



SEVEN SAMPLES OF URBAN MINISTRY

The
FINAL REPORT
On
National Capital Presbytery's
2015 Urban Visioning Network Dialogues

Coordinated by the
Black Presbyterian Caucus
Of the Presbytery

by

Rev. Ronald E. Peters, Ed.D.
Consultant

February 2016
National Capital Presbytery
Washington, D.C.

Acknowledgement:

This report is written in acknowledgement of the privileged blessing that Professor Gayraud S. Wilmore has been and continues to be in my life for more than forty years: scholar, mentor, role-model, and friend. Borne of his towering intellect, passion, and faith in God as revealed in Jesus Christ, his books *Black & Presbyterian: The Heritage and the Hope* (Geneva Press, 1983; Witherspoon Press, 1998) are background reading for the matters discussed in this report.

Ronald E. Peters

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away... And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God... And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home; of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.'

-from John 21:1-4

*History, despite its wrenching pain,
Cannot be unlived, but if faced
With courage, need not be lived again.*

*Lift up your eyes
Upon this day breaking for you.
Give birth again
To the dream.*

- Maya Angelou: *On the Pulse of the Morning*

CONTENTS

1.	Abstract	i
2.	Introduction	ii
3.	Part A: Getting Started	1
4.	Part B: Annotated Chronology of Activities	4
	Phase 1 - (March/April), Definition	4
	Phase 2 - (May/August), Examination	7
	Phase 3 - (September/October), Analysis/ Strategy Review	10
	Phase 4 - (November/December), Report/Recommend	12
5.	Part C: Seven Samples of Ministry	
	Summary Dialogues	13
	Faith Presbyterian Church	14
	Church of the Pilgrims	21
	Church of the Redeemer	27
	Northeastern Presbyterian Church	31
	Northminster Presbyterian Church	32
	Sargent Memorial Presbyterian Church	35
	Westminster Presbyterian Church	41
6.	Part D: Emergent Themes	45
7.	Part E: Observations, Recommendations, Conclusion ...	53
	Observations	53
	Recommendations	56
	Conclusion	59

National Capital Presbytery
URBAN MINISTRY NETWORK VISIONING PROJECT

ABSTRACT:

Between March and December 2015 National Capital Presbytery, through its Mission Committee, designated its Black Presbyterian Caucus to explore possible development of an *Urban Ministry Network* within the District of Columbia. This exploration was planned as a ten-month period of study, dialogue, and discernment called the *Urban Visioning Project*. Ronald E. Peters served as consultant for the project's facilitation based on his book, *Urban Ministry: An Introduction* (Abingdon, 2007) as the assigned text for this discernment period.

Based on the assigned book, a series of meetings and phone interviews were implemented between May and September among the seven District-based congregations (*Faith, Pilgrims, Redeemer, Northeastern, Northminster, Sargent, and Westminster Presbyterian Churches*) whose urban ministries are sampled in the dialogues. The project concluded with an Open Space presentation at the 17 November 2015 meeting of Presbytery with Dr. Peters preaching during Presbytery. Utilizing the Presbytery's *Mission Statement*, the report summarizes these seven samples of urban ministry, makes observations drawn from the dialogues, and offers recommendations regarding future considerations for an *Urban Ministry Network*.

INTRODUCTION

Confident in the “new and living way” of Jesus Christ, we, the leaders of National Capital Presbytery, commit ourselves to “hold fast to the confession of our hope... encouraging one another to love and good works,” (Hebrews 10:20-24). Guided by the Word, sustained by the sacraments, and empowered by the Spirit, we will participate with God to strengthen and transform our congregations to be Missional, Pastoral, and Prophetic, so that we might glorify God in actions and attitudes that demonstrate the love revealed through Jesus Christ our Lord to the world.¹

The Washington metropolitan area with its 7,061,530 persons² comprises the seventh largest and, by some measures, possibly the most affluent of the nation’s urban areas. This is the “neighborhood” or *parish* of National Capital Presbytery’s 108 congregations and 31,325 members lodged in the region’s five counties each of Virginia and Maryland as well as the District of Columbia. Despite its singular uniqueness as the nation’s capital (with all the political, bureaucratic, ideological, economic, military, technical, and cultural complexity this distinction involves), this *urban parish* clearly constitutes an excellent barometer of the landscape of Christian ministry today in the United States.

As such, National Capital Presbytery’s efforts to clarify and enhance the effectiveness of Christian witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the incredibly plural context that urban ministry represents is of tremendous import not only to this region, but also for the Church generally. With over 80% of the United States and more than half of all people globally found in the urban arena, efforts to more sharply define relevant strategies for proclaiming the Gospel in these ever-changing and increasingly challenged settings are of paramount importance.

The *Vision Statement* of National Capital Presbytery, cited above and approved in 2012, affirms the Presbytery’s self-perception as a “*relational network*,

¹ *Vision Statement* of National Capital Presbytery, adopted 24-Jan-2012. See website: <http://www.ncp.devholder.com/about-us/vision-statement> / accessed 24-Sept-2016.

