

# John Knox Presbytery 2017 Vision Narrative

*John Knox Presbytery is a community of communities, centered on Jesus Christ, linked to one another, boldly responding to the Spirit's call to join God's mission.*

## Introduction

God's deep love reaches out to rescue and renew all of creation through the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. We live in a moment of rapid, disruptive, global and cultural change. New dynamic realities challenge our lives and ministries. These emerging realities change everything, including how our presbytery functions. Yet God's mission of good news remains unchanged. We, the congregations and people of John Knox Presbytery, choose to live into God's mission, embracing it as our own. Supporting one another, we recognize today's challenges to be opportunities to listen for and follow the Spirit in fresh approaches that reveal the gracious, joyful reign of the Triune God.

We are a presbytery of 60 congregations, large and small, rural, urban, and suburban, spread across three states. As far-flung witnesses to God's grace at work in our own unique communities, we find strength in our diversity, and rejoice in our unity. Within our respective congregations and our connectional life together, a radical reorientation is taking place. Behaviors, practices, and hopes are no longer focused inward on issues of institutional survival or matters of governance. Instead, we turn outward, risking ourselves spiritually and physically, that we might be, and communicate, good news to our neighbors, new friends, and the communities we inhabit. Like the apostle Paul, we venture on a missionary journey guided by God's Holy Spirit.

## Presbytery

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We recognize that any journey outward must be accompanied by a journey inward to receive the spiritual resources needed for fruitful ministry. That is why elders cannot wait to attend our four Presbytery gatherings annually.

- Marked by renewing worship, empowering Bible study, and by spiritual and theological reflection, they give life to soul and mind.
- With each gathering, expectations are high and a palpable camaraderie is deepened through listening, praying, caring, and extending Christ's love to one another.
- We celebrate the mission efforts of our congregations and regions at every meeting, recognizing that congregations do not exist to support the Presbytery; the Presbytery exists to strengthen and develop congregations.
- An annual Presbytery-wide retreat provides time away to experience the Spirit's renewal and gain fresh capacities for congregational ministry and mission.

Unwilling to seek quick fixes for what is wrong, or return to the comforts of Egypt, we take on spiritual and strategic issues in a manner that brings about deep transition and ongoing transformation. When making decisions as a council, our actions as a Presbytery are based not on the past or present, but on a new sense of what God is doing in our midst.

41 ➤ Institutional upkeep and larger denominational issues are handled responsibly, but our  
42 clear priority is to equip and encourage elders to lead their congregations in ministry  
43 and mission.

44 ➤ We are a community where ruling elders and teaching elders have equal voice, equal  
45 vote, and equal value.

46 ➤ Aware that sometimes our processes stifle and restrain ministry, we continually strive  
47 for a more fluid, permission-giving culture through our procedures and trusting  
48 relationships. Our organizational structures stimulate innovation, maximize our  
49 energies, and focus our efforts to strengthen congregations to reach new people and  
50 deepen spiritual life.

51 Like Abram, we have gathered up our possessions to go on a journey into the unknown  
52 because of our faith in God's leadership.

### 53 **Regional clusters**

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56 Presbytery's priority, to support and nurture healthy, fruitful congregations, is primarily  
57 carried out in our five regional clusters of churches. These clusters are vital centers of  
58 resource and connection, providing life, energy and encouragement.

59 Here is a safe place for elders to engage in honest, robust conversation, relationships that  
60 renew; sharing wisdom; personal support; focused study and training; mutual accountability;  
61 and interpretation of the local mission field. Here is a place where treasured paradigms,  
62 traditional assumptions and familiar ways of seeing and doing things may be questioned.  
63 With unflinching and loving honesty, we help one another assess our strengths and  
64 weaknesses, challenges and potential. We stay alert to the Spirit by praying regularly for one  
65 another, our congregations, and those who have yet to know God's grace and love.

66 ➤ Relevant workshops, special training events, and social occasions create enthusiasm  
67 among other church and local community leaders.

68 ➤ Every cluster serves as a mission incubator, birthing cooperative projects  
69 among congregations and neighbors that bless the communities they occupy.

70 ➤ Seven new "worshipping communities" are launched.

71 ➤ Led by regional coordinators, each cluster regularly assesses the needs of its region  
72 and the neighborhoods within it to determine how they might help people hear and see  
73 a demonstration of the good news of God's justice, compassion and care.

74 ➤ Each congregation is inspired and offered assistance to complete a visioning process  
75 to distinguish God's specific call to this congregation as each one seeks to be effective  
76 in its own setting. As a result, every church has a clear sense of who it is, what it  
77 values, where it is going, and how to get there.

