Commonalities that serve to unite Presbytery members were also documented. The various commonalities and interests that were documented are listed in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 attached to this report. The interests are categorized under workable problem areas; the interests later served as the basis for the problem-solving phase of the mediation process.

During the small group sessions, those attending participated in eight spectrum exercises where they were asked to reflect on their experience across the years within the Presbytery of New York City on several key areas of Presbyterial life. They were asked to position themselves on the continuum and to choose a number, which reflected their experience in the Presbytery, between one and nine, with one being the lowest and nine being the highest. The exercise was

not intended to be a scientific one, but rather to encourage thinking about the broader issues relevant to Presbytery life. The average of all participants is indicated below:

- Mission and Purpose – average of 3.65.
- Spirituality – average of 3.17.
- Caring for Each Other – average of 3.06.
- Caring for Presbytery Staff – average of 3.43.
- Caring Conflict Transformation – average of 2.44.
- Communication and Decision-Making – average of 3.53.
- Structures and Leadership – average of 3.40
- Financial Stewardship – average of 2.19.

VII. SUMMARY OF THE HEALING PHASE

Four large group structured dialogue sessions were held to facilitate healing via a neutralizing history process. An average of forty people participated in the first three sessions, with 120 people participating in the last session in the healing phase. The process provided people with the opportunity to share the hurts they had experienced from both the distant and the more recent past, to invite others to demonstrate listening and understanding, and, then, for persons to let go of their hurts.

The majority of those participating were able to share their hurts with a minimum amount of blame, while others were able to listen thoughtfully and offer words of confession, regret and/or apology when appropriate. The sessions were intense, with some sharing their hurts in the midst of tears that served to invite others into the healing in a vicarious way. In the course of the sessions, there were certain moments of grace during which it was possible to sense the authentic presence of Christ's reconciling spirit.

During the healing phase, a total of seventy-one hurts were processed and released. There is no need to recount the specifics of those hurts in this report, since enumerating them here could potentially resurrect hurts that have been released. What is important to note here is that at the end of the healing phase, most of the participants said that they were ready to let go of the past and not allow it to interfere in their relationships with others in the future. Most indicated a desire to move on and work toward building agreements for the future.

While many took advantage of the opportunity to move toward healing and forgiveness, it should be noted that there are people who chose not to participate in the healing process. Some people chose not to attend the sessions at all; others attended at least one of the sessions of the healing phase but chose not to bring forth their hurts. Efforts were made to contact individuals who were not participating in the healing phase of the process by the Logistics Committee. However, despite their efforts to invite all into the process, some still chose not to participate.

It is unfortunate when participants in past conflicts deny themselves the opportunity to experience God's healing power via the mediation process. Moreover, the fact that certain key people chose not to participate in the process had the impact of denying others the opportunity to process hurts that they had been carrying in response to the actions of those who chose not to participate. Thus, it is hoped that those who did participate in the process, who still carry

hurts in relation to those who chose not to participate, will seek out such people individually and bring their hurts forward, following the steps that were modeled in the healing phase sessions.

VIII. SUMMARY OF THE PROBLEM-SOLVING PHASE

The problem-solving process took place over the course of two sessions, on March 12 and May 21, 2011. The list of workable problem areas and the accompanying interests were distributed to people prior to the first session. People were given a worksheet wherein they were encouraged to do some preliminary brainstorming regarding possible ideas for resolution of each of the workable problem areas.

At the session, people were given an opportunity to list their brainstormed ideas on the flipchart paper that had been set up for each of the workable problem areas, after which we formed into small groups. Each group was given the assignment to reflect on the interests for one of the workable problem areas and formulate a win-win proposal for that particular area, incorporating as many of the previously brainstormed ideas as possible.

After the first session, the proposals were typed up and distributed to members and commissioners in preparation for the second problem-solving session. At the following session, each proposal was reviewed by the group as a whole and we worked at further problem-solving within the context of large group structured dialogue, until we could see a consensus emerging. For some areas the consensus emerged readily; for other areas it took more discussion to insure that the interests were being addressed in a comprehensive way.

The agreements were distributed in preparation for the July 23, 2011, Stated Presbytery Meeting, where official action was taken to affirm them. The agreements are recorded in Appendix 3 of this report.

Those who participated in the problem-solving process are to be commended for their hard work and willingness to be flexible. It is our hope that those who were not able to participate in those sessions will be willing to honor the hard work that those people accomplished such that all might embrace the agreements as their own.

IX. SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

- A. The Presbytery of New York City has many strengths that served it well as we proceeded through the mediation process – and which will continue to provide a foundation for implementing the agreements and learnings that emerged from that process:
1. Dedicated and loyal long-term members and commissioners willing to support each other and work diligently for the Presbytery. This bond exists because of historically deep connections with each other.
 2. Newer members who bring a vision for healthy change within the Presbytery by exhibiting hope and new energy.
 3. A warm and welcoming, inclusive Presbytery that celebrates diversity and encourages different opinions and ideas.

4. A strong commitment to mission work, focused particularly on the local community, but also beyond, along with outreach programming designed to address that mission.
 5. Talented and dedicated members and commissioners, willing to share their spiritual gifts with the Presbytery.
 6. Quality leadership dedicated to carrying out the mission of the Presbytery faithfully and authentically.
 7. Many other strengths as well.
- B. As we initiated the mediation process, it was apparent that the Presbytery was also facing a significant level of anxiety related to past hurts – both from the recent past and the more distant past – in need of healing and challenges in need of problem-solving.
1. Such hurts were surfaced and addressed during the healing phase of the mediation process, at least as much as possible, given the absence of certain key individuals.
 2. The challenges in need of problem-solving were addressed during the problem-solving phase of the mediation process.
- C. Presbyteries that have gone through the kind of high intensity conflict like that at the Presbytery of New York City usually experience one of five potential outcomes:
1. New vision, clear direction, and forward movement.
 2. Some increased clarity of vision and direction, but only small gains forward.
 3. Maintenance – after further initial losses, the Presbytery holds its own.
 4. Further gradual decline, but reactivity is sporadic, or goes underground.
 5. Demoralization, ongoing decline, reactivity continues.
- D. The outcome that eventually emerges is typically dependent on certain key variables:
1. The willingness of all parties to engage in the healing and problem-solving phases of the process in a spirit of conciliation and grace – not a spirit of blaming, rancor, and bitterness.
 2. A steadfast commitment to implement the agreements and learnings that emerge from the mediation process.
 3. Given the fact that a solid core group of people did participate in the process in a spirit of conciliation and grace, there is reason to hope that the PNYC can attain the preferred outcome noted above.
 4. However, given the fact that some key people chose not to participate in the process – or to do so only in a marginal way – and given the fact that there was evidence of efforts to circumnavigate the intent of the mediation process, those who did participate fully in the process will need to be diligent in managing themselves in ways consistent with the “Characteristics of Mature Leadership” identified above (pp. 16-17).

5. Given the fact that there will be ongoing challenges, with the potential for destructive behaviors to surface again in the future, it will be crucial to implement faithfully the agreements regarding “Caring Conflict Transformation” as found in Appendix 3.
6. Another key criteria that can impact the ultimate outcome of the mediation process will be for all members and commissioners to be praying regularly for the Presbytery and its leaders. If all people can make such a commitment, calling upon the intervening grace of God’s Spirit to uphold and guide the Presbytery leaders, there is every reason to believe that the Presbytery of New York City will be able to experience a renewed sense of vision and hope, both now and for the future, as it seeks to live out its calling and mission as the collective body of Christ.
7. Thus, if the agreements and learnings from the mediation process are faithfully implemented – and the other criteria noted above can be met – the stabilization process and forward movement toward living out a new vision can be expected to take about eighteen months to two years.

