

7 May 2015

Presbytery of Waterloo Wellington  
c/o Rev. Mark Gaskin  
Westside Presbyterian Church  
130 Victoria Ave, Cambridge ON

## **Presbytery of Waterloo Wellington Visioning Day – Final Report**

### Process Review

The goal was to find consensus around strategic direction for the Presbytery of Waterloo Wellington. Priorities named by the process are considered valuable input for the on-going work of the Vision Team as they work with the presbytery to adopt its final priorities. The process had three components, two of which were preliminary for the third that was used on the Visioning Day itself.

Trend Scenario Building Exercise: through the use of a blog the goal was to build a two page trend scenario that would represent a consensus view of a plausible future for the presbytery in 2025. A trend scenario is intended to provide a shared context for planning. Participation in this exercise was weak with only about eight people contributing. Consequently I ended up providing more to the content of the trend scenario than planned. Some possible reasons for the low participation rate are: the exercise took place during the Lenten – Easter period in congregational life, some people may have been intimidated by unfamiliar technology or the posts themselves, and it was left up to individuals to choose to make participation a priority. My hunch is that this last point may have been a dominant factor. Regardless, low participation may have led to reduced reflection on the challenges and needs of your faith communities in the future. The final version of the trend scenario was provided to all participants about a week before the event.

Congregational Focus Groups: I prepared a discussion guide and a preliminary collection of questions for discussion. The Vision Team modified the questions to make them more relevant to the congregations of the presbytery. 18 out of 30 congregations in the presbytery participated, which I consider a very good response rate especially given that gatherings had to take place during the Lenten-Easter period. A two page summary of all responses was prepared for participants in the Visioning Day and circulated about a week before the event. Many of the reports came with comments about the helpfulness of the exercise. In fact, for some congregations it seems this was the first time a significant conversation was conducted about the future. It is my sense that this was for your presbytery an effective way to encourage congregational input for the presbytery as well as discernment within congregations

themselves. An appendix to this report contains all the reports from the congregational focus groups.

Visioning Day: About 105 people participated in the day, with approximately 50% of participants being presbyters and 50% coming from congregations. A mix of urban and town/rural congregations were represented. As noted by the Vision Team participants were substantially over the age of 35. The day was framed by the Parable of the Talents and our calling to be stewards of the future of both the faith itself as well as faith communities. Attendees participated in three exercises that were intended to help the gathering answer one question that was framed in two ways: in terms of the parable as well as in more straight-forward practical language.

“In service of the Master as well as the people of faith who follow us, what should be our top five or six priorities for the talents entrusted to us in our stewardship of the future?”

“What are the five or six priorities we can pursue now 1] to foster a vital Christian faith, 2] to support vital communities of faith... 10 years from now?”

The first exercise had an Open Space format, in which participants self-selected to engage in conversations about 2025 and the future of the presbytery. The conversations were held from three different points of view: of congregations, of the social context in 2025, and of the presbytery (the court) itself. Reflections from these discussions were reported back to the whole gathering. The second exercise was World Café, which people participated in enthusiastically. Each table group was asked in the end to name their top 5-6 consensus priorities and write them out on large Post-It notes. I used my judgment to group the priorities together as appeared appropriate, posting them on the wall in their natural clusters of concern. The final exercise was a variation on Dotmocracy, using pretend money instead of dots. A consensus around priorities was achieved by these exercises.

From my observations it appeared that people both enjoyed and found profitable the World Café exercise. A straw poll revealed that the large majority of participants had never experienced this process before. This is an excellent consensus building tool that was created by the Learning Organization Team at the Sloan Business School of MIT. Guides for conducting this exercise can be found at [www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com).

While the Visioning Day was framed to help people focus on future needs in order to set present priorities to begin to address those future needs, it is my sense that participants instead were thinking about their present concerns and priorities. While this is valuable to know the process did not accomplish all that was intended of it. As I stated at the Visioning Day, humans are not “wired” to apply the Golden Rule over time (to include among the “others” we wish to “do unto” those who follow us). As the facilitator I did not impress people enough to be truly thoughtful and empathetic of the next generation. Additionally it may have been too ambitious to think that people today can imagine what they can do now for the sake of those who follow them. In the meantime, current reality concerns are real and that tends to focus people’s thinking on the here-and-now.

## Top Priorities Named at Congregational Focus Groups

The complete summary report from Focus Groups is found in the appendices to this report. 18 congregations sent reports on their discussions. In the summary that follows, numbers appearing in brackets ( ) represent the number of focus groups that made the same observation or named the same priority.

