



*Gathering Together · Nurturing Innovation · Strengthening Communities*  
*Reuniéndonos Juntos · Animando Innovación · Fortaleciendo Comunidades*  
*다같이 모이기 · 공동체를 강화하기 · 혁신을 키워나가기*

## Report of the Stated Clerk Nancy Talbot September 2016

How amazing to realize that we are already three quarters of the way through our second full year of living into the expression of the New Way Forward. The work of the Synod Leader, Synod Networker and Synod Stated Clerk take us in many directions throughout the Synod. In the midst of our very different responsibilities we continue to find time to touch base by phone or in person to make sure that we are continually grounded in the core values of the New Way Forward and that our work complements each other in fulfilling the vision with many from across the synod who are engaged in this transformative work. I remain excited to be a part of this journey with people around the synod. Within my role as Stated Clerk I continue to seek ways to support the open spaces and blue skies of which we often speak.

For the sake of continuity, the report below is presented in the same order as the original benchmarks submitted last January. This order does not bear any relation to actual time spent on particular tasks.

Governance responsibilities are ongoing. I continue primarily through calls placed to me to:

- ❖ Advise ruling elders, teaching elders, presbytery leaders, and stated clerks with regard to polity and ecclesiastical law matters;
- ❖ Serve as a resource person for presbyteries and individuals; and
- ❖ Interpret the Bylaws, Standing Rules and actions of the synod.
- ❖ Synod PJC

Since the withdrawal of the remedial complaint against the Eastern Korean Presbytery, no new complaints have been filed. The Synod PJC Executive Committee cancelled its scheduled September meeting. Although the PJC is prepared to meet quarterly, there has been no need to do so in 2016.

- ❖ Assist the Synod Commission and Leadership Team with the planning of synod meetings by overseeing arrangements, considering special topics and developing draft dockets

I have spent significant time since the June commission meeting planning the 2016 Synod Assembly and working with staff to prepare assembly documents that need to be reviewed and approved by the Commission before forwarding them to Synod Commissioners. In May, I sent a Q&A concerning the election of Commissioners to the Assembly, as well as, the nomination of three candidates to be considered for the Synod Mission and Ministries Commission for 2017/2018 to Presbytery Leaders, Stated Clerks and Administrative Assistants. To date, only 12 of the 22 presbyteries have submitted responses. Of those most have not included YAADs. Our goal is to have close to full participation at assembly from all presbyteries i.e. two ruling elders, two teaching elders and a YAAD age 17-22. At the Commission meeting I will be asking for commission members help in achieving this goal.

In order to consider and address various aspects of the Assembly, I convened four planning teams: by-laws and standing rules writing team; Assembly design team; assembly worship team; and YAAD planning team.

The by-laws and standing rules team consists of TE Carl Wilton, Stated Clerk Monmouth Presbytery; RE Warren McNeill, Stated Clerk Newark Presbytery and Synod Moderator-Elect; TE Jeanne Radak, Presbytery Leader, Newton Presbytery; and TE Steve Plank, Communicator/Stated Clerk, Cayuga-Syracuse Presbytery. This writing team had originally written the new by-laws and standing rules to reflect the New Way Forward in 2014. They reconvened to consider necessary changes to reflect the GAPJC case on representation and to make sure that the standing rules reflect the current operations of the Commission and Synod.

The Assembly design team consists of TE Jeniffer Rodriguez, Hudson River Presbytery; RE Frances Thom, New York City Presbytery; TE Shannon Vance-Ocampo, Transitional Leader, Albany Presbytery; RE Warren McNeill, Stated Clerk, Newark Presbytery; and TE Stephen Fearing, Long Island Presbytery. The design team has focused on ways to plan the Assembly that will provide the opportunity to do the necessary governance work, but within an atmosphere that feels similar to that of Come to the Table.

Both TE J. Herbert Nelson, PCUSA Stated Clerk, and RE Tony De La Rosa, Interim Executive Director of the Presbytery Mission Agency will be participating in the Assembly.

The worship team consists of TE Terri Ofori, Bloomfield College Chaplain and Synod Chaplain; RE Warren McNeill, Stated Clerk, Newark Presbytery; and TE Thia Reggio, Synod Moderator. They are preparing for Warren McNeill's installation as Moderator of the Synod.

The YAAD planning team consists of TE Sarah Hooker and RE Chris Hooker, Susquehanna Presbytery; TE Stephen Choi, Newton Presbytery; and Samantha Brewer, Albany Presbytery. Samantha attended GA as Albany's YAAD. This team is planning the YAAD orientation as well as activities during the assembly that will provide YAADs with time to reflect and consider any actions they wish to bring to the Assembly.

