

Report and Recommendations from the Session Reorganization Task Force

Purpose and Membership

This Task Force was formed in the Fall of 2015 to consider Westminster's Administrative/Committee Structure in light of Westminster's *2020 Mission/Vision Statement* and to make recommendations for reform. Participating in the work of the Task Force were: Pam Adams, Betsy Badger, Cameron Fast, Rich Henderson, Steve Mosiman, Mark Oberhoffer, Norma Smith and Tom Stovall. Teaching Elder Hal Murry facilitated discussions.

Motivation for Formation of the Task Force

1. Westminster's new 2020 Mission/Vision Statement supports a redesign of Westminster's administrative structure as may be needed, to better accomplish the church's mission: "*Inviting All, Exploring Faith, Experiencing God.*"
2. During the last three years, a majority of Westminster's Session members have concluded that the existing committee/administrative structure is not numerically sustainable given the large size of the structure and the diminished size of the church.
3. Increasingly, the Session is aware that in some cases the purpose/mission of some committees is not as relevant as when they were created and that a redefined mission will need different structures for support.
4. Some committees have stopped meeting due to lack of participation; others are moving that direction. Others are no longer clear about their mission/purpose in light of Westminster's "new" realities.

Task Force Process

The Task Force began its work in October, 2015. Members read and thoroughly discussed two books: *Effective Staffing for Vital Churches* by Bill Easum and Bill Tenny-Brittian, and *Governance and Ministry* by Dan Hotchkiss. For each meeting there was both a brief reading assignment plus written "homework" questions intended to integrate and apply the reading to Westminster. Task Force members enthusiastically engaged the materials. Discussions were lively, filled with "aha!" insights into Westminster's past

36 and potential future. Attendance was high for all meetings. Upon
37 completion of all assigned readings, Task Force members engaged in
38 homework questions that integrated the materials and rated reform priorities
39 for Westminster. A compilation of these responses was thoroughly discussed
40 and served as the basis for the following recommendations.

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42 **The Role of the Session** (Westminster's Governing Board)

43 The word "Presbyterian" means "church governed by elders". So at
44 the heart of Presbyterian governance at the congregational level is the
45 Session (the congregation's governing council or board) which consists of
46 Ruling Elders (laypersons) and the Teaching Elder (Pastor) as Moderator.
47 The Session has the responsibility to provide for both the administrative and
48 spiritual leadership of the congregation. Spiritually, the Session is called to
49 discern God's mission for the congregation and then administratively, has
50 the responsibility to see that the mission is being implemented. Though
51 created to be supportive, we have all experienced occasions when particular
52 organizational structures actually impede the identification or
53 implementation of mission.

54 Countless ways exist to organize, govern and manage congregations
55 even within the framework provided by Presbyterian theology and polity.
56 Through the readings and discussions, Task Force members were able to see
57 that many of their experiences related to the functioning of Westminster's
58 Session fit into two broad patterns of church organization described in the
59 literature as: "Board-centered" and "Committee-centered". Every pattern
60 has its strengths, but the particular emphases of Board-centered and
61 Committee-centered governance patterns have delayed crucial strategic
62 conversations related to Westminster's future until recently. Here is how.

63 In a Board-centered organization, board "seats" are filled by
64 committee Chairpersons. The primary focus of Board meetings becomes
65 committee reports and activities. The emphasis is on information sharing so
66 that everyone gets to hear what everyone else is doing, and, perhaps, make
67 suggestions for improvements (which may or may not be welcomed!). As
68 programs multiply and complexity increases, the time allotted diminishes for
69 discussions related to the overall mission of the church and strategic plans to
70 accomplish that mission.

71 In Committee-centered Boards, increased power and responsibilities
72 are granted to committees. The Board functions as the ultimate arbiter for
73 important committee items/business. In conflicted contexts, the board
74 spends most of its time responding to budget concerns and refereeing
75 disagreements over turf. With energies distracted by current and cyclical

76 conflicts, no one has time to define, let alone implement, a strategic mission
77 despite rapidly changing cultural conditions.

78 **Recommendation**: that the Session's top priorities for Westminster's
79 immediate future be the ongoing discernment of Westminster's mission and
80 the development of policies designed to implement that mission. We
81 envision a Session consisting of nine ruling elders (decreased from the
82 current fifteen), plus the moderator. The reduction in size is intended to
83 allow the possibility of more in-depth group discussions and a deeper
84 discernment of God's will. *Note: Implementation of this recommendation*
85 *will require revision of Westminster's By-laws.*

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87 **Committees, Task Forces, Ministry Teams**

88 The Session has all the authority needed to determine what standing
89 committees and other structures are essential for the implementation of
90 Westminster's mission. Based on the Task Force's work to date, **we make**
91 **the following recommendations related to Westminster's**
92 **administrative structure and design:**

- 93 1. That the focus of Westminster's organizational structure be the
94 accomplishment of four key processes alluded to in Westminster's
95 2020 Mission/Vision Statement:
- 96 • Inviting and Connecting (*Inviting All*),
 - 97 • Forming (*Exploring Faith*)
 - 98 • Sending (*Experiencing God* through mission to others)
- 99 2. That the Session provide leadership by developing policies which
100 encourage implementation and accountability to the Mission/Vision on
101 the part of all structures.
- 102 3. That governance and mission at Westminster be supported and
103 implemented by varied structures: committees, task forces and
104 ministry teams.
- 105 4. Committees are ongoing structures created to assist the Session in its
106 governance responsibilities. Committees write reports, make
107 recommendations and gather information to inform decision-making.
- 108 • The Session will develop policies to delineate the responsibilities
109 of committees
 - 110 • Committees may be variable in size, the Task Force recommends
111 three to nine members with a preference for smaller rather than
112 larger committees. A quorum for a meeting is one more than
113 half the committee members, or, if the committee only has three

114 members, a quorum consists of all three members. Committee
 115 members are divided into equal classes (as nearly as possible),
 116 serving three-year terms. Maximum years of consecutive
 117 service on the same committee is six. Committee composition is
 118 reviewed and approved annually by the Session.

- 119 • Examples of committees that we envision: Personnel, Finance
 120 and Property

121 5. Task Forces are short-term groups created by the Session to provide
 122 assistance/recommendations related to a particular issue/concern.
 123 Examples of these from Westminster's recent past: Strategic Planning
 124 Task Force; Membership Task Forces; Reorganization Task Force

125 6. Ministry Teams are created to produce practical results related to the
 126 implementation of mission, without the burden of significant
 127 structural/administrative expectations. Team members are people
 128 who have interest in a particular ministry. Teams are given maximum
 129 flexibility to organize in ways that can best achieve intended results.
 130 The Session develops policies that provide for periodic assessment and
 131 evaluation. Recent examples of "teams" include: Westminster Care
 132 Team, Hospitality Teams, Mission Garden Team and the Mission Team
 133 which is in the process of transitioning from the Mission Committee.

134

135 **Conclusion**

136 We believe that moving towards an overall structure as outlined above
 137 will:

- 138 • improve accountability to mission,
- 139 • increase flexibility to address emerging issues
- 140 • provide increased space and time for ongoing strategic
 141 conversations about God's call and Westminster's Future

142 We also believe that an organizational design based on this outline has
 143 the potential to more efficiently and effectively utilize the time and
 144 talents of Westminster's members and friends as we all seek to respond
 145 to God's call to serve.