Openness to the “new thing”. There were several heartening expressions of openness to new expressions of congregational life: innovation in worship (6), improve use of technology (7), and a willingness to leave some degree of tradition aside (7). As an enabling attitude, several focus groups asked for a “reduction in things that restrict us: governance structures, limits of the Book of Forms, rules” (7). Apparently there is a belief that the current ways-and-means may hold back such innovation.

Desire to see numeric growth: Not surprisingly, several focus groups saw the solution to current challenges to be numeric growth. From reading the reports it appears that “outreach” is understood as a means to attract new congregants. We see this in many common comments: need to do outreach / advertising to maintain congregation (6); reach out to children, youth & their families (3) (9 total). Other recommendations may represent strategies to use in outreach, such as innovation in worship and preaching, have groups that are focused for specific participants (young mums, single adults, etc) (4); have less “churchy” activities that can provide alternative ways into faith community (eg. sports activity) (3) – total (7). This shows us that many in your congregations still believe in the efficacy of the Attractional Model of church. Presbyterians (along with the other mainline congregations) in the 1950’s and 1960’s adopted a passive approach to this model, in the belief that visitors would see what is meaningful to current congregants, find it equally meaningful and subsequently choose to belong. As this model began to fail starting in the 1960’s the Church responded with an active approach to the Attractional Model, called the church growth movement. It was based on a marketing premise: if you create a congregation that is appealing, with “seeker”-oriented worship and meets needs then people will come. The goal of a congregation was to become “the best congregation in the community”. The Church Growth Movement had success during the 1970’s to 1990’s, but since then it too has been failing. This is because—quite simply—the number of people who are in the market for a congregation has been steadily shrinking for the past 50 years. “Outreach”, as it is defined by focus groups here, may not be the panacea that is hoped in it. For those who are church shoppers today, they are indeed looking for “the best congregation in the community”, which has maximum appeal and meets their needs. That being said, a small number of focus groups seemed to report that their congregations are having success as Attractional Model churches.

An Openness to the Transformational Model of Church: The Attractional Model is giving way today to the Transformational Model, and it is heartening to see focus groups calling for priority in its two approaches. One approach is to go deeper into one’s faith, either through personal spiritual practice or congregational practices. There is a growing plethora of resources on spirituality for Christians, encouragement to become “a practicing congregation” and so on that promote and facilitate individual transformation. In an age of personal spiritual inquiry and growing secularism, it is not surprising that 10 focus groups emphasized a need to focus on developing spirituality and Christian discipleship in some way. 9 focus groups also named the other approach commonly known as the missional church. Although this label was not really

used, these focus groups recognized a need to “love your neighbour” by meeting the needs of persons beyond the congregation.

### Priorities Named at the Visioning Day

The degree of consensus for the priorities named at the Visioning Day is illustrated by three counts: the number of Post-It Notes generated by the World Café table group discussions, the number of \$5,000 bills “invested” in the priorities (this represents the #1 choice of priority by participants) and the total number of dollars “invested” in each priority. What follows is a list of the final priorities showing each of the three counts. I have ordered the priorities based on the total number of dollars “invested” by participants during the last exercise, which represents the greatest consensus among individuals. However the presbytery should be mindful of the other two counts as well: the consensus coming out of table groups (that is, from groups of people, indicated by the number of Post-It Notes) and the number of \$5,000 bills (indicating what people view as THE most important priority among the priorities). I created the summary titles used here. The Vision Team should feel free to modify any title in their review of the data in this report.

<b>Priority</b>	<b>Total \$ Invested (indicating strongest consensus)</b>	<b># of \$5,000's Invested (indicating participants top priority)</b>	<b># Post-It Notes (indicating consensus among table groups)</b>
Change the Focus & Function of Presbytery	229,000	30	28
Youth & Camping Ministry	165,000	17	11
Executive Presbyter	130,000	14	8
Improve Communications	106,000	7	14
Outreach	103,000	10	3
Training for leaders / elders / clergy	53,000	4	3
Partnerships / Collaborative work with others (congregations, organizations in wider community)	44,000	1	6
Presbytery Staff – other possibilities	22,000	2	5

### Moving Forward: Reflections and Suggestions About the Priorities

Below are some of my reflections on the material that has been generated over the past two months, shared with a degree of candor.

