



# A New Way Forward

*A Report of the Transitions Working Group  
The Synod of the Northeast PCUSA*

## The First Chapter

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The work of discovering and facilitating a *New Way Forward* for the Synod of the Northeast has been in process since the Synod Assembly of 2011. At that time the Assembly voted to:

- 1 Listen to the hopes and concerns of groups and individuals across the Synod
- 2 Review the previous initiatives taken since 2005
- 3 Incorporate the response of the 220th General Assembly to the report of the Mid Governing Council Commission
- 4 Pray, reflect, and discern together
- 5 Consider and recommend models for the future

*(Report of the Transition Working Group approved at the October 19-20, 2012 Synod Assembly)*

A Transitional Leader was hired and a new learning community was formed as the Transitions Working Group. This Transitions Working Group (TWG) was comprised of racially, ethnically and age diverse members. The TWG spent its first year or chapter of work deeply listening into the various groups that make up the Synod of the Northeast (SNE). Special care was taken to listen within groups that are not well represented among the current leadership of the SNE, including young leaders and those within our racial and ethnic communities. Care was taken to review previous research and initiatives to restructure the Synod.



The Synod Assembly of 2012 received the TWG report and took the following actions:

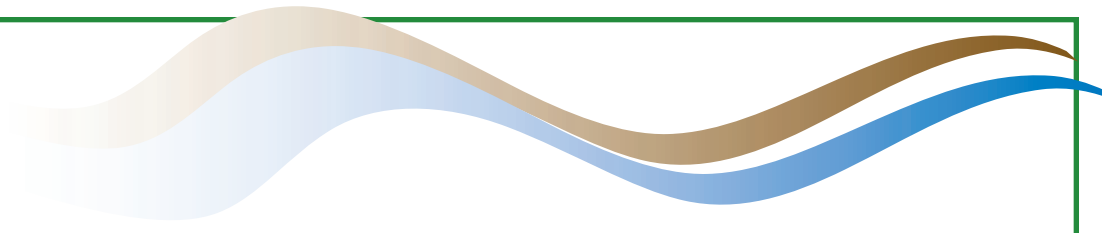
The Synod Assembly unanimously adopted the Transition Working Group's Proposal, affirmed the future direction for the Synod as recommended by the Transitions Working Group (TWG), and encouraged the TWG to:

- 1 Invite all of our member presbyteries into a year of intentional discernment about how to strengthen the recommendations, and to support those presbyteries in this effort;
- 2 Work intentionally with the racial ethnic caucuses to assure that their concerns are responded to in a way that honors their important witness even as we work to become something new;
- 3 Further develop the common identity and missional purpose; report its progress to Synod Council, all presbyteries, and all Presbytery Partnership Groups (PPGs) on a quarterly basis, and bring comprehensive recommendations and findings to the Synod of the Northeast no later than the Synod's 2013 Fall Assembly.

*(Summary of Synod Actions, Published January 9, 2013)*

The full report with Spanish and Korean language translations can be found on the Synod's website (<http://synodne.org/index.php/transitions-blog/transition-working-group-proposal/>).





The further development of this *New Way Forward* is based upon the Transitions Working Group Proposal approved by the 2012 Synod Assembly and is based upon the following foundational values:

- **The membership of our Synod deeply values the gifts of community** beyond the presbytery level and is yearning for new ways to live out that promise. As pressures on presbyteries and congregations continue to increase, synod level gatherings of various kinds offer valuable common ground for mutual nurture and support.
- **We need to find ways to provide greater and authentic access for our younger members**, especially our emerging leadership, to the decision making and resources of our synod.
- **We cherish the diversity of our membership.** As we move into discovering what life will be like as the church of the mid 21st century, we know we will do well to build upon the history of our racial and ethnic caucuses and to use this history as a way toward discovering how we may resource all congregations and presbyteries, to become diverse communities of gracious welcome in an ever more diverse region.
- **We need to shift our energy from governance and administration to mission.** As we structure our life together, we need to find ways to provide as much open access as possible while being good stewards of our resources. We need to model new ways of decision-making that promote this openness. This model will need to provide multiple access points as close to the grassroots as possible.
- **We yearn to discover a common identity and missional purpose.** There is significant opportunity to do amazing things for the Kingdom of God as we gather together in partnership. We need to discern our missional identity and purpose within the region and the world.