X. RECOMMENDATIONS

As was emphasized from the beginning of the process, we at the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center serve as mediators, not arbitrators. Thus, our role is to help parties in conflict experience healing and to help them come to their own agreements on the substantive issues involved in the conflict. As mediators, we do not make recommendations on the substantive issues

Therefore, the primary recommendation that I would make would be to give priority attention to implementing the agreements reached during the problem-solving sessions. There are some agreements that can be implemented immediately; others will take more time to implement fully.

It could seem overwhelming to attempt to implement all the agreements right away. Therefore, I would encourage a steady effort to implement the agreements over the course of a number of months. I would encourage the General Council to devise a plan that prioritizes the agreements and, then, facilitates a steady, deliberate effort at implementation. A sub-committee of the General Council could be appointed to oversee the implementation of the agreements.

If all such agreements are eventually implemented, I trust that the Presbytery of New York City will go a long way toward resolving the tensions that prompted the need for the mediation process. Moreover, the resulting changes in the way the Presbytery system functions will contribute significantly toward working at preventing destructive conflict in the future.

If the Presbytery fails to faithfully implement the agreements, however, the anxiety level in the Presbytery is likely to increase again when the next potentially divisive issue arises. Unhealthy patterns of the past are likely to be repeated. Therefore, full implementation of the agreements is crucial for the future health of the Presbytery.

As the General Council works at implementing the agreements, it may happen that some persons conclude that they cannot fully commit themselves to supporting the agreements. If this occurs, it will be important for leaders to listen to their concerns and potentially make minor adaptations to the agreements in order to address legitimate interests that may have been overlooked. It will be equally important, however, that the General Council not allow such people to block the implementation of the agreements.

It needs to be emphasized that the agreements were reached through a process authorized by the Presbytery that provided an opportunity for all members and commissioners to participate and have a voice in shaping the proposals. Thus, it would be inappropriate for persons who chose not to participate in the process to block the implementation of the agreements. In short, now is the time for all members and commissioners to honor the hard work done by those who participated in the process and, for the sake of the Presbytery as a whole, to set aside their personal objections and affirm their ability to live with the decisions made.

In addition to urging full implementation of the agreements, I would offer a few other recommendations for your consideration in certain selected areas. These recommendations have to do with preventing destructive conflict in the future, decision-making on difficult issues, and understanding the Presbytery as an emotional system.

A. Preventing destructive conflict:

Members and commissioners of PNYC who attended the various components of the mediation process have made significant progress in their ability to address issues of conflict in a caring manner. The educational workshops provided a good foundation of training in alternative dispute resolution procedures. The other phases of the mediation process were designed to equip people further by modeling ways of facilitating healthy group dialogue.

Having experienced the destructive consequences of conflict when it is either avoided or addressed in a win-lose manner, it is hoped that the Presbytery will no longer be tempted to repeat those unhealthy patterns. Despite significant progress made thus far, the process of equipping members and commissioners with further skills in caring conflict transformation should be an ongoing task. As people are further equipped and become more skilled at addressing issues of conflict in a caring manner, the possibility of repeating the destructive patterns of the past years will be greatly minimized.

Such a need can be addressed in part by implementing the agreements under the topic of “Caring Conflict Transformation” as found in Appendix 3. I would draw particular attention to the agreement to publish “the names and contact information of those individuals who have been trained in mediation.”

A number of such people have attended LMPC’s *Mediation Skills Training Institute for Church Leaders (MSTI)*. Those who have attended *MSTI* are, in essence, licensed to present the two versions of the workshop on *Conflict in the Church: Entrusted with the Message of Reconciliation* – the same workshop that I presented at the beginning of the mediation process – utilizing LMPC’s training manual for participants.

Thus, they are a ready resource for providing ongoing training in conflict transformation skills throughout the Presbytery, both at Presbytery events and in individual churches of the Presbytery. They could also potentially present educational workshops in conflict transformation skills that could be advertised in the community and among churches of other denominations in the area.

Moreover, people who have attended LMPC's *Mediation Skills Training Institute for Church Leaders* can serve an important role in the long-term process of helping the Presbytery establish more healthy conflict patterns for the future. Thus, I would encourage the Presbytery to establish a formal structure that acknowledges the training and availability of *MSTI* graduates to serve as a resource to the Presbytery and its churches.

Whether such a group is called a Presbytery Mediation Team or some other name, bringing visibility to such people by creating a formal structure, commissioning them at a Stated Presbytery Meeting, and advertising their availability to provide conflict transformation skills training and mediation services to Presbytery churches can constitute a significant step in the long-term process of helping the Presbytery become more conflict healthy.

A related recommendation would be to insure that the Committee on Ministry (COM) always has several people serving in that role who have attended the *Mediation Skills Training Institute for Church Leaders*. A number of Presbyteries around the country regularly send COM members to attend *MSTI*, as a way of insuring that they have several members who have a vision for conflict transformation and who can readily recognize those situations that would best be addressed via mediation, rather than utilizing the other options at their disposal when anxiety is on the rise in Presbytery churches. Because COM members are routinely rotating on and off COM, the above noted Presbyteries typically send one or two COM members to attend *MSTI* each year, in order to insure that there are always members of COM who bring a vision for mediation to their deliberations.

In a similar way the agreement that "training in meeting management and conflict resolution/transformation be required for Presbytery moderators and committee chairpersons" could be addressed by having such people attend the *Mediation Skills Training Institute for Church Leaders*. Finally, I would recommend that key Presbytery staff persons, both now and in the future, make the *Mediation Skills Training Institute for Church Leaders* a part of their continuing education program.

As noted above, the task of overcoming the unhealthy patterns of the past and changing the way the Presbytery addresses conflict can be understood to be a long-term agenda. Thus, efforts to infuse the conflict transformation vision into every aspect of Presbytery life – by equipping pastors and lay leaders, organizing training events in individual churches, having workshops and facilitating structured dialogue at Presbytery-wide events, insuring that Presbytery leaders and committee members are grounded in Biblical principles of conflict transformation – should be seen as an ongoing priority for the Presbytery.

B. Decision-making on difficult issues:

As was demonstrated when the restructuring proposal emerged from a self-selected group outside of the mediation process, decision-making on major issues can become complicated

and create broad feelings of powerlessness when such proposals are developed in less than transparent ways. Thus, in order to insure that decision-making is done in a healthy way in the future, I would recommend that the Presbytery adopt the practice of developing an “Agreement on Procedures” as a preliminary step prior to initiating any major decision-making process.

Thus, when working at decision-making on difficult issues in the future, I would encourage leaders to consult pages D-5 through D-8 in the *Conflict Transformation Skills for Churches* manual that was used for the April 30-May 1, 2010 workshop. Of course, as noted in the workshop, that model will need to be adapted to conform with Presbyterian polity. Still, developing an “Agreement on Procedures,” following the model found on page D-8, as an initial step in decision-making, provides one method to address challenging decisions in a way that can reduce the potential for unhealthy conflict.

If the Presbytery required that all major decision-making processes be initiated by developing an “Agreement on Procedures” – and having the Presbytery formally approve the “Agreement on Procedures” before initiating any effort to develop a proposal on the issue under consideration – it would contribute significantly toward minimizing feelings of distrust. That is, the kind of surprises that create further hurt, feelings of powerlessness, and the accompanying reactivity – as demonstrated with the emergence of the restructuring proposal – could be virtually eliminated.

C. The Presbytery as an emotional system:

Further skills training in conflict transformation, while seeking to institutionalize healthy decision-making procedures, will decrease the possibility of destructive conflict in the future. However, it is also important that Presbytery leaders understand how the Presbytery functions as an emotional system. Although some input was provided on this topic in the *Healthy Congregations* workshop, I would recommend that Presbytery leaders seek opportunities to become further educated on this topic.