Most congregations and presbyteries in our denomination (and beyond) are facing the same kinds of challenges you are. As I deal with a growing number of congregations and presbyteries I find (when you boil it down) they are asking one of two strategic questions: “How do we cope?”, or “How do we evolve?” As I look at the input through the creation of the trend scenario and from congregational focus groups, and the work product of the Visioning Day, it appears to

me that the weight of responses leans more toward the “How do we cope?” question. Just taking the postings from the World Café exercise, we hear the call to give priority to: assessing congregational viability and engaging in conversations with them about it, sharing resources among congregations where resources are needed, staffing to meet current / growing needs, “help us learn how to do outreach today so we can attract new people”, support clergy in these challenging times, and returning congregations to greater vitality. By comparison there is less by way of suggestions regarding how congregations (or even the presbytery) might evolve in order to truly be good stewards of the future. This is not a criticism. It is hard for us all to imagine things beyond one’s experience and knowledge. What you have here is a solid read of the current thinking of people who have participated in the process over the past 2 months and on the Visioning Day. If the hope is to focus more on the strategic question “how do we evolve?” then two things: 1] people may need their horizons of possibility widened, and 2] you may need to help people adopt a new priority for the future that is beyond the felt and natural desire to maintain what has been meaningful to congregants in your presbytery.

Change the Focus & Function of Presbytery. I find two of the main “priorities for action” quite hopeful. There was definitely some priority and energy around congregational viability. The basic message here I think is “we have to rethink how we understand and approach this issue.” This, I believe, deserves deeper consideration, as it does not have to be an approach that answers “How do we cope?” in order to maintain what people have found meaningful. One way I approach assessing congregational vitality is to think of congregations being in one of three categories: those who are already pursuing their future vitality (and thus need little help, relatively speaking), those that either can’t or won’t pursue their future (and thus need palliative care), and a middle group I call “the might’s”. In your stewardship of the future, could it mean figuring out how to support those already on the way, as well as helping “the might’s” transition to being on the way as well? Congregational renewal takes a lot of attention, imagination, energy, resources and motivation, as well as leadership to focus and strengthen these qualities. “The might’s” may be found in one of two places: in an existing congregation that is primed for a new future, or by creating (to borrow a phrase) a “coalition of the willing” out of several congregations who could be invited to gather to do a new thing together. There may be a synergy here with the idea of creating the role of Executive Presbyter.

The second hopeful priority I have called “create a learning organization.” There was a desire expressed to learn from the experience of sister congregations as new ventures are tried (“don’t reinvent the wheel”), to have a means to share good practices, and a priority to research what is happening in the wider church. I think people were saying “we know we have trouble thinking outside the box, so help us to do that!” An analogy I frequently use is: “Being church today is much like being 16<sup>th</sup> century European explorers. We are getting in our boats and setting off to the west in hopes of hitting some new unknown land. We are told the world is round, so we are trusting that we won’t fall off the edge of the earth doing this! And when we bump into new land, we will explore it, try to understand it, make a map, then return to share the map with others.” For this to happen a presbytery needs

- to believe that innovation will arise out of the grassroots
- to be permission-giving and encouraging of new innovative practices
- to facilitate a way for people in other congregations to benefit from what is being learned by study and experience.

It is noteworthy that one small collection of posts encourages presbytery to “loosen up”, so there are fewer constraints. Also noteworthy: 7 of the 18 congregational focus groups asked:

“reduce things that restrict us: governance structures, limits of Book of Forms, rules.” Making this cultural change in presbytery can help enable greater exploration and learning. I think this may become the most effective means of learning what “the church of the future” looks like. There is much information available in print and online that describes the nature and practices of a learning organization.

Create a Strategic Plan for Presbytery. It is hard to know how much substance there is behind this priority. Sometimes when organizations face uncertainty with little definition the cry goes up, “we need a plan!” Classic strategic planning is most effective when it 1] seeks to determine with crystal-clear clarity some strategic priorities that can advance your core purpose / mission, and 2] foster plans that will work the strategy. For example, part of the core purpose / mission of the church is to express the kingdom of God, call and develop disciples of Christ, and be relevant evidence for the existence of God. A “missional church” approach is a strategy to fulfill this core purpose. Other strategies today include experimental approaches to faith communities (such as Two Rivers is for you), new approaches to Christian formation (such as New Monasticism which is being considered by a group of Presbyterians in Halifax), social enterprise faith communities (eg. Roxy Coffee Shop in Acton ON; or the faith community in Sarnia that is living out “seek the welfare of your city” by focusing on redevelopment of the downtown core by opening new commercial stores). In fulfilling your stewardship of the future the presbytery’s strategy may be (and these are illustrative examples only): “invest in what is strong so it gets stronger”, “create three innovative approaches to faith community that are faithful and appear relevant, and see what works”, or “gather a ‘coalition of the willing’ to form a brand new missional congregation in an established facility.” You can find a bit more of my thoughts on strategic planning in my article [http://www.choosingchange.ca/uploads/2/0/6/6/20661792/the\\_church\\_as\\_god's\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.choosingchange.ca/uploads/2/0/6/6/20661792/the_church_as_god's_strategy.pdf)

