As I prepare for the visioning exercises, I am reminded of the story of the transfiguration. Peter, James, and John hike up a mountain with Jesus. Once there, they see a brilliant flash of light where Jesus is joined by Moses and Elijah.

Peter’s initial reaction, “I will build three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah,” (Mt 17:4 NRSV) takes on new meaning for me this time around. Moses and Elijah are from two very different points in Israel’s history, Jesus is the long-awaited messiah standing with them in the present. I find it striking that Peter’s first instinct is to make dwellings for each of these figures. Rather than take in the awesomeness of the present moment and trying to understand the significance of what’s happening right in front of him, his gut reaction is to build dwellings to preserve and protect the past. He doesn’t recognize the progression from one period of history to another, he doesn’t recognize that progression continuing into the present, and most importantly, he does not recognize his own role in continuing the progression into the future.

I see a remarkable parallel between that story and the situation we have in this presbytery today. The pod system that we have in place is incredibly visionary and ambitious and places us decades ahead of every other presbytery in the country. But, like Peter, many of us are still in the mindset of trying to preserve and protect the past. We cling to former structures, former roles, and expectations of a system that does not exist here anymore.

The purpose of these visioning exercises is to help us recognize the potential of the amazing structure that we have in place and to help us understand the role that each of us plays in the continuation of it.

Because our pod system is still pretty new, we have been going through a few ‘growing pains,’ which is to be expected. I invite you to share your ideas of what you think this presbytery needs to do in order to really get things rolling with our new structure. Once we are up and running a bit more smoothly, then ideally, everything will continue to move forward under its own momentum, creating what I would call a ‘self-sustaining presbytery.’ Since different people have different ideas of what the phrase ‘self-sustaining presbytery’ means, I believe that it is important for us to explore each of those ideas in order to gain as broad of a perspective as possible. We cannot make well-informed decisions about moving forward until we have the information necessary to make those decisions. For that reason, all ideas are welcome.

I’ve attached the presbytery’s current mission and vision statements, along with several worksheets to get us thinking about ways we can move forward in different areas. Please take the time to jot down a few ideas in each section so that our discussion time can be used for as much brainstorming and idea sharing as possible.

I’m really looking forward to hearing from each of you. May God greatly bless our discernment efforts.

-Marji

VISION STATEMENT:

A vibrant, informed, Presbyterian community which nourishes ministry and joins in Christ’s mission.

The mission of the Presbytery of the Northern Plains as we seek to be a faithful witness to the good news of Jesus Christ, is three-fold:

* To CARE for the congregations and members of Presbytery by providing guidance, encouragement and resources for their ministries;
* To CONNECT congregations and members of Presbytery with one another and with the church beyond our denominational geographical bounds;
* To CHALLENGE the congregations and members of Presbytery with a vision of faithfulness so that, with God’s help, our witness on the plains can grow.

***Presbytery - Churches***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **What does it look like for the presbytery to help/support churches?** | **What does it look like for churches to help/support the presbytery?** |
|  |  |

***Being Good Neighbors***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **What does it look like for churches to support each other?** | **What can the presbytery do to help churches support each other?** |
|  |  |

***Bigger Picture***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **How should the presbytery help the “Larger Church” connect with local congregations?** | **How should the presbytery help local congregations connect with the “Larger Church”?** |
|  |  |

***What does a “Self-Sustaining Presbytery” look like?***

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Things that need to happen:** | **In order to do [column 1], we need:** | **In order to do [column 2], someone needs to:** |
| *Nominating Committee needs a list of people willing to do specific tasks*  *(people need to be willing to serve)* | *-current list of people and skills* | *-develop, send out & compile surveys*  *-maintain skills database* |
| *Churches need to pay per capita*  *(people need to be excited about the PCUSA and willing to support the larger church)* | *-build denominational connections*  *-share stories of ‘Why I’m Presbyterian’* | *-track down PCUSA resources to share with the churches*  *-promote and gather stories from individuals to be shared with others through newsletter articles, etc.* |
| *Church teams need to be willing to train other church teams and share knowledge with each other* | *-Identify which churches have strong, well-functioning teams willing to travel and lead training events (or do them through Zoom)*  *-identify which churches need help in which areas* | *-coordinate information and put churches in contact with each other* |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

***What does a “Self-Sustaining Presbytery” look like?***

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Things that need to happen:** | **In order to do [column 1], we need:** | **In order to do [column 2], someone needs to:** |
|  |  |  |
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