We will discuss the details of Synod Assembly at the September Commission meeting.

❖ Serve as a member of the Synod Leadership Team

Identify people synod-wide to serve on Special Administrative Review Committees (SARCs), Administrative Commissions (ACs) and Investigating Committees (ICs). Train new SARCs, ACs and ICs concerning their authority, focus, responsibilities, and limitations. Check in frequently with SARCs and ACs and remain available to ICs for questions and clarification throughout the life of the group.

Shortly after the Palisades SARC final report was presented by the committee at a called meeting of Palisades Presbytery, I received a call concerning a request for a Special Administrative Review Committee in another presbytery. This will result in my bringing information to the Commission concerning this request in September.

❖ Coordinate the Mediation Network

After the Spring Mediation Skills Training Institute that took place at Stony Point, TE Carl Wilton, TE Jeanne Radak and I met to enlarge the steering team of the Mediation Network. It now includes TE Stephen Choi, Newton Presbytery; RE Ana Davila, New York City Presbytery;

RE Chip Low, Hudson River Presbytery; TE Jeanne Radak, Newton Presbytery; RE William Wilkinson, Genesee Valley Presbytery; TE Carl Wilton, Monmouth Presbytery and TE Nancy Talbot, Synod.

We will be meeting in mid-September to plan regional meetings where members of the network can practice their skills as they await mediation requests. The steering team will also begin work to solicit other members

of the Mediation Network who have already been trained and on advertising to make sure that presbytery leaders, stated clerks, presbyter moderators and COM moderators are aware of the network and take advantage of it when the need arises.

- ❖ Continue to staff the Newark Administrative Commission (NAC) and provide support to the Presbytery.
  - Serve as a sounding board and provide advice to members of the NAC, Vision Accountability Board, Newark's Stated Clerk and Transitional Director of Ministries.
  - Serve as a communicator between various groups and the NAC so that everyone has the same information and is working from the same assumptions.
  - Track Benchmarks provided by the Synod that need to be fulfilled before the NAC is dissolved. Remind NAC and the Vision Accountability Board the activities/actions that remain to be done.
  - Provide minutes from NAC meetings to the presbytery.

The NAC is making progress in cleaning out the underbrush that will continue to drag the presbytery down unless it is dealt with during the life of the NAC. All church properties that the presbytery has been carrying that do not have active churches have now been sold. Work continues on making sure financial procedures are in place and operating properly.

Two churches of the presbytery that have administrative commissions in place continue to work through thorny issues that often require my attention and that of the Synod Leader's. It is our hope that these ACs will have made significant progress by the time the NAC is dissolved.

The NAC continues to hold small meetings within the presbytery gatherings so that members of the presbytery can discuss issues, examine potential Teaching Elders and make their opinions known before the NAC votes. This method of operating provides more transparency during this time when the presbytery cannot vote. Although dissolution of the NAC was anticipated by the end of this calendar year, it is not clear that this will be possible. It all depends on how quickly the leaders of the presbytery can address or fulfill the Synod benchmarks.

I have received several disciplinary complaints in Newark Presbytery which require the development of three Investigating Committees. I am in the process of identifying people to serve on these committees and will request that the Newark Synod AC appoint these members at its next meeting in September. This will be followed by training of the Investigating Committees separately since the information is confidential.

## ❖ Our Synod Overtures at General Assembly

For a first discussion and vote at GA our synod overtures did very well. The overture proposing to amend the Book of Order so that Sessions can ordain Ruling Elders for service beyond their congregation such as in a presbytery or a synod received much discussion both in committee and on the GA floor. This overture which opens up who is welcome at the governing tables or higher councils clearly resonated with YAADs, clergy spouses who currently cannot serve on many sessions and therefore cannot serve on any mid-council, and those engaging with immigrant fellowships and worshipping communities. The overture lost by a slim margin and then was referred by an Assembly voice vote to the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly (COGA).

The second overture which was a request for a constitutional interpretation of resolving tensions between different sections of the Book of Order resulted in the following affirmation from the Assembly. “The 222nd General Assembly recognizes the value of making room for all people at the table of decision-making in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). We urge councils, at all levels, to actively consider ways to involve, in the whole life of the church, those previously left out from the table. This includes, but is not limited to, young adults, and those involved in new worshipping communities. We further recommend to the Synod of the Northeast to continue their productive conversations regarding this issue and bring to the 223rd General Assembly a tangible recommendation.”

Over the next two years we will work with COGA concerning the first overture. In addition, we will continue to have discussions within the synod that include ways shape the proposed constitutional interpretation as well as any additional overtures to answer those most concerned with the implications for these changes.

*September 2016*