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- [Celebrate Evangelism: Sunday, September 25, 2011](#)

## Presbyterian Camps and Conference Centers Events

### Camp Johnsonburg:

- **J-Jam Camp Music fest**  
Saturday, Aug. 6, 2011 1-4 pm
- **Annual Golf Outing**  
Saturday, Sep. 10, 2011 1 pm shotgun start
- **Team-Building Retreat**  
Friday, September 30 - Saturday, October 1, 2011
- **Fall Sabbath Day**  
Wednesday, Sep. 21, 2011

[Stony Point Center's 3rd Annual Homecoming: Oct. 22-23, 2011](#)

## Mission Study Update



Rev. Greg Albert  
Interim Executive Presbyter

I have been serving Elizabeth Presbytery for 1 ½ years, about half of the time I was expecting to be here. One of my responsibilities is to oversee the Presbytery's Mission Study process. This is a report on where we are in that process.

Basically, the Mission Study involves three stages: information gathering, discernment, and implementation. Ideally, each stage should take one year and we are basically on schedule. The gathering of information, which included an on-line survey, Session visits, historical and demographic analysis, was completed by the end of my first year. We are now in the middle of discerning what God wants the Presbytery to be and do, based on the information we gathered. Meetings have been held at various locations of the Presbytery and many of our committees and Units have read the Study and provided feedback. Now, the Council is working and praying about it. When they are done, it will be ready for discussion at one or more (probably more) meetings of Presbytery. Ultimately, the Presbytery will approve a Mission Design for the Future.

I was hoping that the Design would be approved by the end of my second year, January 31, 2012. Unfortunately, it looks like may take a few months more than that. The reason is that the Council is the Mission Study team. There is nothing wrong with this although, frankly, Mission Studies are usually overseen by a special team elected by a presbytery. The reason a special team is used is because Councils already have a lot on their plate and little time for discerning God's will for the future. That has been the case for our Council. They have had at least one crisis to deal with at every meeting this year which has allowed little time for discernment. In short, we are a couple of months behind where I was hoping to be in the process. The good news is that the Council has been devoting more time to the Mission Study recently.

I am not particularly bothered, however, by falling slightly behind schedule because something else is happening which could greatly affect the future of this Presbytery. We are in high level discussions with Palisades and Newark Presbyteries about sharing staff and resources. You may be asking, "Well, if that's the case, why are we trying to come up with a Mission Design for Elizabeth Presbytery?" The answer is that the discussions are about **sharing** not merging. In other words, Elizabeth Presbytery will continue to be a presbytery and, for this reason, we need to continue to discern how we can serve Christ, his church, and the world. On the other hand, the sharing of resources may allow us to dream even bigger!

Finally, I want to thank you for your support of and patience with the Mission Study process. We're not done by any means but we **are** getting there. Let us pray: "O God, grant us patience as we work together to discern what you are calling Elizabeth Presbytery to be and do and with whom in the future. Amen."

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## Virtual Office Trial

The Presbytery staff is trying to find ways to economize and, ultimately, reduce the amount of Per Capita. One way we have discussed is working from our homes and cars. This approach is often called a virtual office. We are not sure this will work but we have decided to give it try, for one week. That week will be **August 15-19**. So what does this mean for you?



First, if you call the office, you will have to leave a message but rest assured that the staff will be checking their messages periodically throughout the day and will respond appropriately. As for me, you may either leave a message on the office recorder or call my cell phone, 609-433-1163. Second, if you want to meet with one of the staff, you can arrange to meet him/her at your church or somewhere else that is convenient. Please note, however, that no one will be in the Presbytery office that entire week.

After August 15-19, the staff will be discussing the pros and cons to this way of saving the Presbytery thousands of dollars per year. We will also be interested in hearing how such an approach did or might affect you so please be ready to express yourself after August 19. Remember, our goal is to serve Christ and this Presbytery both effectively and economically. Thanks.

The Rev. Greg Albert, Interim Executive Presbyter

Presbyterian  
Seminaries Events

Princeton Theological  
Seminary

- [Institutes for Pastoral Formation and Renewal](#)

The Alban Institute  
Letters

- [The Company You Keep](#)
- [Teams and Performance](#)
- [It's Your Church](#)

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## Survival and Death, or Growth and Turnaround

It's here, that fork where two roads diverge and the future starts to look different.

The Survival road to Death is easy to follow. Keep putting your energies mostly into Sunday morning. Keep waiting for people to walk in the front door. Keep raising money the same-old way. Keep choosing the same people for leadership. Keep focusing on the needs of longtime members. Keep putting facilities ahead of people, risk-avoidance ahead of mission. Keep waiting for "magical solutions" to appear, like major bequests or a sudden surge of young families with children. What about the Growth road to Turnaround? Hard work, yes, but even more than that, it will require major changes in the ways congregations function. The time for evolutionary change ended thirty years ago. Here are five basics for moving into turnaround mode. They might make your blood boil.

**Put your money into entrepreneurial clergy.** Trying to grow churches with reduced clergy presence hasn't worked. The doors might stay open, and some lay volunteers might have a good time running the church, but the future requires strong ordained leadership in spiritual development, education, reaching outside the walls for new mission and new constituents, training fresh leaders, lighting fires of conviction, and providing consistent pastoral care to increasingly diverse flocks. You want clergy who have a heart for growing the enterprise. Maintenance won't be enough. You need risk-takers, dreamers, men and women with fire in the belly. You want strong, assertive clergy. .

**Work on reaching new constituents.** That means young adults and young families and people outside the current socioeconomic mix. It means adapting to their lives. Sunday morning worship isn't reaching young adults. Find out what will, and reallocate your resources. Membership development requires consistent application of best practices, not familiar ways. It requires leveraging technology and freeing your clergy from institutional maintenance. The future is about sales and marketing, if you will, not polishing brass or keeping longtime members happy.

**Lose the institutional agenda.** We won't grow churches by perfecting liturgies, ordination rules, budgets or facilities. Let them go. We certainly won't grow churches by fighting over who's in charge or by resisting change. The future lies in transformation of lives, not handsome spaces for rituals of belonging. The future lies in mission outside the walls, not preservation of walls. The cost of maintaining facilities is starving our enterprise of funds that can yield growth. We need to be more than a cadre who enjoy gathering in a certain space.

**Focus on faith, not magic.** There are no magical solutions. The road ahead will require a rugged faith and a high capacity for change, for the untried and untested, and for learning from failure. Insiders need to let go of control, a great act of faith. Longtime leaders need to step aside and let younger leaders step forward, also an act of faith. Church loyalists need to let the congregation's identity change, also an act of faith. Faith comes from bringing one's deepest questions and yearnings to God, and discovering that God is faithful. Faith isn't about doctrine, right-opinion, feeling comfortable in worship, or getting affirmation for one's efforts. A church focused on faith will be messy, not orderly, and open to pain.

**Denominations must stop bailing out weak congregations.** None of this way forward is easy or natural. Our pews were filled during the great era of "belonging" (country clubs, service clubs, fraternal organizations, churches). That era ended long ago. Now people seek God, not socialization; they seek to serve, not belong. Many congregations won't have the heart for this new path. They should be allowed to die – and soon. Judicatories should take control of their assets, so that they can be used elsewhere.

As I said, blood-boiling time. But when a stark fork in the road appears, there's no easy way forward.

One road forward is marked "Growth" and the other "Survival." One leads to "Turnaround" and the other to "Death."

*(The above article was written by the Rev. Tom Ehrich, founder of the Church Wellness Project.)*