Restructure Presbytery. Structure enables the optimal management of resources (human, material, financial and time) applied in the implementation of a strategy so the core mission / purpose is accomplished. This suggests that restructuring (classically) requires some substantial preliminary work (“What is our core purpose?” “What strategy will we use to fulfill it?”). For example, Calgary Macleod Presbytery is just finalizing a restructuring that has been about 3 years in the works. It began with the suspension of our standing orders so we could explore and practice new ways and means of doing our work. We did less of what presbyteries typically focus on. We put a priority on encouraging grassroots innovation for mission (in congregations) so presbytery wouldn’t have to think about it. We established temporary committees to do what had to be done minimally. Then in the time and space we created we began to reflect. The emergent sense of strategy is (in my words) “vital, future-oriented, externally-focused congregations”. To make this strategy work we need to improve presbytery visitations to congregations, coach clergy and sessions to strengthen their leadership capacity, help congregations get more connected to their neighbourhoods... and so on. An innovation in structure was creating a half-time role called General Presbyter as a means to address weaknesses in our strategy (“vital, future-oriented, externally-focused congregations”) so it could become more effective. Having a person working 1,170 hours a year on behalf of presbytery substantially disrupts the structure typical of presbyteries, because it relieves the court of so much work. On August 15 we will inaugurate a new committee arrangement that blends in the GP, to strengthen how we work our strategy in pursuit of fulfilling our core mission. This is an example of a comprehensive approach to restructuring... but restructuring need not be all this. Presbytery could take a “skunkworks” approach to the pursuit of new

strategies. Social change theorist Everett Rogers defined *skunkworks* as follows: "It is an especially enriched environment that is intended to help a small group of individuals design a new idea by escaping routine organizational procedures. The research and development (R&D) workers in a skunkworks are usually specially selected, given special resources, and work on a crash basis to create an innovation." To a degree the role of General Presbyter is for us a skunkworks. I suggest this possibility because the skunkworks approach has been typically used to fast-track implementation of a strategy without the danger of it getting bogged down in the usual ways-and-means of an organization. One final word on restructuring: beware the tendencies to think restructuring takes care of your problems, and how it can be used as a distraction so people don't have to think about their problems.

Create a New Role in Presbytery: Executive Presbyter. Participants may see this as a very straight-forward pragmatic answer to several issues in a presbytery. However: before adopting it, be very clear what the role is to do for YOUR presbytery. A thought process like the above can help. While I do not recommend simply doing what Calgary Macleod is doing (our context is different), I can provide documentation on my role if requested.

Proposed Changes in Presbytery's Culture. Congregations and presbyteries all too often adopt goals that people seem very enthusiastic about, but then implementation drags and even at times fails. Similarly they can also adopt new structures and processes to get things done, and yet mysteriously the ways-and-means do not change. This happens because organizational culture is very real and very strong, and culture by its nature exists in order to maintain "how we do things here." It is always a very good thing to give serious attention to critiques of the organization's culture. In fact, I suggest rather than jumping right in with restructuring (if that was your desire) the presbytery spend some time reflecting on its culture: how it enables you to be effective in pursuing your strategies and how it impedes it. My sense is that often the call for "restructuring" is really a call for an evolution in the organization's culture (think of examples you know where restructuring changed nothing). I think anyone who has been a part of several sessions or several presbyteries already has a gut sense of the importance and power of organizational culture to create significant differences between these governing groups who are all essentially following the same Book of Forms. The good news is that culture is learned, and so people have the capacity to learn new innovations in culture.

Youth and Camps. There is a common point-of-view that "the youth are the future of our congregation" and so there can be a strong desire to "do something" to appeal to, attract, incorporate and retain youth in congregations. I fully understand this deeply heart-felt wish to have young people among us. However, this is becoming harder and harder to do. By way of example, Canadian Baby Boomers for the most part were socialized into the Christian faith through their church school attendance, and that was supported by things such as Bible readings and saying The Lord's Prayer daily in public school.... but in spite of that we were unable to retain the majority of our Baby Boomers as youth. Since then the cultural gap between youth and church has grown more significant with every passing year, and the opportunity to influence youth and young adults has diminished. My concern here is a temptation to put a lot of time and effort into trying to be appealing to youth and then failing because the church and today's youth are in such different places... and the failure happening because insufficient effort was given to really understand who youth and young adults are today. I can recommend two excellent evidence-based sociological studies that I found truly eye-opening:

*After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion*, by Robert Wuthnow (2010)

*Belief without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious*, by Linda Mercadante (2014)

#### Closing

What follows are the appendices that are the work product of our process: the Trend Scenario, the summary report from congregational focus groups, and the results of the World Café exercise. Additionally I will forward separately all the focus group reports, in electronic format.

