

Vision and Strategy

From the Vision And Strategy Committee to the Presbytery Leadership Team
Requesting Approval as a Working Document as of 08 23 12

I. The Vision of the Presbytery of Yukon—The MESH acronym:

MESH is a term that reminds Alaskans

- of a fish net, which a fisherman uses to catch fish, and which reminds us that God sends us out to be fishers of people;
- of the connections that are made through God’s church. These connections, between people, and between ministries, remind us that together we are the body of Christ, and that when each member shares the gifts we have been given, there is an abundance of ideas, of warm fellowship, and of resources for doing God’s ministry;
- of the way different individuals, and different regions, and different cultures are called to work together to form a ministry that is greater and more intricate than any one strand alone.

In this vision statement MESH is also an acronym to remind us of the elements needed for vital ministry. We clarify those elements as follows:

- **The purpose of the Presbytery of Yukon is to facilitate Christ’s ministry through congregations and other local ministries within the presbytery.**
- **This requires the presbytery to assist each ministry in its own context.**
- **This also requires the presbytery to help provide the connections, both within the presbytery and beyond that provide the kind of sharing that inspires and feeds the ministry of the whole church.¹**

A. The Presbytery of Yukon seeks to help local ministries to embody the following qualities:

- a. **M**issional—Proclaiming the gospel on two levels:
 - i. Help individuals to know themselves as, and grow themselves as, Christ’s disciples and members of the family of God.
 - ii. Help individuals and congregations to know themselves and grow themselves as Christ’s ambassadors, engaged in the concerns of their communities.
 - iii. Help individuals and congregations become more aware of how God’s salvation is for all creation. Following guidance on The Great Ends of the Church the

church should exhibit whole-earth salvation in stance, in word and in deed

- b. **E**nvironments-aware—That is, Ministry that Fits the Time and Place
 - i. Builds-up local disciples, and the local congregations, in ways that fit the local culture and that build the Kingdom of God. For many years the Presbytery of Yukon has worked closely with St. Lawrence Island Yupik, Iñupiaq, Korean and Town-culture Alaskans. The cultural differences are significant and valuable. God may be calling us to work with a wider range of cultures as well.
 - ii. Builds-up the local communities in ways that build the Kingdom of God
 - iii. Builds-up the whole world through the ways we live locally.
 - iv. Builds-up personal, community and societal awareness on the need for caring for God’s beloved creation.
 - 1. the urgency of caring for God’s earth now
 - 2. the immense value of a healthy earth for all humanity, and the suffering already felt because of the earth’s deteriorating environmental health
- c. **S**ustainable—participating in the biblical mandate to develop sustainable thriving for ministry.

Our vision for sustainable thriving is based on the Presbyterian *Great Ends of the Church*, which read as follows:

The great ends of the Church are: (From *The Book of Order: F-1.0304*)
the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind;
the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God;
the maintenance of divine worship;
the preservation of the truth;
the promotion of social righteousness; and
the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.

Many of our congregations have further defined how they will organize in order to fully fill *The Great Ends of the Church* by using areas of focus provided by the Acts 16:5 Initiative.²

Our vision of sustainability includes both financial sustainability for ministry, and also environmental sustainability in Alaska and all the earth. Sustainability refocuses human beings on right relationships (righteousness). As such, the principles of sustainability are directly related to the biblical concepts of righteousness, including the principles of love, grace and jubilee, and the divine forgiveness of our moral debt to God.

- d. **H**ealthy—Signs of a healthy ministry include the following:

1. The ability to connect the different parts of the ministry to one another well (See 1 Cor. 12—one body, but many parts, all members of one body, and all in need of all the others), allowing the Holy Spirit to move through sharing ideas, inspiration and resources,
2. The ability to deal with the issues of ministry and covenant life, and without raising undue anxiety in the process.
3. The ability to strategize and take action in order to proactively pursue God’s mission for the church stated in a church’s vision statement.
4. The ability to care for the health of others, and not just the health of church institutions. Other areas of concern for health include the health of people, of communities, and of God’s creatures. Ministry that ignores these areas of health cannot be healthy.
 - a. We have experienced this in our own presbytery: One example is the contamination of sea mammals, and of the St. Lawrence Islanders who eat them, by the PCBs left by the U.S Navy on St. Lawrence Island in past decades.
 - b. We also know from first-hand experience that connecting with nature is necessary for a healthy personal spirituality and life.

If congregations are to exhibit the new life that characterizes the gospel, they must be constantly engaged in renewal and reform. Congregations should always be giving consideration to the meaning of grace and jubilee in our personal and congregational lives, and in our relationships with the wider human and natural communities. Specifically, Congregations must therefore be learning and responsive congregations that pay attention to the new thing that God is doing in their communities, and find the freedom to respond with creative joy.