There are a number of written resources that can help Presbytery leaders gain such an understanding. I would particularly recommend two books by Peter Steinke as resources that would be useful for Presbytery leaders to read: *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* and *Healthy Congregations*. Another resource, *Creating a Healthier Church*, by Ron Richardson would also lend itself to a group study among Presbytery leaders and other people who may be interested in participating. A more in-depth treatment of the subject is provided by Edwin Friedman’s book, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. Although these resources focus on emotional process within individual churches, the same dynamics operate within judicatory systems; thus, the learnings to be gained from such resources are very relevant for a Presbytery system.

I would also recommend that Presbytery leaders attend LMPC’s *Clergy Clinic in Family Emotional Process*, followed by the *Advanced Clergy Clinic in Family Emotional Process* in succeeding years. There is probably no other continuing education program that would be more valuable for Presbytery leaders – both clergy and lay leaders – to attend, given the multigenerational history of anxiety experienced in the Presbytery.

XI. CONCLUSION

The Presbytery of New York City has made significant progress in addressing the issues in conflict that prompted the Presbytery to invite the mediation process. That progress was achieved largely by the willingness of people to participate in the mediation sessions, to share the personal impact of past hurts, to move beyond blame, to listen to the concerns of others, to offer mutual confessions, to engage in meaningful problem-solving, and thereby to experience the first steps toward a new beginning.

I share the disappointment communicated to me by a number of people that certain key individuals chose not to participate in the mediation process. However, I would emphasize the fact that there was a significant contingent of members and commissioners who did invest their prayerful energies into the mediation process. They are to be commended for their hard work, courage, and patience in undertaking the process. It is hoped that their commitment to implement the learnings and agreements from the process will have a transforming impact on the Presbytery as a whole, impacting even those who did not take advantage of the opportunity afforded by the mediation process.

I particularly want to thank the members of the Presbytery staff and General Council who helped me stay in touch with what was happening in the Presbytery between the various mediation sessions. Among those to be thanked are the members of the Logistics Committee and the Presbytery staff members who worked so faithfully at overseeing the logistical arrangements required to keep the process on course. Finally, I want to thank those from the Presbytery who had previously attended our *Mediation Skills Training Institute for Church Leaders* who assisted me at various points in the process by serving in a recording role, while I facilitated the sessions.

As the time for my consulting role with the Presbytery comes to a close, I want to note that writing a mediation report is a humbling experience. I realize that there is a great deal that goes on in the life of a Presbytery about which I know very little. My hope is that my ideas for follow-up can be combined with those of Presbytery members and commissioners in such a way that you will be able to make sound and faithful decisions about the future direction of the Presbytery.

It is my hope that the recommendations outlined above can be pursued without further assistance from an outside facilitator. However, I remain available to be of help, if requested to do so, whether through on-site consultation and facilitation, or by phone. Whether further consultation is requested or not, I will follow-up by phone at various points during the coming months to see how things are going in implementing the agreements and to test the continuing impact of the healing process.

Of course, my prayers will continue to be with all in the Presbytery, confident that the Holy Spirit can use this time of hard work and new beginnings to achieve God's purposes. May our Lord Jesus Christ be present with you all as you seek to discern his will for your lives together as a collective body of believers.

Appendix 1

Presbytery of New York City – New York, NY

Commonalities

The following commonalities were identified during the April 30 and May 11-12, 2010, small group structured dialogue process; they reflect some of the key strengths of the Presbytery of New York City. Such commonalities are to be affirmed and celebrated, so that people do not over-focus on areas of disagreement. The numbers indicate how many times the item was mentioned in the various groups.

Caring for One Another

1. Collegial spirit / family environment / support for interim pastors – 5
2. Caring for one another / good hearted / having each other's best interests at heart – 3
3. Willingness to be direct with each other / long-suffering nature of people – 2
4. Healthy relationships / sense of harmony in some sub-groups – 2

Spiritual Foundations

1. Colleagues in ministry together / common purpose / bringing God's good news to all / circle of friendship across Presbytery / connection of faith to work – 9
2. Presbyterian heritage – structure / unity in theological issues / sense of communion when Presbytery gathers together for worship / sense of fellowship / opportunities to contribute to common good – 6
3. Loving Godly people / love for Jesus Christ / faith in Jesus Christ / commitment to unity through the Holy Spirit – 5

Programs and Activities

1. Colleagues in mission together / social witness committees / commitment to social justice work / helping those in need / leadership training – 4
2. Support of the mediation process / effort to come to a new understanding of conflict – 2
3. Commitment to connection and vision for the city / commitment to serve the city – 2
4. Mission groups and projects of congregations / informed by Presbytery – 1

Vitality and Talent of Presbytery

1. Celebrate rich diversity / ethnic pluralism / GLBT / hunger for a wider community / multi-cultural / experts in urban ministry – 16
2. Potential for great future – leading into the 21st century / commitment to growth / commitment to being a connectional Presbytery / hope for unity, way of order / for Presbytery to become a light in the city / model diversity in the city – 9
3. Commitment to hard work / involvement, committee work, good use of energy / work to make things better / commitment to serve Presbytery / strong commitment of lay people – 7
4. Hidden treasures in smaller churches / richness of opinions / freedom to express opinions – 3

Appendix 2

Presbytery of New York City – New York, NY

Interests

The following interests were documented during a series of small group structured dialogue sessions held on April 30, 2010, and May 11-12, 2010, which brought to completion the information-gathering phase of the mediation process. Additional interests have been incorporated below that were documented on October 30, 2010, November 6, 2010, and February 12, 2011, during the sessions in the healing phase. The goal of the problem-solving phase of the process was to formulate agreements that seek to address the diverse range of interests in a win-win manner. The interests are categorized under workable problem areas. The numbers indicate how many times an item was mentioned in the various groups.

MISSION AND IDENTITY

Defining the Mission of PNYC

1. Need for mission statement to be more visible / more widely known / acknowledge that there is an existing mission statement / strive to see it put into action, institute follow-through procedures / symbolize a strategies “roadmap” for churches / simplify structure while clarifying vision / for everyone to model behavior stated within mission statement consistently through mutual respect / mission to be recognized as “outside” the PNYC – 21
2. Need to clarify mission / clarify vision / enhance vision enthusiastically / unified sense of mission / review and update statement frequently / make mission statement main focus / read mission statement at PNYC meetings to unify / enhance education about our Statement of Faith and Book of Order – 20
3. Need for acknowledging small and large church missions are connectional with PNYC / to clarify difference between PNYC’s mission and individual church’s mission / for dialogue between PNYC and its churches about their relationship / understanding of impact upon PNYC when churches do not define and live out their mission / mission of PNYC to include empowerment of its churches and their leaders – 7

Defining the Purpose of PNYC

1. Need to clarify purpose and identity / PNYC to dialogue with each other and its churches about nature of its purpose and identity / clarify goals and objectives / for clear charter to be established / focus on Golden Rule and Common Good – 8
2. Need for acknowledging strong commitment to social justice / strengthen social justice witness / become a voice for the community regarding senior, environmental, and peace issues / for dialogue about differing justice ideas and issues / PNYC to encourage community evangelism / enhance appeal to youth by being voice on social issues – 8
3. Need for celebrating and acknowledging existing mission projects / recognizing that continued fundraising is essential for those projects – 4

Defining the Connection with the Churches of PNYC

1. Need to enhance PNYC’s connection with its churches through clearer definition / commonly recognized and understood language to be used universally throughout PNYC – 5

SPIRITUALITY

1. Need for enhanced spirituality / vitality connection to be made between churches and PNYC / address lack of sincere spiritual focus, i.e. fasting, prayer, listening, communion, biblical language / recover our sense of spiritual foundation / for all to be open to God's call and model what God is asking us to do / address spiritual unity rather than self interests / develop tolerance of differing worship styles / individual reflection on spiritual and missional commitment / address spirituality rather than conflicts / incorporate spirituality into all functions of PNYC – 26
2. Need for shared spiritually focused examination of candidates and new ministers / strengthening of spiritual development of PNYC and its churches / clergy to model spiritual selflessness / meetings and other PNYC functions to reflect more spirituality, less corporate business / institute spiritual equality among all PNYC groups, including empowerment of youth's spirituality / recover sense of acceptance through Christ's love within PNYC / enhance evangelism throughout PNYC's communities / acknowledge that the Holy Spirit is working within us – 25