Thank you for the opportunity to work with you on this interesting project. If I can be of assistance in the future I would be pleased to do so.

Your fellow servant in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. B. Ooms". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

## **Waterloo-Wellington Presbytery**

### Visioning Day “World Café” Results – Compilation of Post It Notes

What follows is a compilation of all the Post-It Notes from the World Café exercise. I have attempted to: 1] cluster them together in their logical groupings, and 2] break them out in a nested way so the presbytery can get a clearer sense of what participants were saying at the Visioning Day. I have revised the clustering a very small amount since the Visioning Day (I did not have a great deal of time to reflect in the middle of the exercise!), but the large majority of notes have remained as clustered during the exercise. All the Post-It Notes have been included below as each note represents a priority named by participants. Where two or more notes said the very same thing, I have listed it only once with the number of times the same point was made shown as a number in brackets (). The number in brackets beside the cluster title (bold text) is the number of actual Post-It Notes that were clustered together in that theme.

### **Change the Focus and Function of Presbytery (28)**

#### Proposed Priorities for Action

Foster a Christ-centered Christian faith

Improve Engagement Regarding Congregational Viability

Define what congregational viability looks like

Conduct Building Audits: help congregations learn the cost of their building

Assessment of our assets as a presbytery for several reasons: just to know;  
resource management (this is inclusive of properties, buildings, and  
people assets)

Congregational Revitalization

Be open to different models of congregation

Assess congregations then help to make them healthy churches

Resources for Congregation

Conduct Talent inventory within the Presbytery

Conduct Talent Inventory within Presbytery

Inventory of skills, resources, talents available within presbytery and  
share it

Share resources among congregations

Share resources among congregations

“ask congregations to offer clearly identified and specific resources to  
presbytery for teaching and mentoring”

Help congregations connect with resources: grants, training

Create a learning organization

Share ideas from each church. Hold a “bring your best” day

Don’t reinvent the wheel

“Do the research: what’s working / not working; share with congregations”

Make presbytery meetings about renewal and learning not housekeeping

Share good practices

Gain knowledge of community needs  
Facilitate discussion of issues like worship, community engagement, music

Greater support for Clergy  
Need to support clergy  
Pastoral Counsellor for the mental health of clergy

#### Proposed Changes to the Way Presbytery Does Things / Governance

##### Strategic Planning

“Create a strategic plan for the presbytery” (2)  
“develop a regular strategic plan and implement it”  
Create a strategic plan and update it annually  
Resourced strategic plan to move us towards our priorities  
Strategic plan for engagement: resources, financial, material, people, priorities

Have more engagement and dialogue with congregations

##### Restructure presbytery

To regain emphasis on support not just administration  
Restructure based on a rethinking of what presbytery should do  
“Presbytery needs to change structure, governance, purpose, website, social media”

#### Proposed Changes in Presbytery’s Culture

Be less formal and bound by rules

“Presbytery must loosen up!: the rules, structure, clergy domination, dogma  
“less levels of government”

Presbytery should engage congregations more pastorally

Be more flexible and adaptive

Presbytery should be more proactive in its approach to congregations

Greater transparency

Improve the way presbytery is run: better communications, better understanding of procedures, have a rep come to congregations to teach what roles are

“Stop and pray: bring God into our discussions and decisions”

## **Communications (14)**

Improve Communications between presbytery and congregations (5)

Provide information, explanations, news, help us see that presbytery cares

Improve communications in both directions: presbytery – minister / rep elder – session -  
- congregation

Two way communications

Newsletter

Website (5)

Dynamic website for communications

Improve congregational websites

Improve social media communications (4)

Specified social media communications: Twitter, Facebook

Be intergenerational in communications

Technology resources

Presbytery communications to become stronger, healthier, perhaps leading to a position of

General Presbyter

## **Youth and Camps (11)**

### Youth

Engage youth

Focus on the youth and young adults we do have and how to build on them / with them  
(we cannot regain the past)

Programming / forums for youth organized by presbytery (2)

Develop youth strategy: look at resources, people, faith development for life

Youth / camp / university outreach and support

Youth ministry: small groups, VBS, incorporate youth into the congregation as a whole