B. The Presbytery of Yukon facilitates communication and connections beyond the local congregations.

1. Through facilitating regionally appropriate opportunities for partnership and support within the presbytery, and
2. Through facilitating opportunities for partnership to our ecumenical and denominational partners beyond the presbytery.

II. PbYukon's Current Strategy for Fulfilling this Vision

A. The Presbytery of Yukon seeks to help local ministries

The Presbytery recognizes that most of the congregations are in decline and therefore are in need of revitalization if they are to fulfill the MESH vision. The Presbytery has, so far, chosen two strategies for revitalizing the congregations of the presbytery.

Strategy 1: Indigenous Church Strategy for village ministry

This approach developed out of a partnership with the Tayal people of Taiwan. Since February 2012 the Aywaan Parish and the Ahmaogak-Akootchook Memorial Parish have been meeting monthly by conference call to follow through on recommendations identified through the partnership with the Tayal Presbytery. Those recommendations include the following values: An indigenous church is self-directed, self-propagating, and self-supporting.

Although a self-directed indigenous church (or parish) will determine for itself how it will pursue these values, we wish to take this opportunity to list the strategies that are currently in play, or are currently being seriously considered. We offer these both to celebrate the work that is currently under way, but also to allow others to offer corrections and additions, so that this document can be more useful.

The *indigenous church strategy* was initially chosen by the Aywaan Parish and the Ahmaogak-Akootchook Memorial Parish for work in their region. However, the presbytery endorsed this work, and its principles can be applied more broadly across the presbytery. That is, this strategy represents the way the insight and learning that occurs in one part of the presbytery can inform and enhance the ministry of the whole. We describe the *indigenous church strategy* here according to the way it is developing in the two parishes. However, the wider presbytery may decide to further develop this approach according to how it applies to the presbytery as a whole.

a. First Value—An Indigenous church is self-directed:

- Encourage the parishes in their efforts to meet regularly, so that they can begin taking charge of their own ministry strategies.
- Self-directed requires qualified indigenous leaders.

The presbytery must continue to encourage and empower indigenous leaders in the village churches. Currently there are two efforts at work on this.

First, the Presbytery of Yukon's Committee on Preparation for Ministry has been teaching CRE classes, and has helped raise-up a number of local leaders as CRE's. This effort continues, as local church leaders suggest candidates. Currently, work is underway to work with identified candidates from Barrow and Atkasuk. There are also prayerful conversations under way regarding the possibility that one or more of these candidates may be called to training toward ordination as Teaching Elder.

Second, the Presbytery of Yukon will continue to urge and encourage the *Giving Voice* group, an ecumenical group of indigenous leaders working design and implement an indigenously designed and operated training program for Christian leaders in villages.

Villages are consistent in asking for more training for ruling elders and deacons.

The two Parishes are exploring whether it would be economically feasible, and missionally effective, for a Teaching Elder to serve more than one congregation, with an emphasis in training, mentoring and partnering with CREs and other local leaders, including elders and deacons.

b. **Second Value—An Indigenous church is self-propagating:**

The Presbytery of Yukon wishes to encourage village leadership in their efforts to raise-up faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

Engaging in real issues in the village,

- i. Recently in Barrow this has meant addressing the issues of parenting and the issue of violence.
- ii. Recently in Gambell this has meant addressing the insensitivity toward Native culture that was shown by government and church leaders of the past, and that sometimes continues today.

The need for healing of wounds, and for improving cross-cultural effectiveness and sensitivity, continues across our presbytery, and across the nation. Our presbytery must increase its efforts and become a leader toward healing and change across our state.

Making efforts to reach people for Christ,

Making efforts to teach the faith

- i. Upward Challenge has been particularly valued across the presbytery for raising up youth as leaders.
- ii. Project Y.E.S. has been a particularly effective method for empowering youth in the arctic to spread the gospel within their villages, and the sharing that ministry with youth groups in neighboring communities.

c. **Third Value—An Indigenous church is self-supporting**

Encourage the people and the churches of the parishes to work together to support God's ministry.

The Joint Parish exploration of sharing a Teaching Elder between villages follows through on this effort. More work is needed in better understanding how the larger church can help congregations, and congregations help the larger church, without creating unhelpful dependencies or injustices.

For instance, Pittsburgh Presbytery is recruiting larger churches to pledge some financial support for CREs, so that small churches can encourage local leadership that has the time and energy for creative, vital ministry efforts. Would something like that be wise for our village ministries?