CARING FOR EACH OTHER

Caring Ministries

1. Need for all to take broad ownership of PNYC, share in responsibilities / build mutual trust / enhance morality, treating others with dignity / celebrate diversity and inclusivity / learn about our diverse cultures and traditions / take ourselves less seriously / create positive environments / develop mutual respect for one another and respect for all opinions / to see people as individuals rather than the issues or roles / caring for one another / acknowledge and celebrate our strengths and that we do care about each other / communicate our differing histories to each other / improve relationship between PNYC and churches / look beyond PNYC and respond to needs of community – 40
2. Need to acknowledge divisive issues of racism, classism and gender bias, and break down the barriers by building up relationships / to acknowledge big versus small, avenue versus less wealthy, church reality / enhance relationships between two types of churches rather than allowing smaller churches to become congregational rather than connectional in nature / celebrate small church's hard work and dedication / hard decisions that have been made regarding personnel / equality of all new churches regardless of size or budget / bias to be addressed through educational sessions / respectful pastoral care and leadership for candidates, new pastors, retired pastors and small emerging churches / listening to and supporting needs of pastors and new churches / equality between PNYC and churches regarding hard decisions regarding personnel and budgets – 27
3. Need for PNYC to be more supportive of churches / PNYC to support committees / create intellectually stimulating elderly programming / involve youth in PNYC decisions making / need for PNYC meetings to be conducted in a Christ-like manner / for all to model Christ-like behavior / PNYC structures to be based on caring for one another first / PNYC to offer help and resources to churches in need / PNYC to set specific goals that strengthen – 14

CARING FOR PRESBYTERY STAFF

1. Need to acknowledge hard work of PNYC staff and leadership / acknowledge that PNYC staff and leadership has been supportive and caring toward new pastors / to be supportive, informing and caring for staff / for healing of the staff / educate people regarding staff's roles and duties within PNYC to enhance transparency and increase respect / clarification of staff tenure / acknowledge the pastoral care provided to staff by acting Executive Presbyter / acknowledge and appreciate that the staff has worked hard and gone above and beyond / for personnel committee to relate and evaluate staff personally / staff matters to be conducted privately rather than in a public forum / for fair, non-discriminatory compensation for staff / acknowledge that staff is compensated well / acknowledgement of committees' hard work / committees and PNYC staff to work together / acknowledge and celebrate sense of harmony and support staff has for each other / caring of staff in relation to negative comments made at PNYC meetings / to acknowledge the pain, stress and pressure staff has been placed under due to restructuring and uncertainty of the future of PNYC / for less criticism / for closure regarding restructuring to instill calm for the future / separation of caring for staff issue and sufficient funding with which to do so / for pastors to value and respect PNYC, thus shaping new attitudes within churches / develop positive attitudes toward PNYC within churches – 44
2. Need to acknowledge PNYC's support and help for churches / enhance morale of PNYC / empower all members of PNYC whether pastors, academics or others / acknowledge that current situation can change, looking toward the future / provide hope in a community of Christ / to support and be loyal to PNYC as a whole rather than specific groups / acknowledge that the best is desired for PNYC / acknowledge that PNYC is a large complex system that is in need of better management and structure / local churches to be more involved in PNYC life – 13

CARING CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

Acknowledging and Addressing the Impact of the Recent Conflict

1. Need for moving forward / allow PNYC to carry out Christ's mission of love and justice / love more intentionally – 5
2. Need for PNYC to acknowledge that conflict exists during this time of substantial change in the system / conflict getting in the way of PNYC abilities to be productive and healthy – 3
3. Need to view conflict as an opportunity for forgiveness and repentance / an opportunity for stronger fellowship – 3
4. Need to recognize and acknowledge that conflict can be a sign that issues need to be addressed / acknowledge that conflict is normal – 2
5. Need for all to take broad ownership of their role within the conflict – 1
6. Need to acknowledge different levels of power and how it contributes to conflict – 1

Processing Feelings of Grief and Loss

1. Need to institutionalize a healing process to be carried out after hurts are experienced – 2
2. Need for all to recognize and respect the necessity of healing in order to have growth – 2

3. Need for there to be a closure process in place – 1
4. Need to acknowledge that issues are filtered through old hurts, thus healing is imperative – 1
5. Need to address silencing of hurts – 1

The Mediation Process

1. Need to reach out to those not involved in mediation process / encourage those not participating to be supportive of PNYC by becoming involved / revise process by which we welcome or invite people into the process – 5
2. Need for all to commit to the mediation process in the spirit of self-examination to be part of the solution – 4
3. Need for those with great concern about issues to be fully immersed in mediation process – 3
4. Need to acknowledge and celebrate those who are participating in the mediation process in the spirit of self-examination – 2
5. Need to acknowledge that the conflict that facilitated the mediation process can lead to healthier communication in the future – 1
6. Need to utilize mediation process to take PNYC into a healthier, more productive future, rather than just surviving – 1
7. Need to embrace transformation of Presbytery – 1
8. Need for procedural clarity of mediation process – 1

Conflict Transformation Skills

1. Need to separate issues from people – 4
2. Need to institutionalize healthy conflict procedures in order to reduce tension and anxiety – 3
3. Need to employ healthy dialogue procedures for PNYC meetings to move beyond position statements / enabling underlying interests to be revealed – 2
4. Need to accept that transformation is not only the responsibility of another – 1
5. Need to address conflict earlier before it escalates, to prevent destructive behavior – 1
6. Need to develop process within which all voices and opinions may be heard – 1

Understanding the Presbytery as an Emotional System

1. Need to acknowledge pattern of conflict in PNYC's history / historical roots of conflict / pattern of majority pulling back as ethnic diversity grew within PNYC / pattern of inability to work through issues resulting in financial withholding tactics / acknowledge multi-generational history of lack of caring – 8
2. Need for all to take ownership and responsibility in conflict / to see PNYC as "we" rather than "they" – 5
3. Need for acknowledgement of silence of those in disagreement of handling of certain issues / for those silenced to be given a voice – 3

4. Need to recognize that the conflict within PNYC may be representative of the broader culture of New York City – 2
5. Need for all to accept and be open to experience loss of some type throughout the mediation process in order for the good of the whole, the PNYC, to be realized – 1
6. Need to recognize how individuals project anxiety from personal lives into their lives within the PNYC – 1
7. Need to accept that as human beings we are not perfect, but to accept one another in Christ's love – 1

Healthy Interpersonal Communication

1. Need to avoid secret meetings before and after PNYC meetings / develop language for win-win solutions / provide open forum for all within which conflict can be addressed / display patience through listening to each other / avoid reactive behavior / avoid labeling conflict or disagreement as a negative / avoid blaming and finger pointing / avoid gossiping / avoid triangling / develop appropriate communication / avoid allowing conflict to polarize / avoid secrets / avoid judging others – 26
2. Need to encourage self-examination / all to model self-examination / demonstrate appreciation and acknowledgement of those who practice self-examination – 3
3. Need to clarify what conflict is and where it exists honestly / rebuild trust and honesty – 2
4. Need for establishment of clear boundaries – 2
5. Need for individuals to accept their responsibility within conflicts – 1
6. Need for individuals to state their own views while being respectful of others' opinions – 1
7. Need to acknowledge the positive common ground that does exist on some issues – 1

