



Interim Executive Director, Tony De La Rosa's presentation to the 222nd General Assembly (2016) on Sunday, June 19, 2016

Good afternoon!

The last time I had the privilege of addressing the General Assembly was back in 2012 in Pittsburgh, when as a ruling elder I was invited to preach at one of the weekday worship services. I remember the texts vividly. One of them was Jesus' healing of the paralytic from Mark 2. Drawing that text, I noted that just as roofs come down as they did in Mark's story of healing and transformation, so too are our institutional edifices undergoing change within the PC(USA). And they continue to change and be transformed to this day in ways that I want to describe for you this afternoon... Behold, says our God, I am making all things new.

It is my honor and pleasure today to share with you the fruits of our collaborative efforts to renew the church's mission, the 2017-18 Mission Work Plan for the Presbyterian Mission Agency.

What is the Mission Work Plan?

It is a strategic plan - our road map - that guides mission and ministry, sets priorities, and seeks to identify and meet the areas of greatest need across the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

The Mission Work Plan didn't just happen or received in one glorious moment of divine revelation.

It was developed with input from commissioners and advisory delegates (just like you) from the 2014 GA, as well as staff, church leaders, mid councils, and Presbyterian Mission Agency Board members.

Because we are in a period of transition, we intentionally designed this strategic plan as a two-year "bridge" plan that will take us through 2018, in lieu of the four-year plans the Presbyterian Mission Agency has historically developed.

The bridge plan came during the time in which the PC(USA) through the call of Moderator Heath Rada and the efforts of the Office of the General Assembly was listening and discerning our denomination's unique identity and relevance in the 21st century.

Input for the Mission Work Plan was gathered through listening sessions and surveys. Research helped us identify energy around certain ministry functions.

So you see, we did not start from scratch on this plan, but we rather, we sought to sharpen the focus of the previous Mission Work Plan.

For example, our Vision & Mission statements remain the same:

Vision:

Presbyterians joyfully engaging in God's mission for the transformation of the world.

Mission:

Inspire, equip and connect the PC(USA) in its many expressions to serve Christ in the world through new and existing communities of faith, hope, love and witness.

However, the Mission Work Plan does bear a distinct difference from previous version in that it begins with an expressly theological foundation rooted in the Six Great Ends of the Church.

- 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
- the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world

But we didn't stop there. We sought to clarify our role in meeting these Great Ends, a role that is both focused and limited.

"As the Presbyterian Mission Agency, we know that we are not solely responsible for the achievement of all these Great Ends. We understand that our role is to be faithful stewards of God's blessings by focusing only on what the Church needs from the national church today, using the unique resources of the Presbyterian Mission Agency."

To this end, while the previous plan contained six directional goals, our bridge plan now has three. Three directional goals that outlines all of the work we do as an agency.

Evangelism & Discipleship:

Grow, proclaim and live out our faith in Jesus Christ by working with our partners, here and around the world, to build communities that witness to the gospel of Christ's love for the rich diversity reflected in all humankind.

Servant Leader Formation:

Seek, develop and energize diverse leaders who are answering God's call to equip the Church to be a welcoming place of worship, mission and spiritual nurture for all of God's children, especially those who have been marginalized.

Justice & Reconciliation:

Galvanize the church to act on issues of racism, violence and poverty as a prophetic witness to Christ's transforming justice by speaking and living out God's truth and compassion as we call ourselves and the world to account for injustice and oppression.

That is "galvanize" not Calvinize.

The previous plan only required our programs to align their work with one directional goal. The new plan requires all of our agency's programs to be in alignment with all three goals.

This is one way in which we can sharpen the focus of the Presbyterian Mission Agency while being responsive to the church's greatest needs: doing what we uniquely can do best with efficiency and effectiveness.

Finally, we re-examined our core values as an agency. The former list of core values had served the organization since 2006. One of the first things I asked our staff to do following my arrival at agency late last year was to identify both their personal and organizational core values from an extensive list of possibilities.

The results of that exercise identified actual, rather than aspirational, core values for the organization.

Similar responses were combined, and these seven values were the most common responses.

Justice
Compassion
Accountability
Faith
Teamwork
Dedication
Service

The values are not listed in hierarchical order, in fact, "Faith" was the top value identified in this process. This should serve as a comfort to all of us, since we are a faith-based organization after all. For purposes of our visual display here, it is represented as the central value for the work of the Mission Agency.

The entire Mission Work Plan and the 2017-18 budgets which the Work Plan helped to shape will go to the Mission Coordination Committee #10 and ultimately to all of you for your consideration and final action.