78 ➤ We recognize that some of our churches struggle for their lives and we find ways for  
79 them to complete their ministry with gospel dignity.

80 The vast majority of our congregations are developing new capacities to be culturally  
81 relevant to their geographic communities and the groups they are called to serve. Together  
82 we help one another discern specific paths to share the practical love of Jesus with those to  
83 whom God has sent us. Like Ananias, who responded to God's call to go minister to Saul,  
84 someone opposed to the faith, our clusters encourage one another to cross barriers to minister  
85 in places and among people where we may feel discomfort... to discover Christ is already  
86 there and we are simply following his lead.

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## 88 **Congregations**

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92 Congregations are vehicles of grace, through which God changes the human heart and  
93 reaches a hurting world. Our local churches are front line agents for God's gathered and  
94 scattered ministry. Drawn by the Spirit to gather each week for worship, care and fellowship,  
95 members are then sent out to discover what God is up to outside the church and to make  
96 God's love real in the places they live and work and play. The church fulfils its mission at  
97 that edge, where those who belong to the community of faith engage and interweave their  
98 lives with those outside the community. We do more than wait for them to come to us; we go  
99 out and engage them. All congregations focus on pursuing God's unique vision for them,  
100 made plain through a process of group discernment. They are clear about their mission,  
101 confident about their future, agile, responsive and engaged with the purposes of Christ in the  
102 world.

- 103 ➤ Members and leaders alike take advantage of learning and training opportunities,  
104 provided by the regional clusters and Presbytery's robust website.
- 105 ➤ Representatives from Sessions share ideas and best practices via teleconference, while  
106 struggling congregations, open to change, receive the guidance and help they need to  
107 move forward.
- 108 ➤ Strategies to interrupt decline are developed and implemented.
- 109 ➤ Meeting the needs of those already in the church is important, but we understand that  
110 the church exists primarily for those who have yet to experience God's grace in  
111 Christ, especially youth, young adults, and ethnic populations. This impulse leads  
112 every congregation to creative outreach that winsomely displays Christ's presence.
- 113 ➤ Larger congregations partner with smaller congregations.
- 114 ➤ Teaching curriculums, successful stewardship approaches, and significant sermons are  
115 shared through an on-line database of resources.

116 Congregations are increasingly linked and know one another as they participate in regional  
117 gatherings for learning, service and worship. Presbytery is no longer spoken of as an  
118 intrusive governmental entity, but as a relational web of positive witness and support. As the  
119 gospel mission catalysed the outward movement of the early church, so we are motivated and  
120 bonded as partners in mission.

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122 **Technology**

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125 We use technology both as a bridge to reach those outside our church walls, and as a means  
126 to share information with one another, recognizing that society, and the younger generation  
127 especially, is more connected than ever. Virtual web communities push us to explore  
128 ministry that connects and builds relationships with persons in our communities and beyond,  
129 who may be strangers to God's grace.

130 ➤ Congregations with a clearly articulated vision are resourced to build their own  
131 websites which function as new front doors to their ministries.

132 ➤ We offer training in how to use selected technologies and social media to share God's  
133 love, inviting others to join in God's transforming work in the world.

134 ➤ We experiment with new ways to use our five teleconference sites for education,  
135 presbytery business, cluster connections, session and presbytery training, and to  
136 promote church-to-church relationships.

137 ➤ A robust online community of church leaders and members has developed around our  
138 main website. Here they discover inspiring video narratives, learn from helpful  
139 workshops and slideshows, celebrate regional mission initiatives, join our edgy blog,  
140 explore links that point them to other helpful websites, and receive basic information  
141 about presbytery events.

142 Even as the apostle Paul used ships, Rome's roads, parchment and the technologies of his day  
143 to extend and support the mission of God, so we seek to use technology in ours.

144 **The Times They Are A Changin'... and We With Them**

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148 Ezra records the rebuilding of the temple by describing the ceremony that accompanies the  
149 laying of the new foundation, a service marked by prayers, singing, and the sound of trumpets  
150 (Ezra 3.10-13). The people responded with shouts of praise because a new temple was laid.  
151 But many of the priests and heads of families who had seen the first temple wept loudly. So  
152 great was the sound that it was hard to distinguish the joyful shouts from the mournful  
153 weeping.

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155 Shouts of joy and sounds of weeping... these are the signs of change. Every one of us is  
156 responsible for the mission God gives us. We realize that we need to change our own  
157 patterns, attitudes and behaviors. This kind of change is not easy. It demands courage. It  
158 requires both praying hands and dirty fingernails. Not everything will go smoothly. But God  
159 is with us, and it is God who will take an ordinary Presbytery into an extraordinary future.

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