### Support Camps

Support camps (3)

Christian camping ministry for all ages

Camp ministry: connect the youth staff to communities where they go to school, share  
gifts, improve training and reputation of camps to equalize all camps, get more  
kids to camp

Support camps and encourage campers: Kintail, Cairn, Presbyterian Music,

congregational camps (ie VBS), Canada Youth

## **Executive Presbyter (8)**

Executive / General Presbyter (6)

General Presbyter as Engagement Coordinator

Hire a presbytery worker for visitations, pastoral care of clergy, future ministry planning

Presbytery engagement coordinator

Presbytery paid resource person: pastoral care, conflict resolution, be a resource person to bring  
others

**Partnerships / Collaboration (6)**

Enable and resource collaborative partnerships of all kinds

Between our own congregations (4)

With other denominations (3)

With groups in the community / outside faith communities (3)

With local businesses

Be unconventional and innovative

Suggested foci of partnerships: create partnerships for outreach, to become more missional, to work together on “current cultural ministries”

**Other Proposed Staff for Presbytery (5)**

Pastoral Counsellor for the mental health of clergy (1)

Coordinator for shared services / Engagement coordinator (3)

Coordinator for shared services (eg.: international missions, local missions, youth work, parish nursing)

Look at funding for supportive cooperation ministries (cluster church) ie Parish nursing, Stephen ministries

Parish nursing (4- includes the 3 above)

**Facilitate Outreach (3)**

Presbytery should support / facilitate outreach (2)

Outreach to families and students

“Create new outreach possibilities”

Suggested methods of outreach: hold “church” on a different day, hold weekly community BBQ’s, create mid-week programs (ie Logos), hire outreach staff,

**Leader / Elder / Clergy Training (3)**

Provide leadership tools and training

Provide mentors and coaches

Leadership development for clergy and laity

Elder training: what is required; faith growth;

**Other Proposed Priorities**

“Presbytery organize and operate a nation-wide “congress” for all people” (1)

## **Waterloo-Wellington Presbytery**

### **Proposed Future Priorities Arising from Congregational Focus Groups**

18 congregations participated in the focus group activity, out of 30 in the presbytery. Priorities in each category are listed from the most common to unique.

#### For Congregations

- **Worship:**
  - Format: more intergenerational & inclusive; new worship practices; less formal worship; more relevant worship; make worship more experiential (6)
  - Sermons: thought provoking, message can be applied throughout week (1), more use of dialogue / discussion in place of sermon (2) – total (3)
  - share worship with congregations of other traditions
- **Faith Nurture:**
  - Focus on developing spirituality, prayer(2), our faith, Bible knowledge -- total (10)
  - Help congregants grow in faith so they live it more intentionally / visibly (4)
  - Foster a perspective that “we are a whole church for the whole community for whole week”
  - We need to talk more about our faith: among ourselves, and with others
  - Help children / youth understand Christian vs. secular-humanist world views
  - We need to offer hope in the midst of troubled times, connecting church/Bible to world
- **Congregational Life**
  - Traditions: be willing to lay tradition aside and “do church differently”; blend tradition and innovation; be willing to try new things and possibly fail doing it (7)
  - Targeted / Inviting / Appealing Activities: have groups that are focused for specific participants: young mums, single adults, etc (4); have less “churchy” activities that can provide alternative ways into faith community (eg. sports activity) (3) – total (7)
  - Technology: adopt it / improve use; “but still maintain ancient practices” (7)
  - Building: be less centered / focused on the building / be willing to sell building; repurpose building to share congregational life with some other purpose (5)
  - Youth: have more activities that are appealing to them (4)
  - Inclusivity: Become more accepting / inclusive of others for who they are (poor, mental illness, LGBTQ sexual orientations, family arrangements, “the needy”) (4)
  - Parish Nursing: for ourselves and the wider community (3)
  - God wants religions to become more open / learning from each other / less division (3)
  - God desires for congregations / “our congregation” to survive, thrive and grow (2)
  - Church camps: important for spiritual development of children / teens (2)
  - Reduce the boundary between the congregation and wider community
  - need more staff as the number of volunteers decline in congregation
  - Expand ministry to our aging, homebound members
  - Foster a more positive and hopeful outlook in congregations
- **Mission:**
  - Outreach for numeric growth: Need to do outreach / advertising to maintain congregation (6); Reach out to children, youth & their families (3) (9) – total
  - “Love our Neighbour”: Focus on the needs of people outside of the congregation: spiritual, economic, social, community. Specialize in meeting one targeted need (9)
  - “The church reveals God to the world”: Become more visible so people can see what Christianity is (4); When we engage in local mission make sure we explain that we do