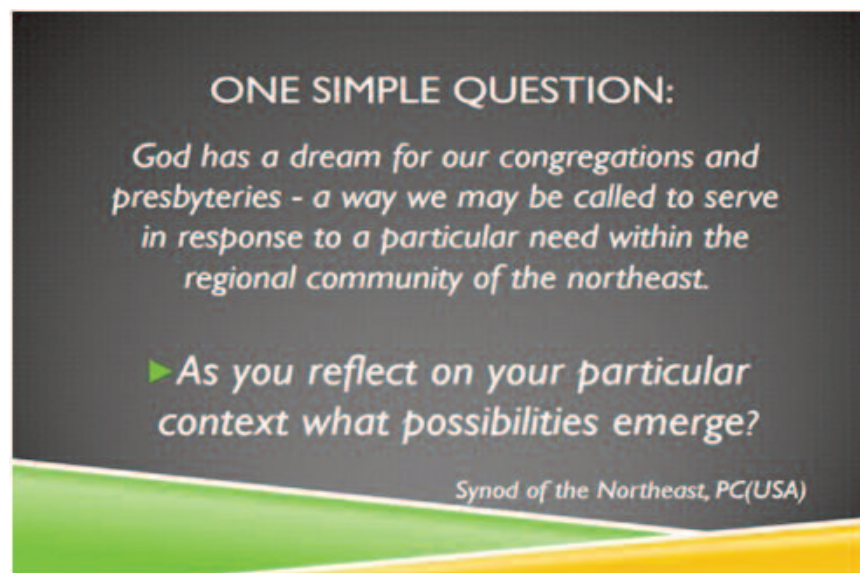




## The Second Chapter

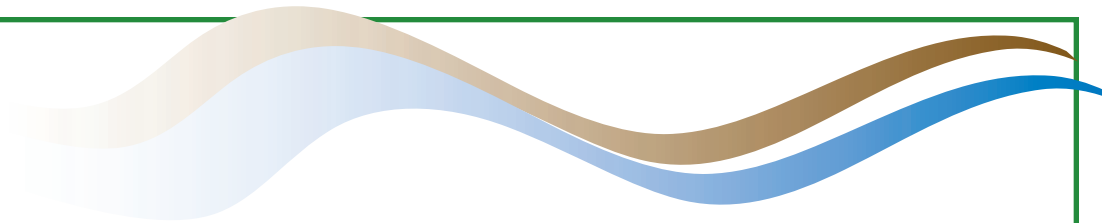
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A second round of listening sessions were designed and offered throughout our Synod. While it has been difficult to get invited into the busy schedules of presbyteries, we were able to listen to the voices of over half our presbyteries, covering all geographic areas. We were also able to hold special sessions for our Racial Ethnic Caucuses and Emerging Leaders. The process, called “One Simple Question,” included the opportunity for participants to reflect upon the following question:



The individual responses to this question have been posted on the TWG Blog found on the front page of the Synod website where individuals may comment or add additional thoughts.

The process of distilling these responses and discerning a common missional calling has been the work of the TWG as they engaged in a season of prayer and reflection at Stony Point Conference Center July 21-22, 2013.



At the same time the TWG added four task groups assigned to develop the detail of this *New Way Forward*. These task groups included:

1. *Governance*— basing its work upon the value of reduced governance
2. *Networks* — basing its work on creating a way for open access to Synod resources in ways that promote innovation and passionate commitment and partnerships across our presbyteries
3. *Staffing*— exploring how we might ensure effective ways to live into this *New Way Forward*
4. *Finance*— exploring how we might both streamline and make accessible the financial resources of the Synod in the most effective and responsible manner

Membership rosters for these task groups may be found as *Appendix A* to this report.

