



Visioning Process in furtherance of *A New Missional Community*

Prepared by **CounterStories Consulting, LLC**

Rev. Dr. David Anderson Hooker

Dr. Allen R. Hilton

Kirby E. Broadnax

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Opening

The Presbytery of Northeast New Jersey (PNENJ) has perceived that God is doing a new thing among them. In a rapidly-changing world, they have dared to imagine a new way of being Christian community together as leaders, churches, and people. In this ecclesial moment, three separate regulatory bodies are being transformed into one thriving new missional community, connected organically, and living generatively among their neighbors in the cities and towns of their region. This brilliant hope has the prospect of changing, not only the experience and ministry of the PNENJ, but also the future of other presbyteries and Christian bodies who see what God has done in northeast New Jersey.

This is no small change! And, as with the birth of the earliest Christian church on the first Pentecost, a whole lot of this powerful future remains undefined and aspirational. To move from where it is to where God is calling it to be, the presbytery has properly begun with a humble moment of discernment. Questions like “What?” and “When?” and “By whom?” need concrete answers, so the leaders of PNENJ wisely launched a Process Creation Team, who have done faithful work together imagining ways to step forward into the transformative engagement that lies ahead.

The Role of the CounterStories Consulting Team

The CounterStories Consulting (CSC) Team has been honored to facilitate the Process Creation Team’s steps through their early discernment. This document distills that team’s conversations and outlines a process by which PNENJ can move forward toward their preferred narrative of a shared future.

Going forward, the CSC team will support PNENJ leaders as they step forward into this preferred future. Having listened well to the Process Creation Team, CSC will now come alongside in ways that prepare the presbytery’s leaders to be “midwives” to this transformation. CSC’s support for this next phase of the process will take several shapes:

Visioning – “Without a vision, the people perish,” says the prophet. But when “their old see visions and their young dream dreams” the flourish of Pentecost breaks out. It will be crucial to identify and articulate the brilliant preferred future for this presbytery, and CSC will help leaders discern what is spoken in the many listening sessions and from that body of input craft a clear and aspirational vision large enough to reflect the energy of this new birth, yet clear enough to provide the outlines of an attainable reality.

Connecting – When a complex community takes up a complex task like the one the PNENJ has set for itself, establishing strong lines of communication and networks of collaboration is crucial. CSC will provide advice and support as PNENJ leaders work to identify existing networks and, when necessary, form new networks that will help them build and sustain this new community.

Identifying Assets. God has blessed PNENJ with resources and skills that already exist as they begin this work. These assets lie within the presbytery and in the associations and partnerships that the presbytery already enjoys. CSC will serve as a conversation partner with the members of the Vision Team and others to help identify these assets and begin to help design ways to activate them toward the realization of the vision.

Skill Building – Talking and listening well to one another – generative communication in all its various forms – will become a primary skill set in the new future. CSC will prepare resources and offer live (virtual) training to form those skills among leaders of the presbytery and, through them, in the congregations and people of the presbytery. The specific skills will be those needed to convene, facilitate, and report out on the listening sessions that comprise the bulk of this process.

The Process

The first organizational steps from lofty ideals to practical actions are often halting. In the chart below, CSC outlines specific and concrete action steps that will significantly advance toward the preferred future. The goal is to put leaders of the PNENJ in a position to listen well to their people and incorporate what they hear into the way they engage.

The larger flow of the process has four main aspects:

1. Building Skills for Listening
2. Listening and Information Gathering
3. Vision Creation
4. Storytelling

Though they represent an ordered movement forward, these are not distinct phases or chapters, as if one must be completed in order for the next to occur. Rather, the process will feature a fluid and adaptive movement toward the ultimate goal of building a preferred future for PNENJ that listens to and reaches to all populations within the presbytery.

Not only will the following process activities support this purpose, but the process will also build the capacity for PNENJ to replicate and conduct these activities on their own as they continue to reach out to their surrounding community.