The proposed budgets for 2017 and 2018 are set at approximately \$62.5 million dollars per year and represent an approximate 15% decrease from the 2016 budget

Change didn't just affect our goals: it now affects our entire way of doing financial planning. We began with the most conservative approach available, a zero-based budgeting approach that called for all our departments to consider "worst-case" funding scenarios. From there, we crafted sound, careful budgets that align to our Work Plan's directional goals while acknowledging our unique and limited role in fulfilling the Church's mission.

It is important to know that for the first time in recent memory, no unrestricted reserves are being used to balance the proposed budgets. We seek to live within our means, and that means restoring our reserves – putting mission dollars back into our "rainy day" fund, if you will – and we adhered to historic revenue trends and not fundraising goals to set budget targets. Using these conservative assumptions, we will present first to Committee #10 and then to the entire Assembly budgets that both balance and plan for the future.

We are at an exceptional time with unique opportunities.

Budgets are tight, needs are great, we want to reach out to new constituencies without making the current ones feel obsolete or excluded – sound familiar? Doesn't that sound like a challenge all of us are facing in our sessions and presbyteries?

On behalf of the PMA, I want ask you that as all of you serve in your committees and consider proposals and overtures affecting the work of the Mission Agency to remember the Mission Work Plan's vision and goals and consider using them as filters for any new programs or initiatives that may be directed to us to implement or fulfill.

Because no unrestricted reserves are being used to balance the budget, if something is added – something else must be cut back.

Just as many of you have done in your own sessions and mid councils when weighing financial concerns against missional priorities, we have made difficult decisions that required restructuring programs and positions at the national level.

Because Christ's mission extends beyond the Presbyterian Mission Agency and into the broader church, there are other agencies, councils and networks of the church that may choose to pick up the mantle and nurture those services no longer provided by the PMA.

We hope that you can be guided our work on both the Work Plan and budget in considering those ideas that call upon us to do still more.

BUT...

As faithful Presbyterians, we acknowledge that all the work of the PMA Board and staff in preparation for this Assembly may not be sufficient in God's plan for us. We recognize and hold dear our polity which asserts that this General Assembly is charged with "discerning and presenting with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, matters of truth and vision that may inspire, challenge, and educate both church and world." (G-3.0501c)

We readily defer to your perception of the Spirit's call to us as a Church, and Presbyterian Mission Agency stands ready to support and resource your prayerful determinations. Over the course of the next few days, in your committees, we will keep an eye on the dollars and financial implications of the many items for your consideration, and with your leave we hope to offer careful, cost-effective alternatives to otherwise meritorious proposals that seek to accomplish Christ's work in the world. In sum, we will seek to accomplish what you direct us to accomplish as you prayerfully determine what we should do to fulfill what the Holy Spirit advises.

I also ask you to consider personally supporting – with your own gifts and that of your home congregations and presbyteries -- any new initiative or program coming to Presbyterian Mission Agency.

The church is in a time of change. Few of us would recognize the church of our grandparents.

The Presbyterian Mission Agency cannot be all things to all people. We cannot do all that we feel individually called to do or that many constituents want us to do.

And our role is not to do it all, but rather to be in touch with the needs of the church as this Assembly determines them to be and to turn our attention to those identified needs.

We're no longer the 5-million member denomination we were at reunion. Yet, we're still providing programs and services for a church that is now a third of its former size.

Our situation is not unique. They are the same challenges your church, your presbytery, and your synod faces.

But contrary to what the "Church Lady" thinks, we aren't special.

But through the grace of God and the love of our lord Jesus Christ, we can do special things –

we can bring hope to the those in despair through our disaster response in Flint, Michigan where PDA is providing support, education and emergency supplies,

we can inspire the leaders of tomorrow through the Youth Triennium where over 5,000 youth and young adults will "GO" (that's this year's theme, in case you were wondering!) for a life-giving and life-changing experience,

we can equip the church to become truly intercultural by building multiracial, multilingual and multicultural communities of faith.

I'd like to share with you now a brief video that offers but one window into the kind of ministry that we do on behalf of Christ's church as the Presbyterian Mission Agency as we inspire, equip and connect the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in its many expressions to serve Christ in the world. "Behold," it is written in Revelation, "I am making all things new."

[Click to view video.](#)

You will be seeing and hearing many of these stories this week as the Presbyterian Mission Agency shares the mission and ministry it is doing on behalf of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. For your future use in sharing those stories, we have put them all on one web page for your easy access and viewing.

So if you will take out your smart phones and text PMA to 41411, you will receive the link to the web page.

Please share the stories of how lives are being transformed through the grace and love of God.

Thank you.