The process of the 2013 Synod Assembly’s deliberation on this *New Way Forward* will begin with this overview and its general recommendations. Following this, a new set of By-Laws has been drafted which will provide governance and structural detail. The proposed By-Laws will be presented for information and for a vote at the 2014 Assembly as provisional so that we might begin to live into this *New Way*. The TWG recommends that the Synod Council appoint a By-Laws Review Panel to periodically review these new By-Laws and make recommendations for improvement to the 2014 Synod Assembly. The second and final vote of this *New Way Forward* will be held at the Synod Assembly of 2014. The 2013 Synod Budget will offer opportunity to have trial runs of some parts of this *New Way Forward* while living faithfully within our current Synod By-Laws.





## A Brief Description of the New Way Forward

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### *The Synod of the Northeast —a working definition*

We understand our Synod as a regional community of PCUSA presbyteries and their congregations committed to serving as supportive mutual partners. It is the responsibility of this regional community to walk alongside its presbyteries, offering the kinds of resourcing presbyteries are unable to provide alone. The Synod exists to serve its presbyteries through resourcing, guidance and the ability to gather partners on a larger scale. Drawing upon its regional size and diversity, the Synod provides valuable resources and opportunities for its presbyteries. The Synod also provides creative and less encumbered space for innovation. With governance simplified and without the intense relational and governance demands faced by most presbyteries, the Synod can be a place where creativity might be allowed to flourish.

### *The Missional Purpose of the Synod of the Northeast*

This is the vision God has placed in our hearts, that together we will become witnesses to the ever-expanding community of Christ, following his way: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (*John 13:34-35*)

We are a regional community of presbyteries and congregations learning to respond to God’s call to become agents of divine justice, transforming the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in the Northeast into a community of hospitality and welcome for all. We recognize that we have not always lived into the gift of our great diversity. We have not always fully welcomed all those within the communities we serve, including people of different racial or ethnic identities, economic classes, genders, abilities, sexualities, immigration statuses, or those who are marginalized in other ways. Finding deep joy in our differences, we commit to equipping the saints for a courageous and steadfast witness of love and hope; learning, growing, worshiping and working together.



## Governance

One of the values discerned through the first chapter of our work included the reduction of human time and energy needed to support the governance of our synod. The goal of this part of our *New Way Forward* is to reduce by approximately 50% the human hours and energy required for the governance work of the Synod. This will be achieved primarily with the following changes:

- 1. Moving to a Synod Governance Assembly every two years.**
- 2. Holding a “Big Tent” type of event on the alternate years** to promote faithful practices, showcase innovative new ministries and mission, and networks to provide quality relationship building/sustaining time among the members of our presbyteries and congregations.
- 3. Restructuring membership on our Synod Council to include one representative from each presbytery.** Each presbytery will be invited to provide a slate of nominees from which the Synod Assembly will elect Synod Council members who reflect the diversity we value.
- 4. Other members of the Synod Council** will include Young Adult Advisory Delegates (YAAD) from 1/3 of our Presbyteries and one each from our Racial/Ethnic Caucuses and Presbyterian Women.
- 5. Membership on the Synod Council** will be open to active members of Synod presbyteries or congregations.
- 6. Regular meetings of the Synod Council** will convene quarterly on a Friday afternoon through Saturday lunch. These meetings will include time on Friday for the Council to work within its working groups and then to meet in plenary on Saturday morning.
- 7. The Council will consist of three working groups** of approximately 1/3 each. These include **Trustees, Networks Review** and **Synod Mission**. This report will include more detailed descriptions of each working group. The following are brief descriptions:



## Trustees

This will fulfill our legal obligation to have an official Board of Trustees. We would use this group to cover the traditional responsibilities of such a board with the inclusion of serving as the Synod's Finance and Budget Committee. We have had this change reviewed by legal counsel and it is found to comply with New York State Religious Law.