Strategy 2: Congregational Revitalization and Transformation is Essential

If congregations are to exhibit the new life that characterizes the gospel, they must be constantly engaged in renewal and reform. Specifically, congregations must be *learning and responsive* congregations that pay attention to the new thing that God is doing in their communities, and find the freedom to respond with creative joy.

There are a variety of ways in which congregations function in order to facilitate their ability to be *learning and responsive* congregations. The presbytery needs to encourage and support congregations in these efforts.

Many of our congregations have chosen to implement this strategy by participating in The Acts 16:5 Initiative designed by The Vital Churches Institute. Further, the presbytery has voted to support this approach. It is therefore appropriate to give a brief description of The Acts 16:5 Initiative here.

Acts 16:5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in numbers daily.

The Acts 16:5 Initiative encourage churches across the presbytery to embrace the transformation that God is bringing to the church by encouraging seeking a missional vision and strategy for the local church.

- a. The Acts 16:5 Initiative works for *contextual transformation*. That is, it encourages each congregation to begin by seeking God's vision for their congregation—a vision for their ministry at this time in their own place that affects their community. Churches exist to participate in God's mission in their own communities. Churches must be able to articulate that vision, and then train up the disciples to engage in that mission.

Across the country churches are reporting that without this sense of purpose, people no longer feel motivated to participate in church life and worship. Thus, without this kind of vision and intentional reshaping of ministry, churches tend to dissipate and die. However, God is faithful, and is waiting to open doors to new life in ministry.

- b. Once churches have clarified Gods' vision for their ministry in their community at this time, they must then organize their ministry to fulfill that vision. Vital, sustainable ministries need all of the following elements—all these elements must

be developed with the overarching vision in mind:

- i. Worship—*The Doxological Concern from Acts 16:5* To developing both personal and congregational habits of praise and worship that nurture our relationship with God.
- ii. Discipleship—*The Koinonial Concern from Acts 16:5*
Growing disciples into mature, missional individuals and people. This includes Christian fellowship, spiritual formation, and engagement in service to others.
- iii. Outreach—*The Missional Concern from Acts 16:5*
Engaging individuals and communities in the issues that matter to them.

By actively participating in the lives of others and of our communities, we point to the Good News, which is active in their lives, and which must be seen as active in the world. It is as people recognize the living Good News (*Gospel*) as active in their lives and communities that they are drawn to Christ and to Christ's ministry through the church.

- iv. Leadership—*From Acts 16:5*
God is consistent in calling people to leadership. It is the work of the church to discern and confirm that a person's call to leadership is from God. In addition, it is the work of the presbytery to provide for culturally appropriate training, mentoring and community for all ordained leadership.
 - v. Generosity—*From Acts 16:5*
The Presbytery of Yukon will be proactive in
 - Providing guidance to congregations in how to develop Christian generosity.
 - Communicating the ministry opportunities of the Presbytery well.
 - Structuring ministry and finances both to challenge one another in generosity and outreach, and to assure the financial sustainability of the ministry.
- c. Acts 16:5 coaches leadership to engage in *action learning*. Action learning recognizes that we are in a time of accelerated change, and what worked once may not (probably will not) work now. We make our plans based on what we assume will work best, of course. However, once the plans are put into action, we are now compelled more than ever to observe and learn from what works and what does not. That is, we must be willing to constantly adjust our strategies.

This is best done in an attitude of *play* rather than *control*. God is in charge and we are not. It is our role to come with joy and creativity to ask, "What

opportunities has God set before us, and what can we do with that?” This means we must have permission to do our best and fail, just as much as we have permission to do our best and succeed. God will teach us through what does not work, and will help us to learn and reshape what we are doing. We remember that God is the Potter, the Church and its work is the clay (see Jeremiah 18:1-6); our efforts must therefore be re-formed when they are not quite right.

Another way to think of this begins by recognizing that the ministry belongs to God, Who is our Heavenly Father; our Heavenly Mother. We are invited to approach God’s ministry with child-like joy and enthusiasm. In Acts 16:5 language, we become “*contagiously excited*” both about what God is doing, and about what our part can be in it all. This does not mean that we are not serious about God’s goals. It does mean that joyful and trusting creativity, similar to what we experience in games or sport, best facilitate the kind of work we must do today.

Again, this means that the presbytery must encourage its churches as they try new strategies. We must all have permission to minister boldly, even at risk of failure. The point is to continue feeding the congregations’ enthusiasm with faith, learning, and encouragement.