- this because of our faith (1); Evangelize: share our faith / we need a “coach” to help us practice evangelism for today (2); members as apologists for God – total (8)
  - Ask people of the wider community what a meaningful / helpful church looks like (3)
  - “Imagine a project that meets a community need but does not require a large budget or the expenditure of lots of energy”
- Organization:
  - Collaboration / Partnerships: between congregations / Christian organizations / community groups & agencies (3); shared staff among congregations (2) – total (5)
  - Pastor: may need to shift to congregations without pastors(1); pastor with tent-making ministry (2); must become less reliant on ministers(1); – total (4)
  - Leadership: Strengthen leadership training in congregation (2); equip elders in spiritual practices and pastoral care (1) – total (3)
  - Less emphasis on our Presbyterian heritage and denominational differences (3)
  - Become “less institutional”; be open to home church format

#### For the Presbytery (Court)

- Reduce things that restrict us: governance structures, limits of Book of Forms, rules (7)
- Provide a network to share what is working / best practices among congregations (4); Conduct more research on “what’s working and what’s not working” (2) – total (6)
- Amalgamation: “re-align churches in presbytery (just do it) then support the remaining congregations”; amalgamate while there is congregational strength, not once it’s dead; have flexibility in how to manage amalgamations; conduct city-wide amalgamation (5)
- Shift from being reactive to problems to being proactive in providing leadership to congregations (3)
- Provide a means for congregations to work together on regional activities / mission (3)
- Provide more education / training in congregations; have SME’s (“subject matter experts”), help congregations understand what a relevant / what vital church looks like / faith sharing & evangelism (3)
- Have a team / individual to help revive and build up congregations & their pastors (3);
- Need to be more encouraging / supportive of congregations / pastors (2)
- Provide a means for people in one congregation to resource / mentor another congregation (2)
- More opportunities for congregations to gather and have dialogue on issues (eg. Day of Reflection LGBTQ gathering)
- Designate one congregation as a “youth / young adult focused” church
- Develop a system to share printed music among congregations
- Help congregations hire staff for new emerging roles (eg. Parish Nurse, Outreach Worker)
- Permit and support congregations as they experiment with new ways
- “Help people transition to the notion of satellite churches drawing people into large centers from small communities”
- “No new church plants” (1); “we should focus on church planting” (1)
- Conduct a “marketing campaign” on behalf of all congregations
- Is presbytery needed?(1) Is synod needed? (2) – total (3)

**Participants:** CITY: Central (Galt), Westside (Galt), Knox’s (Galt), St Andrew’s (Hespeler), Knox (Preston), Doon (Kitchener), St Andrew’s (Kitchener); ; **TOWN&COUNTRY:** Knox (Conn) & St Andrew’s (Mt Forest), Knox (Crieff), Gale (Elmira), Knox (Elora) & St Andrew’s (Alma), Knox-Calvin (Harriston) ,Rockwood & Eden Mills.

## A Trend Scenario for the Waterloo-Wellington Presbytery Visioning Day

### **The Social Context We Anticipate in 2025**

This is a blessed part of our country. The economy of our area is expected to be a leading contributor to economic growth for the province. Information and communications technology, the universities, the large insurance industry, engineering and services will continue to grow. This anticipated positive economic future for our urban areas will subsequently lead to population growth in Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge and Guelph. As another consequence, our area will continue to be one of first arrival for immigrants to Canada. Rural area towns within 30 kilometers of the urban cores are predicted to increase in size while those more than 30 kilometers from an urban center are expected to decline in population. As it has been for the past 100 years, Canada's population is becoming ever more concentrated in its major urban centers and their satellite communities.

Congregations as we have known them were developed and sustained by the Silent Generation (born between 1925 and 1945) and the Builder Generation before them. By 2025 the number of Silent Generation members will have declined due to death (the average life expectancy in Canada is currently 82 years). Those still with us will be between 80 and 100 years old—most of them unable to contribute to congregational life as they once did. In 2025 the Baby Boomers will be between 60 and 80 years old. Many Baby Boomers will be engaged in active retirement. For some this will mean family involvement and travel, which will take them away from their congregations. For others it could mean greater opportunities to participate and volunteer in congregational life and its mission. Today the Millennial Generation (born since 1981) is Canada's largest demographic group, and they dominate the culture of our society now. By 2025 they will be age 44 and younger, raising their own families. Unlike the Baby Boomers, the Millennials substantially did not go to church school and have very little—if any—church experience. To them Christianity is a foreign and unknown religion.