## Networks

In its first chapter of work, the TWG also discerned that the Synod Community desired a way to provide resources in a way that had broader access than our previous system of Presbyterian Partnership Groups (PPGs). This *New Way Forward* is based upon the value that our Synod is not called to provide programming, but resourcing, and that the gifts for this resourcing are best found within the giftedness of our members. This *New Way Forward* attempts to create resourcing that flows from the grassroots to the larger regional community where such resources are highly accessible and draws upon the passion and interest of our members.

A network is a group of individuals, churches, and/or presbyteries recognized by the Synod Council, committed to gathering and working together with a common purpose that embodies the overall mission of the Synod.

### **Purpose:**

*Networks in the Synod of the Northeast form and gather because:*

- they share a common purpose
- they have something to share with one another that will strengthen their common ministry
- they are stronger together than they are apart
- they are brought together by the Holy Spirit
- they together have experience, knowledge, and passion to offer the church at large.





*Networks in the Synod of the Northeast form and gather to:*

- provide for mutual support
- gain fresh perspectives for ministry
- maintain regular connection/communication between members
- resource others in the Synod and beyond.

**Structure:**

- The network will determine its own leadership, arising from within the group, and will set its own agenda.
- The network will appoint a liaison who will relate to the Synod Council through the Networks Working Group and assigned Synod Networker. This is a mutual relationship, facilitating communication, assessment, and regular reporting.
- The network will be established for no more than a two-year period, which may be renewed through re-application.
- In accordance with the Book of Order directives for diversity and in faithfulness to the Synod's common missional purpose, networks will be encouraged to seek diversity in their make-up.
- Network members are accountable to one another for the ministry and mission to which they have committed.

**Communication:**

- Each network will regularly communicate with the Synod community through their assigned Synod Networker so that individuals, congregations, and presbyteries can pray for, engage in the work of, and be inspired by the network.
- Network description, goals, and contact information will be provided by the network liaison to be posted on the Synod website and shared within the Synod community.



### **Funding:**

- Funding will be available through the Synod to support the mission and goals of the network, including gatherings and the cultivation of resources and faithful practices to be shared.
- Regular accounting of how the funds are being used and who is managing them will be shared with the Networks Working group through the network liaison.

### **Responsibility of Synod Council:**

- The Synod Council will encourage requests for networks and will assist in facilitating new networks and network activities through its appointed Networks Working Group.
- The Networks Working Group will report and make recommendations to the Synod Council, presenting pertinent information, including new network applications and the status/accomplishments of existing networks.
- A Synod Networker will be assigned to each network to support the building and maintaining of a healthy network.

### **Application:**

- To be considered as a network of the Synod of the Northeast, an application must be provided to the Synod Working Group.
- Applications may be revised as needs change and new ministry opportunities arise. (Please see *Appendix B*)



## Mission

There are areas of common interest and commitment throughout the Synod that would benefit from Synod-wide facilitation. The Mission Working Group is responsible for articulating our common mission and encouraging its various expressions.

*These areas include:*

- **Development and pursuit of our common missional purpose** as outlined previously with recommendations 1-3
- **Diversity**—This includes the support and facilitation of Racial/Ethnic Caucuses\*, an annual convocation and new initiatives related to facilitating ways to become more authentic multi-cultural, multi-racial and inclusive.
- **Emerging Leaders**—This includes support and facilitation of programs and initiatives that encourage and resource our younger leaders. Programs will include the Early Ministry Institute (EMI)\*, further developments of resources past the three-year program of EMI and the development of other gatherings and networking opportunities that support our emerging leaders.
- **Leadership**—This includes current programs such as our Collegium\* for Missional Leaders on Presbytery staffs, Transitional and Interim Ministry Training\*, and other initiatives aimed at resourcing and equipping leaders for ministry and mission.
- **Innovation**—Inspired by new models for ministry and mission we will discover creative opportunities for the Synod to partner with presbyteries to live into new ways of being the church. Areas of innovation may include new worshipping communities as well as presbytery and congregation-based mission and revitalization projects.
- **Campus and Higher Education Ministries**—This may include a renewed future partnership with Bloomfield College, as well as the development of new ministries utilizing the new, congregationally based campus ministry program, U Kirk developed by the PCUSA.
- **Mission at The Eastward (MATE)\*** —As one of our longstanding Synod originated and supported mission projects, MATE continues to provide innovative models and faithful practices.