B. The Presbytery of Yukon facilitates communication beyond the local congregations

1. We are seeing more success and possibility through partnership between churches from different denominations:
 - a. PLUME in the Mat-Su Valley (Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, Episcopal)
 - i. Trapper Creek church seems to work as a multi-denominational effort.
 - ii. Explorations are under way re setting up a Native Ministry to serve the growing Native population in the valley.
 - b. We currently have three multi-denominational congregations
 - i. New Hope Methodist Presbyterian in North Pole
 - ii. Jewel Lake Parish (Methodist and Presbyterian) in Anchorage
 - iii. Delta Jct. Presbyterian and Faith Lutheran—Partnered in Delta Jct.
 - c. Many churches commonly engage in local multi-denominational partnerships:
 - i. At the blessing of whaling fleets and other community-wide happenings.
 - ii. Barrow shares its space and leadership with other churches for funerals.
 - iii. Some congregations hold cooperative programs (Sunday School, etc.) to nurture Christian discipleship.
 - d. There are several other possibilities for partnerships in villages
 - i. Gambell is partnering with the 7th Day Adventists for Christian Ed
 - ii. Conversations in Nome may lead to partnering with Lutherans or Methodists.

- iii. Some of us are wondering about partnering with the Assemblies of God in certain places (maybe Savoonga and Kaktovik?)
2. Two strategies are currently in use within the presbytery for communication and connection.
- a. Village churches are currently engaging in monthly conference calls to discuss mission strategy and program.
 - b. The South-central region congregational pastors are currently meeting monthly for pastoral support, using an approach adapted from the *Jesu Caritas* groups developed by the Roman Catholic church.

Reflections:

- a. This raises the question of whether each region should seek a strategy for communication and connection.
 - b. Besides regional connections, we wonder if there are other groups that might benefit from some kind of formal approach to connection and communication. For instance CREs have met together at stated meetings of presbytery. We wonder if the ministry would be benefit if they, or others we have not thought of, met more regularly—perhaps by electronic means.
3. Communication and Connection in Support of our Local Communities
- Our mission to our local communities sometimes calls on us to make connections with non-church agencies. This may be to work for economic and other justice issues, healing issues, or other efforts that may not be specifically “church” efforts, but which, nevertheless, is work we are called to do as ambassadors for Christ. Here we offer two examples members of our presbytery are currently exploring.
- a. The presbytery’s Self-Development of People Committee is working with the University of Alaska on a possible partnership. There is a need to develop more economic opportunities on St. Lawrence Island. The presbytery will work with UAF to develop and implement a business plan that will provide a means for St. Lawrence Island artists to sell their work.
 - b. Visions Service Adventures provides a “Peace Corps”-type opportunity for middle and high school youth. They establish a relationship with a community and provide labor for construction or other projects that the communities need done. The point is both to encourage youth, and to help make community projects possible that might not otherwise be possible.

Endnotes

- ¹ Historical note: Why are presbyteries now about facilitating local congregations and ministry?
1. We have come full circle, reflecting the Old School-New School battle of the early 19th century.
 2. Is mission a function of the denomination or of the presbytery?
 - a. Denominationalism won, and 12 Boards were formed (i.e. Board of National Missions).
 3. In the past 40 years we have moved closer and closer to a presbytery-centered
 - b. 1970s – Corporate Model: executives execute the national mission
 - c. 1980s – Synod Model: national church asks synods to define how to apply the national mission in their region
 - d. 2000s – congregations execute mission, and presbyteries support the mission of congregations—a cooperative effort to make local churches effective.
 - i. 2000s – New Form of Government: Presbytery discerns strategies for helping local missions.
 - ii. There is less requirements and more permission-giving in the new form of government to allow local congregations to do ministry in ways that fit their context.
 4. Therefore: the shift has happened (from a national-centered ministry to a congregation-centered ministry). The question: how does presbytery “fit” into that context so that presbytery truly adds to the ministry?

Society is becoming more knowledgeable about what they are against, but are having more trouble unifying around what they are for.

This is reflected in current church life. So allowing churches to organize their ministry in ways that fit their context is a part of the way we are dealing with this.

² The Acts 16:5 Initiative builds on the Presbyterian *Great Ends of the Church* by defining the following as the purpose and focus of a living church:

1. Worship—*The Doxological Concern from Acts 16:5 (concerned with our relationship with God, which flows out of private and corporate worship)*
2. Discipleship—*The Koinonial Concern from Acts 16:5 (concerned with our relationships within the church, and how individuals and congregations are nurtured for Christ’s mission)*
3. Outreach—*The Missional Concern from Acts 16:5 (concerned with our personal, and congregational relationships with our communities and the wider world)*
4. Leadership—From Acts 16:5 (concerned with how we each take responsibility personally, and in how we work together to raise up and nurture leaders for the church)¹
5. Generosity—From Acts 16:5 (concerned with the spiritual and practical implications that flow out of sharing the gifts God has given us.)