COMMUNICATION AND DECISION-MAKING

Clear and Collaborative Processes

1. Need to be able to disagree with each other and still be in a relationship / to acknowledge that disagreement does not indicate lack of trust – 5
2. Need to empower people to become involved in communication process by educating them as to how the process functions / to communicate opportunities to connect with PNYC and enhance positive reasons why they should connect / encourage people to channel their passions through healthy communicative avenues – 3
3. Need to acknowledge that disagreement is not indicative of racism / to acknowledge that anxiety within PNYC regarding race, gender and class, should be communicated in an open and healthy manner / certain criticism should not be generalized as racism – 3
4. Need for resolving anxiety over PNYC minutes / minutes to reflect summary of actions rather than a transcript / clarity in format – 3
5. Need to acknowledge that poor or manipulated communication neither serves a purpose nor is healthy / acknowledge that difficulty arises when decision-making process is delayed by ill-prepared information – 2

6. Need for voices of youth to be heard within PNYC / create welcoming, inviting and accepting forum within which youth's voices may be heard – 2
7. Need for PNYC to make personal contact with people demonstrating support and encouragement – 1

Communication and Information-Sharing

1. Need for open and honest communication and dialogue / open sharing of information / maintain open and transparent communication / create environment of communication where all voices are heard and where no voices are dominant / all encouraged to speak and voice all opinions / avoidance of closed groups / avoidance of behind the scenes decisions / more direct communication with each, avoiding gossip / maintain more consistent healthy communication language, verbiage / voicing issues and concerns rather than making abstract complaints / avoid reactive decision-making through discernment – 31
2. Need for PNYC decision-making to be more transparent / clarify decision-making procedures / PNYC structures to be more clearly defined regarding funding sources / clarification of reasoning behind certain decision-making regarding diversity training / decision-making procedures to be more efficient and timely / decision-making process to be conducted cooperatively / implement more timely follow through and accountability for implementation of decisions – 10
3. Need to implement central communications hub to inform others regarding various committee functions and decisions / implement more effective website in order to strengthen communication / continual updating of mailing list to be carried out / celebrate Midpoint and other communication devices – 7
4. Need for better communication procedures between PNYC and smaller churches / for more discernment on how PNYC communicates with smaller churches / enhance connection and communication between PNYC and congregations / for church leaders to share PNYC information with congregations – 7
5. Need to employ Spanish speaking staff person to communicate with Spanish speaking congregations / expansion of Spanish language resources in PNYC / engage non-English speaking congregations in PNYC conversation – 5
6. Need for better follow through regarding strategic planning / development of broader strategic plan / enhance ability to transform issues into workable proposals – 4
7. Need to celebrate recent communication initiatives for churches without pastors / to acknowledge that some committee communication has been transparent / to acknowledge that some PNYC communication is being conducted in a healthy manner – 4
8. Need for committee communication to be conducted within respective committees / personnel committee reports to be more objective in content / enhance committee communication procedures – 3
9. Need to acknowledge long standing pattern of lack of civility at PNYC meetings / enhance civility at PNYC meetings – 2
10. Need for PNYC commissioners to be better informed regarding PNYC issues / commissioners should receive in-depth information – 2

11. Need to explore, find alternative methods, of communication and decision-making for the future of PNYC / provide resources to equip churches with more effective ways of evangelizing – 2
12. Need to implement educational communication regarding the structure of PNYC in order to enhance relationship between congregations and PNYC – 1

STRUCTURES AND LEADERSHIP

PNYC Staff and Other Leaders

1. Need to re-evaluate structure of PNYC based on organizational needs rather than personalities / study to be done regarding size of staff and appropriate funding needs / current structure may be adequate, but can be better utilized / creation of manageable systems / review of staffing structure performed thoughtfully and in an informed manner / for re-evaluation of strategic plan through mediation process lens – 10
2. Need to clarify salaries of PNYC staff / clarify qualifications of PNYC staff / clarify roles and duties of PNYC staff / move away from temporary part-time status – 6
3. Need to celebrate wisdom and intelligence within PNYC / find ways to use PNYC gifts in a productive manner / focus on planning for a vision for the future of PNYC – 5
4. Need for clarity of committee expectations and responsibilities / committee assignments to be consistent with the interests of the members / function in a way consistent with a common mission and purpose / need for courage to make difficult decisions regarding staff – 4
5. Need to acknowledge hard work of moderator / general collaboration between moderator and other leaders – 3
6. Need for there to be trust of leaders and committees by churches / deep Christian compassion and concern needed for staff – 2
7. Need for institutional awareness of diversity of PNYC within policy making / ongoing diversity and racism dialogue and training – 2
8. Need for clarification of General Council's role and duties – 1
9. Need for open communication within PNYC staff – 1
10. Need for change of PNYC locale exploration – 1
11. Need for PNYC presence in Council of Churches and global issues – 1
12. Need for personnel and CASS to be in dialogue with each other – 1
13. Need to acknowledge historical pattern of inability to clarify structure – 1
14. Need for more opportunities, i.e., retreats, to build relationships – 1
15. Need for greater general presence and knowledge of PNYC in relation to congregations – 1

Leadership Development

1. Need for improved leadership-orientation training and dialogue for both continuing and new leaders / greater focus on development of younger members / enhance ongoing leadership training programs / nominating process to reach out to new volunteers ensuring rotation / for transparency throughout nominating process / nominating process to focus on gifts rather

than influence or expertise / empowerment and support of leaders / need to enhance continuity of service / enhancement of dialogue between nominating committee and committee nominees / use of skills based manner during nomination procedure / updating of current leadership structure to enhance diversity in leadership / draw upon those with theological expertise / more attention to be paid to Christian Education and youth ministry – 25

2. Need for training for those volunteers serving on committees / those serving on committees to be trustworthy and competent / follow through of tasks both by staff and volunteers / accountability and responsibility for one's own work – 7
3. Need for restructuring of Committee on Ministry regarding addressing of congregational issues / liaison to be functional within their church / exploration of liaison options / consistent follow-up procedures – 4
4. Support and respect for CLP's / dialogue with PNYC regarding functions to develop clarity of roles – 3
5. Need for exploration of committee restructuring involving reduction / consistency in practices and rulings – 2
6. Need for seasoned leaders to become healthy role models – 1
7. Need to recognize isolation of some leaders – 1

Pastoral Leadership

1. Need for strong leadership that focuses on mission and purpose of PNYC / take responsibility and follow through – 3
2. Need for streamlined process in pastoral searches / consistency within ordination, installation and commissioning process / open communication with candidates and clergy – 3
3. Need for examination of candidates and ministers to be conducted by theological dialogue / Book of Order call process to be examined as to efficiency – 2
4. Need for leaders to understand scope of their authority to avoid abuse of power issues – 2
5. Need for parity between pastors and elder commissioners – 1
6. Need for dialogue and clarity of part time compensation – 1

Conduct of Meetings and Relation to Churches

1. Need for PNYC meetings to be conducted in a civil / respectful / professional manner / with Christian love and a sense of spirituality / to focus on positive ministries within PNYC / for clarity of meeting process and procedures / Stated Clerk to remain neutral throughout meetings / personal agendas to be left out of proceedings / length of meetings to be kept at minimum / implementation of agenda items limit for docket / structured in such a way as to promote healthy dialogue where all voices are welcomed, empowered by being given an opportunity to speak / meetings to be welcoming, promoting encouragement and inspiration / acknowledgement of diversities at meetings and how they can be reflected as a community of saints / reduction of anger / meetings to stay focused on topics presented without scapegoating issues and people / to be conducted in orderly manner so that minutes may be taken efficiently / create networking system at meetings / brainstorm ideas for new meeting

locations that create more positive open attitude / for proposals brought to PNYC meetings to be sufficiently researched regarding process in order to instill trust / voting process to be examined as to whether it can be accomplished in a more timely manner / acknowledge the dual nature of PNYC meetings / exploration of an additional PNYC meeting option / need for all members and commissioners to attend entire meetings / reduce wide range absences through coordination and communication / need for clergy to model peacemaking skills on floor of PNYC meetings – 50

