

Practices: Tuning Hearts, Minds, and Lives to Discern, Discover, and Embody Christ's Mission Together

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God- what is good and acceptable and perfect." Romans 12: 2 NRSV

"For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ." I Corinthians 2:16

"We proclaim Christ admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ." Col 1:28 (NSRV)

"Whatever you do in word or deed do all in the name of the Lord, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

In order to live the vision that we have embraced, the presbytery will observe the following practices* as core to our life together.

1. DWELLING IN THE WORD

Rationale:

The early church was guided through consistent attention to the sacred Scriptures with the conviction that through them God spoke life and truth and directed the affairs of the church. "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." Psalm 119: 105. "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant giving light to the eyes." Psalm 19: 7,8 I Tim 3: 16, " The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Hebrew 4:12 "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Acts 2: 42

Description:

"Dwelling in the Word" suggests that we will not only listen to the word read and preached, but that we will take time to ponder, reflect and respond together to the direction of the Holy Spirit through Scripture. This requires that we take time to listen, think, ponder, prayer and share together what we are hearing and seeing in God's Word. This means moving from a "devotional" mind set of reading a few verses for inspiration or comfort, to intentionally listening for God to speak through God's word and expecting that God actually will speak to God's people. To "dwell" implies taking lots of time, absorbing and abiding in the Word of God as we also abide in God.

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Action:

- Through this Spiritual discipline of beginning all meetings with a time of reflecting together around a passage of Scripture, all committees, ministry teams, and Presbytery meetings will engage with God and each other.
- Dwelling the Word might also mean that presbyters are reflecting on a passage as a part of preparation for a meeting and come prepared to share in small groups how the Spirit is speaking.
- As a people centered in the Word we will regularly return to Scriptures for wisdom and guidance in all of our deliberations .
- After sermons are preached or any time God's Word is shared we will take time to respond and take action to the instruction we have received.

2. THREE FOCUS GROUPS AT PRESBYTERY (Gathering, Equip and Encourage, Sending Out)

Rationale:

God has equipped the church with a variety of gifts to accomplish God's mission. As we work together with the gift mix of the larger body within areas of our passion there will be maximum joy and energy for fulfilling the vision God has for our presbytery.

Description:

Three broad passion groups (Gather Together, Equip and Encourage and Go Out to Serve) will meet during each presbytery meeting and will provide a venue for folks to gather with others around their area of passion for dreaming, discussing, planning and implementing meaningful ministry that will enable us to live our vision. Passion groups are where the majority of the ministry of the presbytery will be conceived and developed.

Action:

- Continue to provide substantial time at each presbytery meeting for these groups to meet and network
- Identify at least a couple of point people for each area who will provide continuity and leadership for these teams.
- Sub groups may form within each of the three big areas to allow more specific interests and ministries to be cultivated.

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3. PRAYER is a core practice in all our gatherings and our life together between meetings.

Rationale:

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Acts 2: 42 "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Phil. 4: 6, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; everyone who seeks finds; and to those who knock, the door will be opened." Matthew 7 Prayers is the means that God has given us for accomplishing God's will on earth as it is in heaven. [need citation] "Nothing of eternal significance is ever accomplished apart from much prayer"

Description:

The possibilities for practicing prayer are endless, but some of the following ideas may be deepened or added to strengthen our life of prayer:

1. A phone prayer group that meets maybe twice a month to share burdens and joys across our Presbytery.
2. Development of an yearly prayer guide (similar to Yearbook for prayer and mission) with weekly prayer points for each of our churches, pastors and ministries in the presbytery. Churches would be encouraged to lift these up in worship each week.
3. Development of a presbytery prayer chain which could be activated when one part of the body is in need of specific intercessory Prayer. This would require a person or two to organize this and to be the point person for starting requests.
4. Provide preannounced venues before and during presbytery meetings for individuals who wish to spend time at presbytery Praying with others who have a heart for prayer.
5. Continue the practice of bathing particular congregations from the geographical area of the meeting in prayer as a part of the presbytery worship service.
6. A quarterly one page prayer newsletter that will report current needs and most importantly answered prayers or make this a regular page in the regular newsletter that we develop.
7. Encourage and facilitate the development of prayer partnerships or trios between individuals, churches, ministry groups.
8. As appropriate, when special needs or concerns arise, call for concerts of prayer or special prayer gatherings

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9. Fasting — individually and as a body. Continue to call the presbytery to periodic seasons of fasting around particular concerns
10. Teach fasting as a regular core spiritual discipline for individuals, churches and the presbytery together.