*\* Indicates potential to function as a network.*



## Other Components of the New Way Forward

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### *Staffing*

The Transitions Working Group and its Staffing Task Force have recognized that this *New Way Forward* will require additional staff support from individuals with giftedness in relationship building and missional vision. We recommend three full-time (or the equivalent in part-time) positions. These would include a Head of Staff/Synod Leader, who would facilitate the Synod's overall vision for ministry and mission as outlined in the *New Way Forward*. A strong emphasis should be placed on this person developing a team ministry with the Synod Networkers and support staff, and the modeling of a servant leadership style where this person acts as the first among equals. As the Synod Leader, this person must work to maintain the focus of the Synod upon the values and specific plans developed in this *New Way Forward*. This position could be located in the Central/Western New York region and include overall supervision of support staff. This position would also include about halftime work with that region's presbyteries in facilitating the creation and support of networks. Two additional positions of Synod Networkers could be deployed in the New England/Long Island area and in the metro New York/New Jersey area. The Synod Networker positions would be funded from our mission budget while the Head of Staff/Synod Leader position would be funded through the Administrative budget. The Synod Networkers would be under the supervision of the Head of Staff/Synod Leader. We will continue with current staffing for the position of Stated Clerk and support staff.

### *Ecumenical Relationships*

As a Synod we have always highly valued our ecumenical relationships and partnerships. Our Synod boundaries include many councils of churches. The Synod Council would work with its head of staff and the leadership of the various presbyteries to appoint official ecumenical officers to these Councils. Ecumenical officers would serve as the Synod Council's Ecumenical Cabinet and would be convened by the Synod Leader. A budget would be provided for membership and additional support based upon membership requirements, need and tradition. In the future this group may include interfaith relationships as they develop.



## *Leadership Team*

The leadership team shall consist of those persons who hold elected office within the Synod's governance structure. These include: the Synod Moderator, Moderator-elect, the Past Moderator, the Treasurer, the Stated Clerk, and the Synod Leader (without vote).

## *Nominating Committee*

Following our commitment to reduced governance, the Leadership Team will serve as the Nominating Committee.

## *Personnel Committee*

This group would be responsible for support and supervision of staff.

## *Committee on Representation*

This committee would continue to serve as that which reviews appointments and nominations to ensure that we keep our commitments to be an inclusive community.

## *Permanent Judicial Commission (PJC)*

All things related to our current PJC and Office of the Stated Clerk would remain as they have been.



## Financial

Some simple shifts will provide the resources needed to live into this *New Way Forward*. Here are some of the shifts:

- **Presbyterian Partnership Groups would begin to phase out** by reducing their funding in 2013 by 60%. The remainder of these funds would be shifted to trial runs of Networks and Synod Mission, with 20% held in a contingency fund in case of unforeseen hardship incurred by loss of PPG funding. The remaining 40% will be shifted to fund new Networks. The total amount will remain at the 2013 level.
- **Higher Education funds would be reduced by 60%**, with an additional reserve fund held for Bloomfield College at the 2013 funding rate. The remaining 40% would be made available for trial runs of new U Kirk ministries with possibility of contingency funding in the event of unforeseen hardship due to loss of funding. ([www.ukirk.org](http://www.ukirk.org))
- **Funding for the new positions of Synod Networkers** would be drawn from Mission.