2. Need for clarity / common understanding of what a viable church is / for PNYC to be supportive by making hard decisions regarding smaller churches / PNYC to research options for smaller churches to create new ministries rather than church closures / for resources to be provided that stimulate growth for small churches / committee decisions to take into account needs of smaller churches, particularly those without pastors / exploration of reducing the number of churches or merging options – 16
3. Need for new and current member orientation including education regarding denominational polity and statements of faith / need for PNYC education process for new and current members – 5
4. Need for PNYC support of small churches in pastoral searches / to acknowledge that sizeable lack of installed pastors at many churches impacts feelings toward PNYC / develop a plan for empty pulpits – 3
5. Need for risk taking / taking chances rather than dismissing new ideas and suggestions because they are not the status quo / make commitment to learn from possible mistakes resulting from risk taking / promote creative options for dealing with impasses – 3
6. Need to clarify strategies for churches / for PNYC to be shepherd of its congregations – 2
7. Need to best use resources within specific geographical areas by churches dialoguing with one another to realize new visions for ministry – 1

FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

Presbytery

1. Need for all churches to share financial responsibility as part of connectional commitment within PNYC / to increase giving to PNYC / challenge churches to be accountable to pay apportionments through connectional dialogue / dialogue to help PNYC understand inability to pay apportionments / review and revise apportionment formula / face hard decision-making regarding financial situation – 18
2. Need for reducing expenses in relation to current financial situation / transparency regarding spending / be wise about spending / enhance financial stewardship by possible staff reductions / endowment to be used for new ministries / protect endowment fund by using it for intended purposes rather than current use / current budget to reflect giving / financial resources to be shared responsibly regardless of ethnicity of churches / share financial resources with churches in need – 11
3. Need to acknowledge and address PNYC's financial challenges / acknowledge PNYC engages in responsible stewardship / acknowledge difficult personnel decisions made within PNYC not always consistent with realistic budget / spending to be consistent with funds – 5

4. Need for connection between PNYC and those with financial management skills / enhance directing of financial resources to strengthen churches / focus on financial resources within PNYC – 3
5. Need for clarity and transparency within communication between PNYC and churches regarding the budget / address economic health of PNYC and its churches while insuring fiscal accountability – 2
6. Need to acknowledge that financial issues are not always the source of conflict within PNYC / to separate church issues from financial responsibility – 2
7. Need for communication to be enhanced between PNYC and wealthier churches regarding taking ownership versus taking possession of smaller churches – 1
8. Need for dialogue between PNYC and churches not meeting apportionment commitments – 1
9. Need to separate caring for the PNYC staff from budgetary issues – 1
10. Need to acknowledge long historical pattern of budget conflicts – 1

Churches

1. Need to acknowledge fears of smaller churches who are viewed as non-viable / fear of being closed due to lack of financial resources / for support of smaller churches by PNYC in order to make realistic adjustments to apportionment commitments / for support for smaller churches without pastors / brainstorming of ideas for support of smaller churches issues involving apportionment problems / financial discussions conducted with complete information and clarity regarding budget – 10
2. Need for churches to take financial responsibility / churches to become committed to financial responsibilities / churches to contribute to PNYC in alternative ways beyond financial / churches to honor corporate agreement regarding apportionments – 6
3. Need to acknowledge that congregations do engage in stewardship / to enhance congregational dialogue about stewardship and apportionments / for small church discussions to take place collectively / celebrate strengths of smaller churches including stewardship of material resources / financial resources to be shared responsibly regardless of ethnicity of churches / financial stewardship issues addressed – 6
4. Need for fairness and equality in addressing fiscal responsibility / clarity regarding what constitutes fair apportionments / use of sensitivity as well as accuracy when citing apportionments / establish trust and confident nature – 4
5. Need for trustees to be good stewards of funds for PNYC – 1
6. Need to avoid spiritualizing apportionment decisions / avoid labeling that creates shame – 1

Appendix 3 Presbytery of New York City – New York, NY Agreements

The following agreements were initially developed as proposals by small groups composed of members and commissioners attending the March 12, 2011, session in the problem-solving phase of the Presbytery mediation process. The proposals were further refined by the group attending the May 21, 2011, session, such that all in attendance were able to affirm them as agreements. The agreements were distributed in preparation for the July 23, 2011, Stated Presbytery Meeting, where official action was taken to affirm them.

A. In order to address the issue of **Mission and Identity, we agree:**

1. To use our current Presbytery Mission Statement as a working document that is open to revision and updating. The current mission statement reads as follows:

Our Mission, as the Presbytery of New York City, is to embody God’s gracious love in Jesus Christ through our ministries, our congregations, our partnerships, our service and witness, and our common life together. As a manifestation of Christ’s body, we proclaim God’s Word and promote God’s justice to all persons and in all places, public and private, throughout NYC, striving to grow in faith and size so that all may hear and experience the Good News of Jesus Christ.
2. That the Presbytery review our Mission Statement via the following means:
 - a. General Council send to each congregation’s Clerk of Session a request for the following: present to the Session the Presbytery’s Mission Statement, reflect together on the congregation’s Mission Statement, and comment on the relationship and relevance between the two as we together seek to evaluate our statement of the Presbytery’s mission.
 - b. Request that that the New York City entities of partner denominations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) provide their mission statements to the Presbytery for our information and assistance in reviewing our own mission.
 - c. Consider the possible outcome, that we revise our Mission Statement so that it can adequately provide a basis for evaluating every idea and plan that comes before the Presbytery.
3. That the Presbytery enhance the visualization of our identity by intentionally incorporating some clear visual identification on all documents originating from the Presbytery – at the minimum using a banner or the logo of the PC(USA).
4. That the Presbytery address the issue of strategic planning by:
 - a. Organizing a widely based Presbytery small-group process to review the Strategic Plan, evaluating and re-visiting it as a way to engage in discussion and decisions about our collective mission.
 - b. The possible outcome would be to determine what to do with the present Plan or set in motion a process for something newer, based on our agreed Mission Statement and our intentions as a Presbytery; we would expect the new Plan to be specifically restricted to what we actually intend to do.
5. That the Presbytery enhance our life together via the following means:

- a. Actively encourage and facilitate pulpit exchanges and other forms of congregational interaction.
 - b. Strengthen and facilitate relationships between pastors, including recognition of new pastors, ministers in validated ministries, retirees, and associate pastors, as one aspect of strengthening our common life together and our ability to engage in service and witness.
6. That the Presbytery facilitate a reorientation to a missional emphasis by instituting mission-oriented presentations and conversations as key elements in meetings as a means of re-ordering the emphasis of our life together from governance to mission.
 7. We have not given dates for accomplishment of these tasks, understanding that they will need to be developed through interaction with other groups and their suggestions. The priority is in the order these items are listed, and this should affect dating.
 8. The assumptions behind our proposals include:
 - a. We have lacked continuity in determining our direction as a Presbytery.
 - b. We need a sense of common calling as a Presbytery that will enable us to understand our purpose as an organization.
 - c. We can use the present as a base for critiquing ourselves.
 - d. Sessions of congregations need to be involved.
 - e. We take imperfection as a beginning and ask, “What should the Presbytery be about?”
 - f. We need to evaluate each idea in terms of a mission statement and therefore we ask, “What needs to be added?”

B. In order to address the issue of **Spirituality, we agree:**

1. That the life of Presbytery be framed liturgically in the context of the church year.
 - a. That each meeting reflect where we are in the liturgical year and related thematic emphasis.
 - b. That a worship leader be appointed for the year to see that the worship services reflect the full diversity of who we are, including our youth, and to ensure that the meetings reflect the liturgical theme, and be informed by guidelines for “Presbyterian Worship in Mass Assembly.”
 - c. That a chaplain be appointed for each meeting who will accept individual prayer requests and conduct a prayer at a midpoint of the meeting – leading the meeting in a time of announcements, joys, concerns, and intercessory prayer. The name will be announced in the Call Packet for people to share prayer concerns ahead of time. Such a person will also seek to follow up after the meeting with those persons with a prayer concern.
 - d. Every meeting of Presbytery has a stated time at the end of the meeting to state what has transpired during the meeting. That a “theological observer” (Teaching or Ruling Elder) be appointed for the day to provide theological reflection on the content of the meeting and lead a short period of corporate theological reflection at the conclusion of the meeting.
 - e. That committee/council reports be presented as a response to the word informed by the liturgical and/or thematic emphasis of the meeting.