ACTIVITY	LEADER	TIMING	NOTES
1. Produce Video	<p>PNENJ (develops and records it)</p> <p>Communications Team?</p> <p>Reference Asset Map Jam -- listed one film and one graphic design/videography student</p>	April	<p>Develop an educational video to be played as part of the introduction and context setting at the various listening sessions and focus groups</p> <p>This is a short 5-10 minute (max) introduction that describes the scope of the presbytery's work (in relationship to Sessions and Synods). This will help participants in listening sessions and other contexts who are unaware of the role to clarify the distinct roles of presbyteries.</p> <p>Questions: Should former Presbytery leaders be part of the video?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is in the video? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Not too many ppl ○ Not too exclusive • Key talking points <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Framing ○ Value ○ Invitational tone
2. Develop a Communication Strategy	<p>Visioning Team</p> <p>Communications Team?</p> <p>CSC will serve as thought partner to these groups</p>	ready for initial implementation by late April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will presbytery members be made aware of this ongoing process? • Who can members contact if they want to participate in the process? • What mix of communication methods will be needed in order to reach members across the presbytery and be inclusive of different language needs (i.e. translation of materials, closed captions on videos, audio and visual updates, materials for each church to share with their congregants, etc.)
3. Design Listening Sessions	<p>CSC</p> <p>Visioning Team</p>	April	<p>If there are several different types of listening sessions (affinity groups, sessions, linguistic, agency participants, any one outside the church?), there may need to be more than one design, but</p>

			<p>the questions should be linked and overlap.</p> <p>How large are these sessions? 10-15-20 people? An entire session? Is there a different model for large groups, medium size groups and small groups? Should we pilot a couple to work out the kinks? Should there be co-facilitators and a scribe for each session? (that requires many more people being prepared)</p> <p>Develop a form (paper or preferably electronic) that allows the facilitators to summarize and synthesize and record as effortlessly as possible. Possibly build a paper form that parallels a mentimeter® or some other program/app which will help with the thematic analysis later (For all paper surveys collected, someone within the presbytery will be identified to enter the data into the electronic collection forms)</p>
4. Train Facilitators for Listening Sessions	<p>CSC will design and conduct</p> <p>Visioning Team will build the team of listening session facilitators</p> <p>Facilitators</p> <p>Scribes</p>	Early May	<p>Training will cover listening, ensuring full participation, helping to clarify comments, preparing for difficult dialogue, staying focused, welcoming dissenting perspectives, taking notes.</p>
5. Conduct General Communications Skills Building Training	<p>CSC will design and conduct</p> <p>Visioning Team and others within PNENJ network -- (help spread word, invite, convene, etc.)</p>	June	<p>Communication and NVC skill building & practice</p> <p>These virtual sessions are for any interested members of the presbytery and are being offered in response to the request for skills building around communication.</p> <p>The general training will particularly serve the Facilitators, Conveners, and Network Weaver roles within this process. (These roles are described below)</p>

			More broadly, this training will help any presbytery member strengthen their ability to communicate beyond this process, and will support ongoing outreach beyond the presbytery into the community.
<p>6. Prepare to Populate and Conduct Listening Sessions</p> <p>Facilitate 15- 25 small groups conversations</p>	<p>Visioning Team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Identify sufficient numbers of Conveners ➤ Facilitators ➤ Scribes ➤ Network Weavers ➤ Grief Chaplains <p>Reference Asset Map Jam for the following & other suggestions:</p> <p>National Black Presbyterian Caucus - NJ chapter</p> <p>Number of universities suggested - Seminary students</p> <p>Immigrant pastors especially Arabic speaking, Korean, Portuguese and Thai</p> <p>Jerome Lane - staff community organizer</p>	<p>Late April, Mid May - end of June</p>	<p>How do we recruit different language groupings (Arabic, Korean, Spanish, Portuguese, Malagasy, Slovak, Taiwanese, others?) ?</p> <p>Find assistance to translate the process into multiple other languages.</p> <p>Which parts of missional documents can be synthesized/summarized to include as part of the framing/setup for the listening sessions?</p> <p>Although the three previous presbyteries had communication systems and practices, there is probably some need to help think through the methods of communication and invitation to get people that often don't participate (language, culture, age and other marginalizing factors. This might also be where we activate the community organizing groups that work in or out of the presbytery. We also need to help identify strategies to involve people who might regularly attend church services and other social activities but who don't otherwise involve themselves in the business of the church.</p>
<p>7. Create and distribute online</p>	<p>CSC</p> <p>Visioning Team</p> <p>Conveners</p>	<p>June</p>	<p><i>This is an optional activity</i> - Create online survey (with print available) based on the questions designed for the listening sessions to solicit broader feedback.</p>