By 2025 our society will be more “secular”, but the spiritual landscape of Canada will be very mixed. The North American religious phenomenon called “polarization” will be more pronounced. On the one side, the reduced numbers remaining in our churches will seem more committed and involved overall. On the other side the number of Canadians claiming to have “no religion” will increase markedly to perhaps 40% of the population in 2025. In 2015 “religious nones” is already the world's third largest religious group. From 2015 – 2025 a major source of the growing “no religion” group will be congregants and others on the margins of our congregations (the “relig-ish”) who choose to drop out of church involvement completely because it no longer holds sufficient meaning for them. That being said, in 2025 perhaps as many as a third of Canadians will be “believers but not belongers”, still affirming that “Jesus Christ is the Son of God” even though they choose not to participate in church at all. Within the “no religion” group will also be a growing number of people who identify themselves as “spiritual but not religious”. Rooted in our society's strong values for individualism and relative truth, people in this group believe they have the freedom to piece together their own sense of individual belief and spiritual practice. This orientation creates a great divide between them and the Christian faith. They see following Jesus or belonging to a church as practices that would diminish their personal freedom to control their own spirituality. Consequently this will be a hard group for Christian faith communities to appeal to. Within the “no religion” group the ranks of true atheists will probably not grow too much by 2025. That being said, a growing number of people will be less confident in the existence of God in 2025 than they are today.

## **Congregational Life We Anticipate in 2025**

Between now and 2025 many congregations will feel challenged by the changing society beyond the walls of their building as well as by the evolving realities within the congregation itself. For some congregations, decline in membership and reduced worship attendance will strain resources—financial and human—putting at risk current expectations and congregational organization. Some congregations with facilities built for a bygone age will find their building a growing burden. During this period, within the Presbyterian Church in Canada overall, we anticipate about a 30% decline in membership, a 33% decline in worship attendance, and the closure of 25% of our congregations.

Despite these challenges, congregations will continue to be “the heart and soul” of the Christian faith in 2025. But, to over-simplify, congregations will be oriented by one of two different strategic questions that will both be understood as faithfulness. One group of congregations will be oriented by “How do we cope?” The goal of these churches will be to maintain a style of congregational life that represents the preference of its long-term members. Ironically, congregations focused on preserving its customs and culture will be more at risk of closing. Some of these congregations will not have the will or the resources to be different, and they will need a palliative ministry of care. Others will still be trying to work church growth strategies (by trying to address perceived needs and creating appeal) even though the number of “church shoppers” has been in decline for 50 years. However, others of these congregations may have the resources (people, financial and in facilities), strategic location and the seeds of possibility that presbytery may choose to provide leadership for congregational renewal for the sake of the future. Such congregations need to be challenged to shift away from their “coping” perspective to a more future-oriented one. Change in these congregations will take leadership: from clergy and elders within the congregation, and from presbytery alongside the congregation.

Other congregations will be oriented by a different question: “How can we be a faithful and relevant congregation for today and tomorrow?” These congregations will work at understanding the “new normal” of their society and believe “this is an exciting time to be in mission and ministry!” A renewed sense of ministry and mission—all in God’s service—will orient these congregations rather than institutional preservation. “By visioning for the future a congregation can find its life in the present.” These congregations will be much clearer on their identity, calling and mission because they ask questions like: “Who are we?” “Who is our neighbour?” “What is God calling us to do?” “Who do we say Jesus is?” These congregations will live and work with the tension between the belief that God revitalizes congregations and congregants help revitalization to occur. Whether they recognize it or not, these congregations will be at work developing a new localized understanding of what it means to be a church for the future. New practices and priorities will often come through trial-and-error learning from experience. They will be more open to asking questions like, “Do we really need this building? Is it holding us back from what we want to do?” In these congregations one main trend will be for spiritual renewal: helping people discover the Christian faith, fostering a greater sense of connectedness with God and a growing authentic discipleship in following Jesus. Another main trend will see congregations engaged more with the wider community, recognizing that our calling to love our neighbour requires some form of faithful presence and mission locally. Congregants will walk into their neighbourhoods with eyes and ears open to what God is up to. This will mean rethinking our apprenticeship to Jesus with an orientation that is outward and risk-taking, with grace saturated practices of being ‘with and for’ our neighbours. Both these trends—inward spiritually and outward in love—will become a new form of Christian witness: fostering visibility, promoting an understanding of the Christian faith, building respect... all of which may cause some people to look at Christ more closely. Congregants will find this

renewed ministry and mission meaningful, bringing them joy, because through them a desire would be met: “we would see Jesus.”