- f. For each of the items above requiring someone to be appointed, that appointment will be made by the Moderator in consultation with the Docket and Worship Committee.
2. That commissioners and Sessions be encouraged to prepare for Presbytery meetings by discussing the issues and questions to come before Presbytery. Also that they report back to their congregations through their Sessions and that this preparation and response include prayer for the Presbytery, its employees, commissioners, and committee and council members.
3. That Presbytery through the CM&N identify (and provide resources/space/creativity/desire) at least one congregation/location in the Presbytery to function as a spiritual resource/retreat center for the Presbytery. This particular congregation/location would then be a hub for the other spiritual resource centers to be located in each borough.
4. To encourage Presbytery entities to engage in spiritual retreat activities.

C. In order to address the issue of **Caring for Each Other**, we agree:

1. To be intentional about relating as a connectional body and with one another by:
 - a. Meeting once a year (Presbytery) primarily for fellowship, worship, and service, and to vary the time of the year to accommodate a variety of schedules.
 - To be implemented by the General Council within one year of adoption by Presbytery.
 - b. Setting up conversation groups with people of different backgrounds, including people from small and large churches.
 - To be implemented by CM&N, COR within six months of adoption by Presbytery.
 - c. Organizing social gatherings including parties for diverse inclusive community.
 - To be implemented by the General Council within three months of adoption by Presbytery.
 - d. Encouraging and celebrating congregational partnerships across diverse boundaries.
 - To be implemented by CM&N within six months of adoption by Presbytery.
 - e. Promoting the importance of training congregational members in “the connectional” nature of Presbyterian Church.
 - To be implemented by CM&N within six months of adoption by Presbytery.
2. To be intentional about pastoral care to Presbyters by:
 - a. Establishing an e-mail prayer list.
 - To be implemented by PNYC Staff as they receive prayer requests, COM, and by those designated as per-meeting chaplains by the next meeting after adoption by Presbytery. Requests for confidentiality will be respected.
 - b. Sharing "fun" facts about members of PNYC.
 - To be implemented by the Moderator and Moderator-Elect within three months of adoption by Presbytery.
 - c. Having an annual, day long or over-night, retreat for Teaching Elders and Commissioned Lay Pastors to be implemented by COM.
3. That Committees and Councils of PNYC be intentional about encouraging and training congregations, especially those without pastoral leadership, in pastoral care of their members by:

- a. Setting up workshops to train Elders on how to provide pastoral care.
 - To be implemented by CM&N within six months of adoption by Presbytery.
- b. Sending reminders to Sessions to provide pastoral care.
 - To be implemented by COM, CM&N within three months of adoption by Presbytery.

D. In order to address the issue of **Caring for Presbytery Staff**, we agree:

1. To affirm the following as we address the issue: a) we are dealing with God's children who are more important than numbers or dollars; b) in recognizing that staff members are human beings, the Presbytery – through the Personnel Committee, and Presbyters individually – will seek appropriate balance between concern for personal situations and attention to professional performance; c) we will encourage Presbyters to use respectful, appreciative, and cooperative communication with staff; d) we recognize that the limited number of staff requires Presbyters to take a greater responsibility for Presbytery's work/mission.
2. As a connectional body of Christ, to encourage Presbyters and congregations to pray for staff by name on a regular basis.
3. To recognize that Committees are “resourced,” not “staffed” by Presbytery personnel.
4. That committee reports to Presbytery note/acknowledge their staff resource person(s).
5. To provide all Presbytery staff with business cards and name tags to be worn at Presbytery functions.
6. To explore and consult with staff about including on the Presbytery web site, their photo and biographies of all staff with their key responsibilities
7. To honor our Presbytery process concerning the hiring and electing of staff and officers.
8. To affirm the Personnel Committee's responsibility for caring for Presbytery staff.
9. To request that the General Council include on the docket at the annual Presbytery meeting the recognition and appreciation of staff.
10. To encourage a staff retreat for the purpose of team building, in light of the fact that we recognize the staff of PNYC as an integral part of Presbytery's work and that Presbyters have a responsibility to care for staff.
11. To direct the Personnel Committee to identify and provide appropriate resources and educate Presbytery staff as to availability (through Board of Pensions Employee Assistance Program) of self-care and stress relief programs when requested.

E. In order to address the issue of **Caring Conflict Transformation**, we agree:

1. To affirm the following as we address the issue: a) sources of ongoing conflict of culture and control should be identified: for example, big church versus small church divisions; tensions over the use of the endowment; divisions over whether to assess churches under the apportionment or per capita formula; disagreements over whether committees and Presbytery functions should be supported by paid or volunteer staff;

- b) individuals who participated in healing sessions should be encouraged to take their learning in relationship with others; c) Moderators of Presbytery and of committees will recognize issues of unacceptable behavior and address them using healthy healing skills.
2. To include sessions on conflict resolution training for congregation leaders on Presbytery Day or borough-wide training events.
 3. To have congregations participate in training following the “Healthy Congregations” model every two years.
 4. To covenant to act with civility (avoidance of unacceptable behavior, such as name-calling, talking over one another, engaging in “sidebar” conversations, using others in narrative, demonizing others and their work, using “them” or “us” language, tone of voice/attitude, overuse and/abuse of Robert’s Rules).
 5. To affirm “The Guidelines for Presbyterians During Times of Disagreement” and include them in every Call Packet.
 6. To establish a “Covenant of Transparency”:
 - a. The Presbytery (staff), Committees, Councils, and Congregations demonstrate openness and shared ideas, “minority opinion” reports accepted as a valid perspective, attendance, respect of final vote with the process to contest, and to respect the process.
 - b. Presbytery Meetings (same as above) also: Proposals and Initiatives in writing in advance to be consistent for all groups. Patterns that are consistently used by any group to disregard this guideline, should not be allowed to submit the paper work.
 - c. Encourage first and second readings where possible and to make available the material as soon as possible.
 - Respect for prior first readings or discussions of final vote.
 - Commit to open discussion without Robert’s Rule for first readings of major proposals.
 - Use interest based bargaining from conflict transformation skills handout given on 3/12/11 session of mediation process.
 7. To create a greater sense of community in committees and at Presbytery, we recommend that training in meeting management and conflict resolution/transformation be required for Presbytery moderators and committee chairpersons.
 8. To acknowledge and address the fact that there are a number of areas involving ongoing conflict:
 - a. Greater education should be provided in advance, when possible, about issues that come to the floor of Presbytery or in some cases in committees.
 - In this regard, background reports on unfamiliar matters could be included in the call packet or in hand-outs distributed.
 - b. There should be published (e.g. on the Presbytery web site, etc.) the names and contact information of those individuals who have been trained in mediation so they can be a resource in healing conflicts.
 - c. Negative behaviors should be addressed responsibly when they occur and should not be left for sidebar.
 - d. Healing services should be offered annually at Presbytery Meetings, (refer to C.1.a).

9. To covenant not to use power in its forms of domination or obstruction or dependency but to empower through mobilization of resources – money, time, talents imagination, property, organization – to promote the well being of all in the PNYC.
10. To provide assistance to Commissioners regarding protocol for meetings on PNYC web site.