surveys (optional)	Network Weavers		<p>Create another survey to accompany the focus groups (see item 12.) that will be designed to <i>refine</i> the analysis of the listening sessions.</p> <p>Inclusion of surveys may depend on the amount of additional data needed (are enough voices already represented? are those voice diverse and reflective of the broader presbytery? etc.).</p>
8. Conduct Wider Training in the Presbytery on Convening Listening Sessions (Optional)	CSC Facilitators Visioning Team	June - July	<p><i>This is an optional activity</i> -- This would be a much larger training on conducting listening sessions (a step above the general communications skills building training).</p> <p>Training would include any listening session facilitators who are available and interested in participating as trainers (to further build their capacity)</p> <p>Subject to time and resources remaining.</p>
9. Provide ongoing consultation and support to facilitators of public sessions	CSC	Through out the entire process	Primarily being available to hear how it is going and do troubleshooting for facilitators that will facilitate more than one session and also available in advance of the session if there are last minute questions.
10. Thematic analysis/ synthesis of results from listening sessions	CSC Scribes	Early - mid July	<p>Synthesize notes from the listening sessions and any survey data that may have been created.</p> <p>Themes will shape the draft vision statement as well as reveal any elements that point to a beginning of a mission statement -- i.e. <i>action</i> steps to enact the vision.</p>
11. Draft a vision statement and mission statement elements	CSC with participation from the Visioning Team	Mid - late July	Incorporating the input from listening sessions, work with leaders to craft a vision that represents the robust aspiration of the PNENJ.

12. Conduct a few (3-4) focus groups to refine listening sessions results	CSC will facilitate Visioning team will identify and convene participants	Late July - Early Aug.	After all of the listening sessions are completed and the materials have been synthesized have a few representative small groups to determine whether what we think was said is reflected in what we are reporting back Survey option
13. Presentation update at May Presbytery meeting	CSC Visioning Team	May	
14. Draft final report	CSC	Aug.	
15. Final report (ideally) before Sept 17 Presbytery meeting	CSC	Early Sept.	

Roles

Several key roles and functions will help move the visioning process forward and then extend its impact throughout the presbytery.

One of the most important roles will be that of the **Visioning Team (VT)**. Though this team has already been configured, CSC will ask the PNENJ co-leaders to finalize this group of members who will be the core contacts for CSC throughout the implementation phase of this visioning process. The Visioning Team will be the key process implementers -- this may look like individual VT members stepping into the specific roles that are listed below, or it may involve them in connecting other members across the presbytery to the process to fulfill various roles and ensure that process tasks get completed.

Another role listed in the above chart is **Communications Team** -- CSC encourages the Visioning Team to identify a core of 2-3 people who can manage the communication logistics throughout the process. Those people may be members of the Visioning Team, other members with communications, video production, and other necessary skills throughout the presbytery especially from larger congregations that have strong media ministries. If none of these resources actually exist or are not readily accessible within the bounds of the presbytery then possibly from the Synod or PC(USA) central office if there are such resources existing and readily accessible.

The following are specific roles that will provide key implementation functions for the bulk of the process:

- **Facilitator**
The facilitator of listening sessions or conversations will encourage frank and informative speech from people of all perspectives and viewpoints. By setting the tone of the room and inviting voices who might otherwise not speak, this person sets the table for a free flow of information and opinion. The facilitator may be a different person than the host and or the convenor. A good practice in these processes is to provide, where possible, co-facilitators to support and balance one another.
- **Scribe**
The visioning process will be greatly helped by those who record the conversation. In this function, it will be important for the scribe to capture what happens in the room in ways that go beyond verbal accuracy. Mood, emotion, and ethos will be those intangible qualities that provide extra depth to the analysis of the sessions
- **Convener**
The organizer of a listening session will craft invitations in a way that encourages participation from all corners of the presbytery and welcome in ways that build momentum in the room.
- **Network Weaver**
This role is crucial to the building the connective tissue that will help the work permeate the presbytery. This will involve connecting the conveners with the presbytery leadership, session leaders, active lay leaders, and key informers in and among various groups so the Conveners can do outreach for the listening sessions.
- **Grief Chaplain**
Part of listening will usually involve hearing hard accounts of hurt and trauma. A grief chaplain is a person on the ground in a session who notices when participants share hard things and comes alongside those people – sometimes in session, but always also after session. It will be crucial for GC's to be very obviously accessible.
- **Storyteller**
The whole process will be greatly helped by the presence of people who can paint the big picture through creative means of sharing the story of the visioning process once the process ends. One(s) who will listen for the answer to a question like, "what is the story of PNENJ?" and can create some kind of story-based archive to document the emerging vision.

