

RECOMMENDATION TO SESSION
FROM THE NEW BEGINNINGS LEADERSHIP TEAM
Adopted May 12, 2015

INTRODUCTION

The New Beginnings process of discernment has reached a stage which permits the Leadership Team to submit a report of the community's needs together with a recommendation to the Session for implementation of the results of the discernment process in its strategic planning.

The New Beginnings process began with an assessment conducted by a team of outside reviewers who took an objective look at our congregation and community. Thereafter, we organized six small group meetings and involved more than 70 members of our congregation. The ensuing conversations helped us to see ourselves and our context for ministry with more clarity, especially in the area of being in relationship with our community. It also highlighted a need for a broader review of our community and its needs.

Next, Session authorized the New Beginnings team to facilitate further study and exploration of these issues through a study of the book, The Externally Focused Church, which was concluded last fall. The book focused on the relationships vital churches have with their communities, ultimately resulting in changed lives, both for the churches and the community. It made clear the difference between churches and other organizations, churches being those who bring good news WITH their good deeds.

Session then authorized small groups to go into the community to speak with community leaders in an attempt to discern the needs of our community and opportunities to work with our neighbors. In that regard, interviews were conducted with the Allegany County Health Department, the Human Resources Development Commission, the Department of Social Services, the Kensington and the Union Rescue Mission. Attached hereto are the reports of the New Beginnings interviews.

COMMUNITY NEEDS

Community organizations, both secular and faith based, uniformly point to poverty as the central issue facing our community. From poverty flows homelessness, substance abuse, abuse and neglect of children and the elderly, hunger, and a lack of a sense of self-worth. There are a number of community initiatives, in planning stages and/or underway, that are attempting to address these types of needs and are in need of volunteers. Many of them are detailed in the attached outreach interviews.

First Presbyterian Church is already involved locally in ministries such as the Summer Lunch Box Program. While it fulfills a vital need in our community, it isn't currently structured to allow for the development of relationships with those we serve, a necessary ingredient of our ministry if we are to continue to be a vital congregation.

RECOMMENDATION

Consistent with the Great Commission and First Presbyterian Church's long-standing commitment to mission work, it is the New Beginnings Leadership Team's recommendation that our congregation participate in building relationships with people in the community via partnerships with agencies that will allow us to help address community needs and change lives. We advocate participating in as many projects as our resources (both human and financial) allow, guided by the parameters detailed below. This effort would allow our congregation the opportunity to share their gifts with the community, as well as to participate in serving those without hope, the most powerful form of witnessing for the Lord and furthering the work of his kingdom.

While we recommend being open to numerous opportunities, (keeping in mind the "parking lot" of suggestions generated during the group meetings as additional ideas for service that can be considered) we believe that all proposals should be evaluated by the Mission Committee using parameters for determining if the project(s) will help us work toward the goal of changing lives.

Additionally, we believe that a plan outlining each project's mission, goals, outcome measurement tools, resources needed and ability to determine success should be developed prior to undertaking any such project(s). This plan should also be used in the review process at the conclusion of the project to determine if the goal(s) were achieved. The proposed parameters and project planning tool are outlined below.

PARAMETERS:

Based on our learning from *The Externally Focused Church*, we recommend using the following parameters to evaluate proposed projects:

- Does the opportunity put us in relationship with those we seek to serve or alongside others who are serving?
- Is this ministry or agency willing to work with us as a faith-based organization?
- Do we have people who are ready, willing and able to develop this ministry?
- Will this opportunity result in changed lives? (both ours and theirs)
- Do we have the necessary funding?

PROJECT PLAN:

The overarching goal of each mission opportunity for our congregation is to touch the lives of those we seek to serve which will touch our lives.

- Define Mission
- Set Goals
- Define and agree on the meaning of terms
- Define Measurement Tools
 - How can we measure the impact we will have on the lives we seek to serve and on our congregation as we have served in each project?

- Develop Leaders
 - Young Volunteers
 - Mentor, teach, evaluate and encourage
 - Delegate
 - Direct, coach, delegate (give them tools, turn them into teachers, solicit feedback and gain new leaders)
 - Perform evaluation potentially based on reporting changed lives, growing relationship, in addition to reviewing financial and time investments of our congregation.

- Look at Results (the bottom line should be changed lives)

We recommend that the Mission Committee serve as a central source for aligning members with mission-based organizations in need of such services. We also recommend that Session adopt a goal of 100% participation by the congregation in some level of service to these organizations in the community. The specific ministry is left to the discretion and general interest of each congregation member. In this way, we believe that First Presbyterian Church will be of greater service to the community and by extension to the Lord.

New Beginnings Leadership Team:

Julie Courtney
Jeff Getty, chair
Pam Jan
Caroline Kelly, ex officio
Michael Levitas