F. In order to address the issue of **Communication and Decision-Making**, we agree:

1. To facilitate twenty-first century communication by bringing the Presbytery technologically up to speed. Given the fact that this will have major financial implications, the following items will be referred to the General Council for inclusion in the Strategic Plan.
 - a. To develop an Information Technology Technical Assistance (ITTA) help-line and network for all churches and commissioners of the Presbytery.
 - b. To provide adequate power supply and Wi-Fi at all Presbytery meetings.
 - c. To take up a special offering to fund technology in our churches.
 - d. To encourage all churches of the Presbytery without websites to make use of the free websites offered by the American Bible Society.
 - e. To assign an e-mail address to every Presbyter.
 - f. To provide training in computer basics at leadership days.
 - g. To develop an intranet site with access to Presbytery commissioners and to Presbytery only.
 - h. To update Church Information website to reflect current changes in officers, etc. and for committee meetings.
2. To strengthen the communication of committee work – to be implemented by the General Council.
 - a. To create a template for reporting to the Presbytery for all committee work to include motion, action follow-up and timelines.
 - b. To create job descriptions and mission statements for committee work and structure that is accessible to all people.
 - c. To post policies, describe work, promote events of each committee on the website.
 - d. To update committee members and contacts on website.
 - e. To develop and implement leadership training for all committee moderators to be done at Presbytery leadership day and members of committees to be done by the committees themselves.
3. To enhance the physical face of the Presbytery – to be implemented by the Staff.
 - a. To create a Presbytery of New York City month (suggested month: September) in each congregation.
 - b. To provide a person outside of the congregation to give a minute for mission.
 - c. To provide a bulletin insert with recap of the highlights after each Presbytery meeting that would go into the bulletins of each congregation in the Presbytery.
4. To reach into the margins – to refer the following items to the General Council for inclusion in the Strategic Plan, given the fact that they will have major financial implications.
 - a. To include youth voice in participation.

- b. To develop resources for non-English-speaking congregations to interpret and participate in Presbytery.
 - c. To provide volunteer translators for different languages, including sign. Can be provided through headsets and computers.
 - d. To assure that churches without pastors are connected to the Presbytery with special in-reach to them.
 - e. To assure that Presbytery is accessible to those who are physically challenged, including visual impairment.
 - f. To require that no Presbytery meeting should take place in an inaccessible building.
5. To be a friend to colleagues in ministry: establish a service of reaffirmation of ordination vows yearly during the January meeting of Presbytery/Epiphany with sacramental overtones – to be implemented by the Docket and Worship Committee.

G. In order to address the issue of **Structures and Leadership**, we agree:

1. To request that the SRO in consultation with the General Council lead the Presbytery in a discussion to redefine the current responsibility and powers of the General Council.
2. To affirm the following recommendations for the future work of all the committees and councils of the Presbytery of New York City:
 - a. That each committee conduct a self-review by May of 2012.
 - This self-review will be determined by the members, but should include possible consolidation with another committee.
 - We recommend that the number of people who attend the meetings and do the work of the committee be noted and that this figure determine the number of seats on that committee in the future.
 - An at-large member of the General Council should work as a mentor/resource to each committee as they conduct their review.
 - b. That the SRO develop any standing rules changes for PNYC approval by December, 2012.
 - c. That the PNYC moderator and committee chairs be encouraged to seek out coaches/mentors for the continuing development of their leadership skills by June, 2011.
 - Some Biblical models for mentoring include Moses and Jethro, David and Nathan, Ruth and Naomi, and the Ethiopian eunuch and Philip.
3. Additionally, we agree to propose the following recommendations for specific committees and councils:
 - a. That the Committee on Representation develop its own mission statement and strategic plan by December, 2011, taking into consideration possible NFOG implications and that it report to General Council.
 - b. That the Committee on Ministry and Nurture create additional training opportunities and resources for elders and deacons.
 - c. That the General Council oversee the implementation of all outcomes of the mediation process.
 - d. That the General Council revisit the Strategic Plan for this moment in time and that any revisions be adopted by consensus rather than by simple majority. This should be accomplished by May, 2012.

- e. That General Council consider the adoption of Presbytery-wide compensation guidelines to promote greater equity. This should be accomplished by December, 2012.
 - f. That the Personnel Committee review and revise job descriptions as necessary by December, 2012.
4. Additionally, we agree to propose the following recommendations for the PNYC as a body:
- a. That everyone in PNYC participate in being, seeking, and welcoming volunteers to assist with and cover former staff support functions.
 - b. That PNYC celebrate and show appreciation for volunteers and committee members by the May Presbytery meeting each year.

H. In order to address the issue of **Discipleship and Stewardship** we agree:

1. That the General Council will clarify the definition of stewardship to include time, talent, and treasure.
2. That the PNYC, in conjunction with the requested Mission Statement questionnaire (see A.2.a above) will send out a stewardship mailing and pledge card to all congregations each year in November, asking congregations to pledge to the Presbytery in three ways: Per Capita, Mission Programs of the Presbytery, and Extra Commitment Opportunities. The mailing should include an attractive “narrative budget” illustrating what the money is to be used for, and a list of Extra Commitment Opportunities to consider.
 - **Responsibility:** The Committee on Mission, Finance and Corporate Responsibility would be responsible for coordinating advance communication from the various committees and councils of the PNYC to generate the pledge card, narrative budget, extra commitment opportunities list and other materials for the mailing. **Time frame:** starting in November, 2011 for the 2012 budget.
 - To create a Circle of Treasurers and Mission Interpreters for the purpose of disseminating information on Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly mission activities, as well as congregational affairs.
 - The pledge card might look something like this:

Presbytery of New York City Pledge Card	logo
Name of Church _____	
In gratitude to God and as an expression of our commitment to the ministry of the Presbytery of New York City, we pledge our financial support for 2012 as indicated below:	
\$ _____ Per Capita (\$XX/member)	
\$ _____ Mission Programs of the Presbytery	
\$ _____ Extra Commitment Opportunities-Project # ____	
\$ _____ Total pledged for 2012	
Our pledge to the Presbytery of New York City = ____% of our church’s anticipated annual income.	
_____	_____
Clerk of Session Signature	Date

3. That the PNYC accept responsibility for implementing a course of action based on a policy of what constitutes a viable church, by doing the following:
 - a. Publicize broadly throughout the Presbytery the criteria used by CM&N to help determine the viability of congregations.
 - **Responsibility:** CM&N. **Time frame:** September, 2011.
 - b. Convene a short-term working group composed of representatives of smaller churches burdened with expensive buildings or undergoing financial difficulties who are therefore concerned about their own viability, and larger thriving churches with resources and an interest in developing new mission opportunities. The working group would be charged with imagining, generating and/or brokering new mission opportunities, drawing on the analysis of the February, 2011 report of the Strategic Property Assessment Committee, and any other resources it deems relevant.
 - **Responsibility:** CM&N. **Time frame:** Working Group to meet May-October, 2011.
 - c. Based on the report of the working group, CM&N and CWSW would draft recommendations to present to the Presbytery at the November, 2011, stated meeting, that highlight new ministry opportunities, which might include, but should not be limited to:
 - New church development (home-based churches, emerging church models, a “green” congregation, new immigrant congregations)
 - Youth ministry (e.g. school or community-based)
 - Affordable housing for the elderly
 - Prison re-entry (halfway houses)
 - Ministry with the homebound or the homeless
 - Peace & Justice ministries (battered women’s shelter, ministry with gang members, community center, early childhood education, etc.)
 - d. Develop a team of grant-writing coaches to assist congregations in seeking outside funding for their ministries.
 - **Responsibility:** The Committee on Mission, Finance and Corporate Responsibility or CM&N. **Time frame:** group of coaches is formed by September, 2011
 - e. Hold “budget discussions” prior to and separate from a stated meeting of the Presbytery for the purpose of hearing the rationale for budget requests from various committees and entities.
 - **Responsibility:** The Committee on Mission, Finance and Corporate Responsibility. **Time frame:** September or October, starting in 2011.