Guiding Values

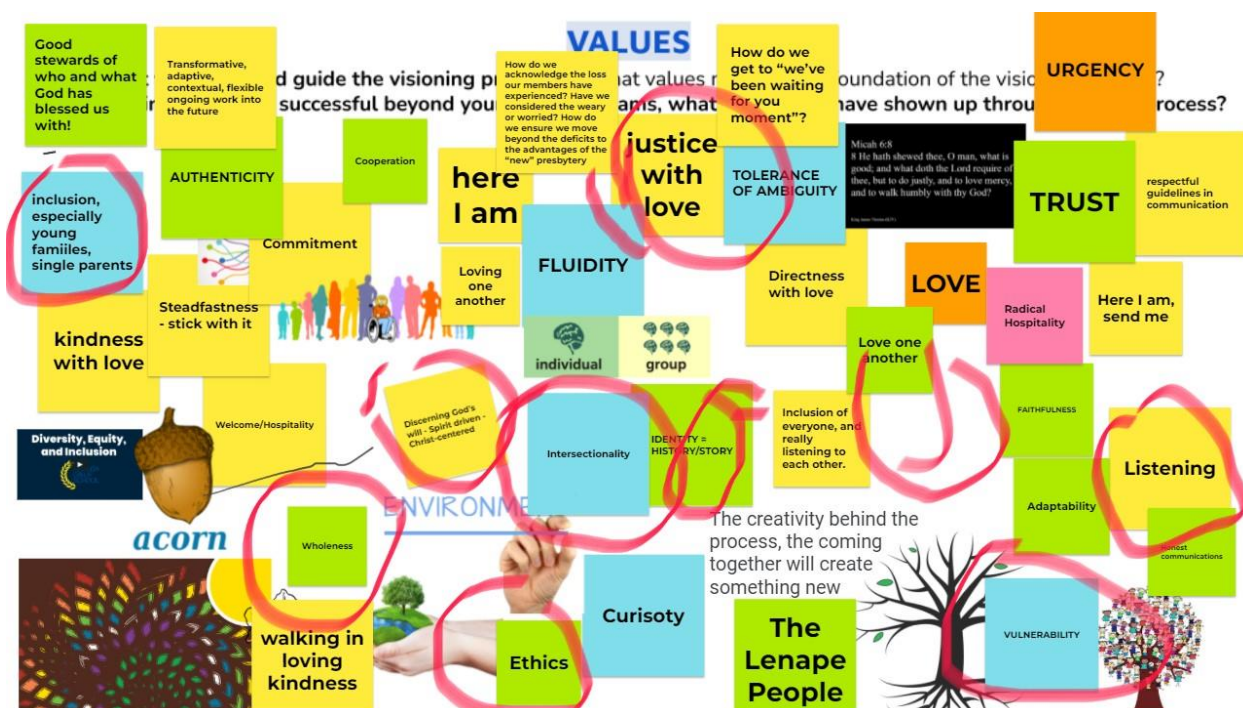
Values are crucial to the character of a community. How the presbytery does things will be as important as what they do. In fact, it would be possible for the PNENJ to complete all of the activities described in this process and not succeed at living into their preferred future, if the manner of relationships and its community culture are not central guiding pillars of the work.

In the earliest stages of the work of the Project Creation team, members expressed to one another what value most represents them at their best. Below is a graphic representation of

these personal values that was visited in each session and served as a collective aspiration for their time together.



In addition to these personal values that helped Process Creation Team members know one another, the team identified values that they hope will guide the presbytery-wide process and the life together of the presbytery going forward. Below is a Jamboard reflective of those values:



A synthesis of the above chart by the CSC team reveals the following as guiding values for this new visioning process:

