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Presbytery of New York City – Mediation Process

Problem-Solving Phase

Agreements from the Session on May 21, 2011

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 next step is for the Presbytery to take official action on the agreements and to develop a plan and timeline for incrementally implementing them.

Agreements Affirmed on May 21, 2011

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.