## Supporting Presbyteries

We are aware that our presbyteries were created in a previous era of growth and prosperity. Many presbyteries are half the size they had been at their creation. The result has included loss of staff leadership, drain on volunteer leadership as well as significant financial pressures. The Synod will need to facilitate and encourage opportunities for our presbyteries to explore new ways of working together and perhaps reconfiguring themselves. We recognize that creative conversations have already begun among some of our presbyteries. We encourage the Synod to provide funding for this work beginning in 2014. Funds should be made available through our Synod Mission Budget to resource this important work.





## Recommendations:

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The work of discovering and facilitating a *New Way Forward* for the Synod of the Northeast has been in process since the Synod Assembly of 2011. We therefore recommend:

- 1 To adopt the *New Way Forward* as a road map for our future synod, including changes related to the working definition of our Synod, our common missional purpose, governance, networks, mission, staffing and finances.
- 2 To appoint a Vision Implementation Team to develop a strategic plan for living into our new missional purpose.
- 3 To instruct the Vision Implementation Team to develop a two year program leading the Synod through an exploration of issues related to majority /white privilege.
- 4 To instruct the Synod Council to appoint a *New Way Forward* Review Committee to monitor the progress and make recommendations for improvement.
- 5 That the Synod Council appoint a standing committee on by-laws and standing rules with a report by September 1, 2014.
- 6 To adopt the proposed 2014 budget as the financial plan for the *New Way Forward*.
- 7 That in the transition year the Synod Council invite representatives of every presbytery not otherwise represented on it to attend as an advisor.

*Appendix A*

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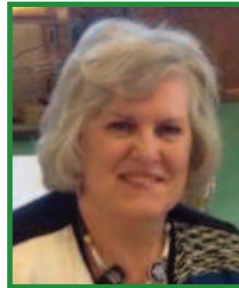
*2013 Transition Working Group*



*Rev. Ruth-Aimée  
Belonni-Rosario*



*Devin Berry*



*Virginia Champlin*



*Rev. Dr. David Choi*



*Rev. Dr. Harold  
Delhagen*



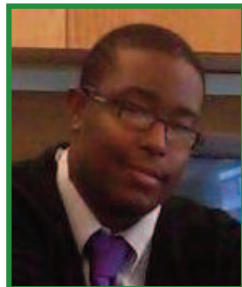
*Lori Hylton*



*Rev. Rhonda Kruse*



*Rev. Meagan Manas*



*Joshua Narcisse*



*Rev. Dr. Amaury  
Tañón-Santos*



*Rev. Dr. Carl Wilton*





*Appendix A (con't.)*

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*Governance Task Force*

Lori Hylton  
Warren McNeill  
Joshua Narcisse  
Mark Smith  
Amaury Tañón-Santos  
Carlos Wilton  
David Meerse  
Harold Delhagen

*Networks Task Force*

Ruth-Aimée Belonni-Rosario  
Devin Berry  
Virginia Champlin  
David Choi  
Cindy Kohlmann  
Meagan Manas  
Amaury Tañón-Santos  
Mieke Vandersall  
Harold Delhagen

*Staffing Task Force*

David Ashby  
Tom Conboy  
Brian Croak  
Tony De La Rosa  
Pauline Haynes  
Marianne Rhebergen  
Neil Rotach  
Harold Delhagen



*Appendix B*

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*Synod of the Northeast  
Network Application*

Proposed Network Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*(person designated by the organization to be the network liaison)*

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number (Home/Cell): \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Network Description: \_\_\_\_\_

Proposed Network Members and/or Congregations/Presbyteries Represented:

\_\_\_\_\_

Purpose: \_\_\_\_\_

Goals: \_\_\_\_\_

**Part A: Network Description**

What are members' commitments to one another?

How will the network embody the mission of the Synod?

What unique voice will be heard through this network that isn't currently heard?

Are there any resources you see your network creating that would be helpful to the larger church?

What resources and support from the Synod will be helpful in meeting these goals?

What contributions will be made by network members?

**Part B: Funding and Resources**

Will the network be applying for funding? How much?

How will the funding be used? (If possible, include a draft budget)

How will funds be managed?

What other resources will be needed?