- **Adaptability** -- fluid, contextual, flexible with the future

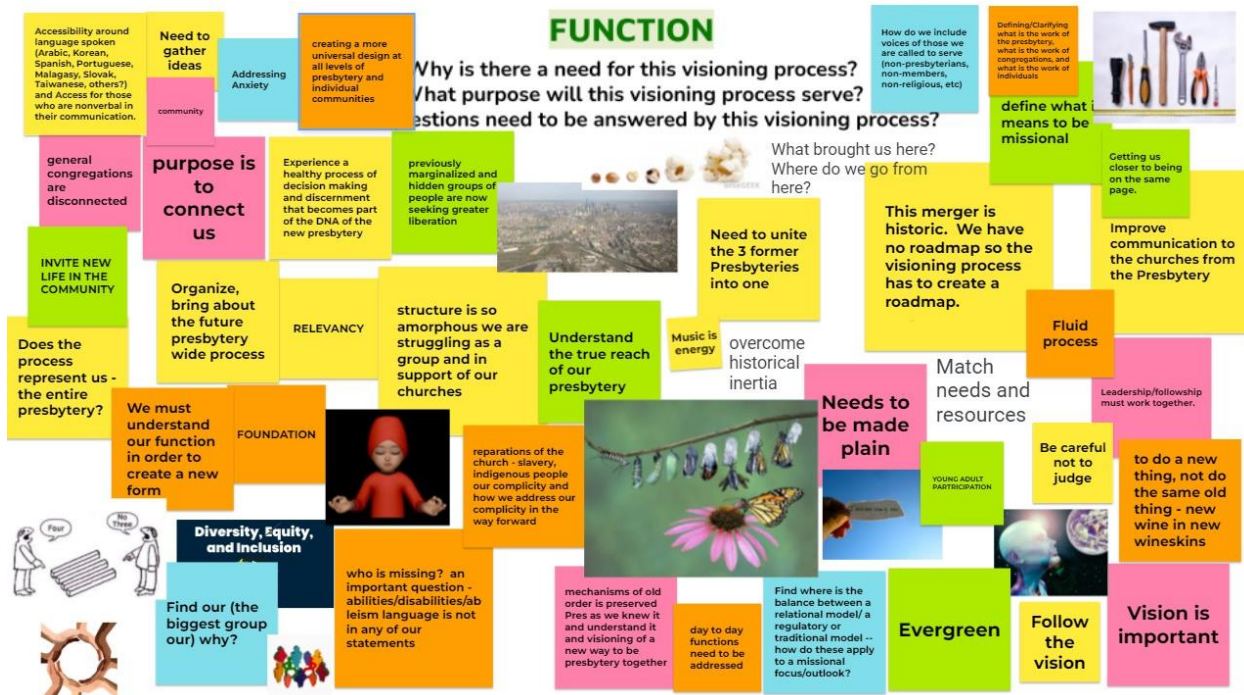
- **Commitment** -- steadfast; sense of urgency
- **Faithfulness** -- Spirit-driven, discerning, good stewardship
- **Curiosity** -- creativity, tolerate ambiguity
- **Growth**
- **“Here I am, send me”** -- cooperation, willing engagement
- **Inclusion** -- of people who have often and/or historically been excluded.
- **Love of one another** + -- love *plus* kindness, directness, and justice.
- **Radical hospitality** -- creating an environment of welcome that acknowledges varied experiences
- **Vulnerability in listening and communication** – which includes empathic listening to diverse voices, including voices of dissent
- **Wholeness** -- considerate of the complexity of identities, histories, and experiences; authentic.

Unsurprisingly, the personal values identified by the Process Creation Team share significant overlap with the values that they determined to be essential to the coming phase of the visioning process within the presbytery. Though these values were articulated as ones the Team hopes will be present during the visioning, it is worth thinking about sharing these values with members of the presbytery as possible guiding values beyond this particular process. At every stage and beyond, the expressed values of the PNENJ community leaders (and, in time, the people of the presbytery) will shape the character of the culture the PNENJ is becoming.

Function of the process

When the Process Creation Team was invited to think about the *function* of this visioning process, they responded to the need for and purpose of this visioning process. From a brief analysis of their jamboard responses (pictured below), we heard them name that this process should:

- **Connect** - including unity of the three presbyteries, among general congregations, and with the broader community.
- **Generate newness** - take new approaches to who is included, imagine new structures, overcome historical inertia.
- **Support the presbytery in getting clear on its role and how to best offer support** -- including discerning the differences in the work of the presbytery, congregations, and individuals.
- **Improve communication** - build skills and structures for better communication within the presbytery.



Feel within the process

In their imagining of the future visioning process, CounterStories asked the Process Creation Team to reflect on how they hope members of the presbytery will feel throughout the process and how those members might describe their experience at the end of the process. Their responses captured on the Jamboard below demonstrate a vision that is in alignment with the values they also outline.