Action:

Identify one or two prayer point person(s) who will re-establish and gather a prayer ministry team whose passion is to pray for the people and mission of our presbytery. Look for prayer point persons These individuals will gather folks could meet more frequently than the announced general times for prayer and might work on the implementation of this practice. However, often the prayers aren't necessarily the ones with the administrative gifts to develop this area. Maybe we need two teams – a couple of folks who do the oversight stuff and then a team that prays.

4. WORSHIP is a central component of our gathering as a Presbytery.

Action:

- Identify and empower a worship team to pray and plan worship times for presbytery, providing for a wide variety of Worship experiences throughout the presbytery meeting. This team probably comes from the "Gather together" passion group.
- Make it a practice that in each presbytery we experience a variety of fresh forms of worship and ideas to take home to
- our congregations.

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5. CARING FOR AND CONNECTING WITH THE CHRIST IN ONE ANOTHER

Rationale:

"We belong to one another" Weep with those who weep, rejoice with those who rejoice. Body life stuff from I Cor 12 and Rom 12 again Acts 2 and 4

Description : Cultivate a variety of ways for folks to share spiritual growth points and struggles with each other.

Action:

- Assign to task force of either Gather Together or Equip and Encourage team
- Form small growth groups that meet both during presbytery and by phone between meetings
- Use mixers, games and ice breaker question to help people connect during gathering time in presbytery.
- Have a suggested sharing question or two, that goes beneath the surface for folks to discuss during meals and/or breaks
- Develop the prayer chain and other prayer strategies for sharing needs and concerns as described above
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6. ON GOING DISCIPLESHIP OF PASTORS AND LEADERS

Rationale:

Scriptures re "work out your salvation for God is at work in you" Grow in all ways into Christ who is the head of his body, the church consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds

Description: Main components

1. All pastors and lay leaders in a growth/accountability group.
2. Provide the opportunity for all pastors/leaders to be connected to a growth/accountability group, working toward this becoming a norm for all pastors and elders who serve on the presbytery level
3. Twice yearly presbytery events for equipping and encouraging
4. Every presbytery meeting has equipping/ encouraging segment
5. Encouraging other long term and continuing education events

Action:

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Form a sub group of the "Equip and Encourage" area to give attention and oversight to this. They will need to work in close communication with COM

7. DOING MISSION TOGETHER

Rational:

Need some scripture and couple of sentences - we meet God as we serve together etc.

Description:

Make doing mission a regular facet of our life together by...(maybe these points are really actions)

1. Offering folks the opportunity to share in some mission project the day before presbytery in the community where we are meeting.
2. Encourage churches to network around mission outreach both in and beyond the presbytery.
3. Encourage the forming networks for youth mission trips and making mission activity apart of the Fall and Summer camp program.
4. Listen to the voice of the Spirit to discern where God is working and how we can join together to strengthen particular Ministry throughout the presbytery and even in the world at large. Expect to be surprised by what God might want to do in and through us.

Action:

Form a sub group of the "Go out to Serve Group" to develop this concept

8. CORE VALUES

Action:

1. Develop and follow for our meetings and life together.
2. Form a task force to develop these.
3. Once they are adopted, lift up one as the center of worship or equipping time at each presbytery meeting.
4. Continually revisit them as the foundation of our life together.
5. Develop a covenant that ministers and elder commissioner sign each year

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[notes]

Other . . . I don't know – the sky is the limit.

Maybe the one practice we haven't highlighted is events/venues for fun/fellowship and recreation.

*The term "practices" refers to ancient disciplines and observances of the church gathered since its beginning as described in Acts 2: , I Corinthians 12 and 14. These practices continued to guide and sustain the church throughout history. In modern times as the church at large has taken many of its cues from the cooperate and institutional world, these practices have often been neglected and sidelined to the peril of the church. As we now attempt to regain our moorings and move with God's Spirit into these new and uncertain times it seems that our presbytery and our guiding vision will be well served as we learn to cultivate and practice these ancient disciplines in fresh ways in our contemporary culture.