

Seeking a Prophet

Elizabeth Presbytery seeks its next steps in the service of Jesus Christ.

Elizabeth, NJ-What is a Presbytery to do when it knows change is coming down the road; significant, long term change; a recasting of mission and ministry in a tighter, leaner economy; rejuvenating its outreach as its very relevance comes into question?

What is a Presbytery to do when the change comes now, when an Executive Presbyter takes a new call, and the wary membership, the declining finances, and the waning vision demand something new? Those are the questions facing Elizabeth Presbytery.

“We are faced with a real challenge,” said Rev. Peter Hofstra, chairperson of the Financial Development Committee, “The departure of our previous EP opened up funding to keep our missions and outreach budget afloat. We were looking at draconian cuts to vital parts of our Presbytery’s historic mission giving. But those problems will face us again when we call an interim. Do we look for someone on a part time basis? Do we go without an EP, a model we’ve heard about in New York State? Do we look to share an EP with a sister Presbytery? Everything is on the table.”

One thing is certain, business as usual is not going to work. Along with the rest of the denomination, the Presbytery of Elizabeth has experienced declines in membership and giving, and the loss of a number of churches through closure or merger. If current trends continue, fully half of the fifty churches that make up the Presbytery are at risk of merger, or extinction in the next decade.

What is the next step? To trust the Lord and boldly enter the wilderness.

In Presbyterian terms, it sounds like the same old thing. An Interim Executive Presbyter (IEP) Search Committee was formed and put to work. But the stakes are far higher than same old, same old.

“Things are changing in this Presbytery,” said Rev. Karen Chamis, co-chair of the Search Committee, “It is an exciting time to be here.”

The tools are familiar. The IEP will be expected to lead the Presbytery in a Mission Study. At any time, the questions for the Study are powerful. “Who are we? What are the expectations of the Presbytery? What does it truly mean to be connectional? Missional?” But now, here, these questions are built over a renewed sense of worship, of theological reflection, and a real desire to reclaim the proclamation of Jesus Christ in Central New Jersey.

The quest now is to seek someone, an elder or minister, trained and well versed in the tools of mission study, but, even more, someone who will speak to this Presbytery with a prophetic voice, speak to a Presbytery listening for the Word of the Living God.

More information is available about the search on the Presbytery website, www.elizabethpresbytery.org.

PRESS RELEASE