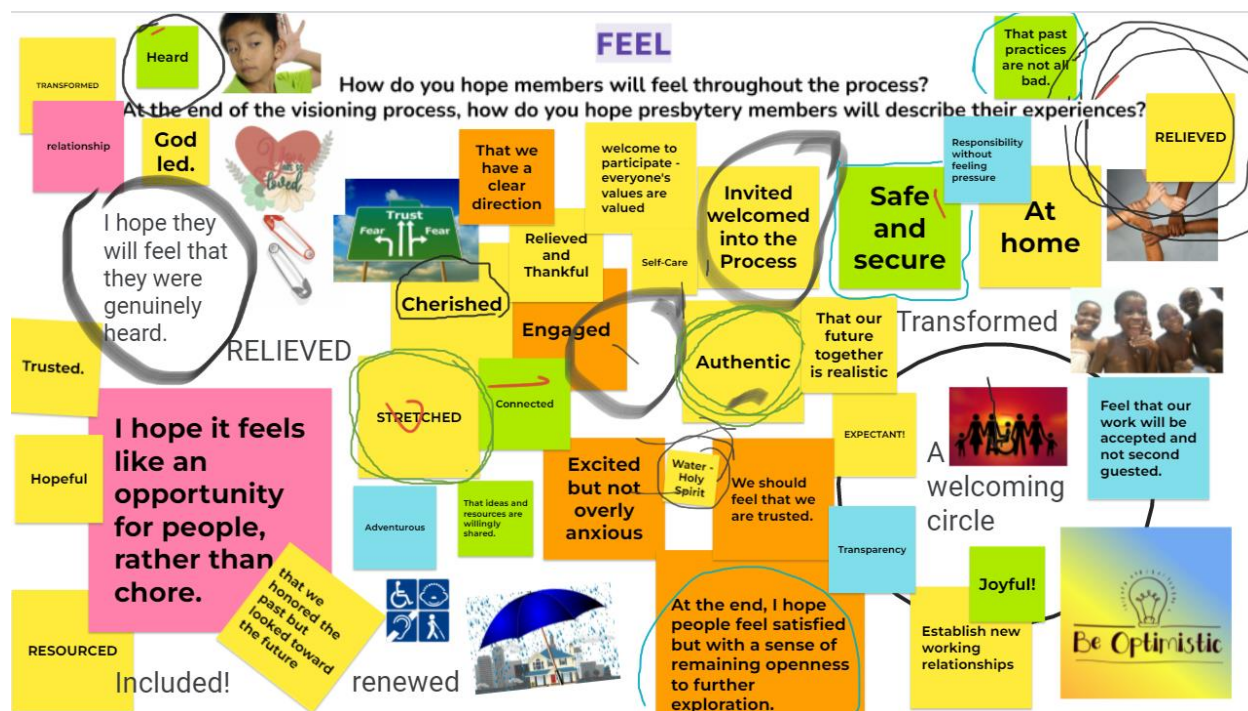
While the circled items in the jamboard represent additional agreement on those items, it is worth specifically highlighting themes that emerge based on the frequency with which some of the items were mentioned.

The most commonly articulated feeling that Process Creation Team members hope the process conveys is a sense of **welcome and invitation** -- they describe this as honoring language accessibility within the process, and creating a process that feels like an opportunity that presbytery members want to step into, rather than feel obligated to.

In addition to this, the Team frequently notes that they hope presbytery members feel **trusted** -- that what they share will be accepted for what it is; that members will feel heard; that there will be a sense of feeling relieved at the end of the process; and that the presbytery will feel more connected through new relationships.

Though these items were mentioned twice and the above were mentioned three or more times, the Process Creation Team also envisions presbytery members feeling **God led, transformed, and hopeful** as a result of the process, and aspire for the process to honor the past as the presbytery moves into the future.

If PNENJ Visioning Team members decide to gather feedback on how it was for members of the presbytery to participate in this process, they may think about beginning with measuring whether or to what degree the participants experienced the feelings in this list.



Including Multiple Communities

Over the course of the four sessions, a common theme that emerged at each gathering was the importance of including groups who have previously been present but unengaged or not at all included. Not only was there a desire for this visioning process to be inclusive, but the Process Creation Team made it clear that they wanted that inclusion to be bold, meaningful for the communities participating, and ongoing. They grappled, asking questions of themselves like:

- “what are our intentions?” and
- how might we create structures to foster this far-reaching collaboration?

There was no interest in surface-level or token-type inclusivity. Rather, the group wanted the too often disengaged and excluded groups to feel like they could see themselves reflected within the outcomes of the process, and also within the life of the PNENJ community moving forward. The Team also considered the need for those engagement spaces to feel invitational, welcoming, and safe enough that people would be willing to participate to whatever degree they feel interested.

Once again, the Process Creation Team captured their ideas within a Jamboard (excerpt from the 3-panel jamboard is below). An analysis of this document along with notes taken from the conversation within the sessions shows that there are several specific groups the Team hopes

this visioning process reaches. These groups were labeled by the CSC team using language mentioned by the Process Creation Team as much as possible. The group names are followed by details that are found in the jamboard.

- *Differently Abled / Disabled community* -- includes those with autism, who are sickly, and who are neurodivergent.
- *Families* -- specifically young families, those with unique family composition, young couples with children. Also included here are the lack of men found in the pews.
- *Former members & unchurched people* -- this includes people who left due to church hurt, those who felt it was becoming too liberal/concerned with social justice, those who have strayed, and those who are seekers but not yet fully engaged.
- *LGBTQ+ community* -- Trans people were specifically highlighted.
- *People in facilities* -- includes seniors in homes, people in group homes, rehab facilities, and incarcerated.
- *People of the Global Majority*¹ -- inclusive of Indigenous peoples, different racial/ethnic/language groups, and people who are immigrants.
- *Young people* -- includes college students, youth, young adults
- *Additional groups mentioned with less frequency:*
 - Those who are homeless/unsheltered
 - Veterans
 - People who are poor
 - Those with inconsistent work schedules

The team members recognized that the time and resource constraints of this phase of the process will not support broad community engagement beyond those currently connected to the various congregations and agencies, the hope was expressed that patterns of outreach and invitation would be established among those currently connect and that those patterns and practices can be replicated overtime to reach far beyond the current membership and participant rosters.

¹ People of the Global Majority (PGM) was first learned by CSC team member Kirby via the Avarna Group. A great definition found here in an essay by Rosemary Campbell-Stephens, MBE is: "a collective term that first and foremost speaks to and encourages those so-called to think of themselves as belonging to the global majority. It refers to people who are Black, Asian, Brown, dual-heritage, indigenous to the global south, and or have been racialised as 'ethnic minorities'. Globally, these groups currently represent approximately eighty per cent (80%) of the world's population making them the global majority now.."



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In addition to reflecting on the communities that the Process Creation Team believes it important to include, they also discussed the desire for the process to feel accessible in terms of language and communication. They wondered about what ways this work might be communicated (both content-wise and logistically) so that there are multiple ways for presbytery members to engage with the process and stay abreast of the evolution of the process. Indeed, one of the ways the Process Creation Team wanted presbytery members to feel as a result of engaging in this process was “properly communicated with.” They noted that as you travel further down the presbytery levels, people are less aware of what conversations are happening at the higher levels. They posed the question, are we not communicating well, or are people not listening?

There is awareness within the Process Creation Team that some people do not know what has been going on within the presbytery, and others are feeling impatient and asking questions about the amount of time that has already passed since the merge of the three prior presbyteries. One Team member noted that there should be a communication strategy, rather than a haphazard approach. Overall, the Process Creation Team wants to ensure that across the presbytery at all levels, members have access to information about this visioning process, that they’re able to access that information in a variety of formats and locations, and that the information gives them a clear sense of the work being done within the presbytery and how they can connect with the ongoing process. Some ideas for sharing this process generated by the Team included:

- Bulletin inserts
- Video updates and testimonial about the process
- Podcast

Costs -

Recognizing the fiscal constraints associated with the visioning process, CSC will not put forth an hourly billing estimate. Rather, it is proposed that this process be implemented for the **fixed-rate flat fee of Thirty Seven Thousand five Hundred Dollars exactly (\$37,500.00)**. Payments can be made in equal monthly installments (\$7,500) beginning in May 2022 through September.

Closing

The intention for CounterStories Consulting during this next phase of the process is to most effectively and efficiently utilize the fiscal resources and time available by serving in a consultation, accompaniment, and skill building role for the stated purpose of using the visioning process to further accelerate the process of PNENJ living into a newly articulated vision. By activating and utilizing the leadership and other existing resources within the PNENJ, the Presbytery itself will be left in a better place to continue to act without the need for continuing external support.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rev. Dr. David Anderson Hooker

Dr. Allen Hilton

Kirby Broadnax

For CounterStories Consulting, llc