² U.S. Census Bureau: <https://www.census.gov/search-results.html?q=2015+washington+metro+area+population&search.x=11&search.y=10&search=submit&page=1&stateGeo=none&searchtype=web> / accessed January 2016.

celebrating the diversity among the citizens of the realm of God in service to God's mission." The statement goes on to list the following as the first of its three emphases identified through 2017:

We will challenge, equip, and support our congregations and their leaders in their discernment of God's invitation to discipleship, as we:

- Serve as a catalyst for mission by connecting congregations with common local, national and international mission interests.
- Bear public witness, bringing a prophetic word to the powers and principalities of the world based upon the love, truth and justice of God in Jesus Christ.
- Provide a forum for our leaders and congregation members to reflect theologically.
- Connect ruling elders across congregations enriching their missional identity as apostles sent into the world in service to God's mission.
- Equip congregations in their discipleship formation of children, youth, young adults and adults.

It is against this backdrop that the ten-month period of study and dialogue between March 1 and December 31, 2015 of National Capital Presbytery's Mission Committee and its Black Presbyterian Caucus (BPU) known as the *Urban Visioning Project* must be understood. As the project began to take shape, it immediately became clear that it sought to structure a process of discernment and possible clarification of what a **Presbytery urban vision** might look like with particular attention to needs of congregations located within the District of Columbia. Moreover, it was clear that such *urban visioning* as might be discerned would certainly include at its center of focus the gifts, unique challenges, and potential participant BPU congregations in the District.

This was not surprising in that the *Urban Visioning Project* was initiated with a proposal to Presbytery's Mission committee from Black Presbyterians United in

January 2015. Although initiated by the BPU, the proposal reflected the etiquette of society's contemporary "post-racial" ethos. It described the proposed project's aims utilizing race-neutral language with sociological and theological terminology that avoided any reference to race. Its introduction, purpose, and rationale statements were as follows:

Introduction

The communities in which our urban congregations reside have experienced astounding change over the life-span of these institutions. Contexts have shifted dramatically; what once was the appropriate focus and practice of ministry is no longer the same in a great many situations....

Purpose

To facilitate within our congregations during 2015 a process of prayerful discernment regarding the urban mission of the National Capital Presbytery executed through the Urban Ministry Network and its vision for 2016 and beyond as this Presbytery seeks to live out its witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ....

Rationale

Scripture is very clear that God expects *results* (Matthew 25:31-40; John 15:1-4 are but two of many examples of this biblical teaching). This proposal is structured, therefore, to assist NCP to clarify and define potential outcomes that can be quantified both empirically and spiritually as our urban congregations consider their future.

Clearly, its initiators intended this Urban Visioning project as a more inclusive effort than discernment among the District's nine congregations of Black Presbyterians United alone. Indeed, BPU had undertaken a self-assessment among its constituent congregations³ four years earlier in 2011, receiving responses from

³ The 2011 BPU survey of congregations included two Black churches outside the District (Community and Prince George) in addition to District churches: Faith, Fifteenth Street, Garden Memorial, Northeastern, Northminster, Redeemer, Sargent Memorial, Sixth and Westminster.

nearly 53% of the 728 average weekly attendance of these congregations.⁴ In summarizing its findings, Rev. Eleanora Ivory who conducted the survey on behalf of BPU, commented on the context in which ministries of these congregations were taking place:

Demographic changes in communities throughout metropolitan Washington, DC as well as the daunting economic and environmental conditions and current complex political dynamics all give graphic evidence to the need for people of faith to not only stand in the breach, but to contribute to a discipleship infused with actions that manifest God's work in the world today.⁵

The summary concludes by affirming the Caucus' commitment to being in active partnership with future efforts to discern ways and formats to more effectively engage this context:

BPU is determined not to be, simply a spectator but to be active in seeking social justice for all people. We begin this new commitment as a *COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS*, a caucus of the National Capital Presbytery (NCP) and a chapter of the National Black Presbyterian Caucus (NBPC), but we are open to whatever identity, structure and direction to which we believe God is calling us in the future.⁶

With 9 of the 15 Presbyterian churches in the District being significantly or predominately African American in membership, participants in the Caucus, and the Caucus being the architect of the project, Presbytery's Mission Committee understandably assigned BPU as its organizational designee to facilitate this discernment process on its behalf.

⁴ Rev. Eleanora Ivory. "Black Presbyterians United 2011 Congregational Survey Summary." An unpublished document shared among BPU constituent church leaders. Fall 2011, p 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p 11.

⁶ *Ibid.*

As such, BPU immediately found itself facing the task of addressing one of the most dominant and persistent stereotypes concerning urban ministry: its perception as essentially ministry among the socially challenged: the poor, disenfranchised, disregarded, and devalued constituencies in society. Moreover, in cities like the District of Columbia, where large percentages of the residents are Black (still slightly more than half in D.C.) the phrase “urban ministry” is typically viewed in many predominately White denominational and seminary settings as “code-word” or stereotype for ministry among “those people” who are not the denominational norm. After all, the Presbyterian Church (USA) is largely a White (more than 90%) as is most of its seminaries and largely a suburban denomination.

That said, this stereotype of urban ministry did not prevent a vibrant dialogue among representatives of seven churches both historically Black and White: Faith, Pilgrims, Redeemer, Northeastern, Northminster, Sargent, and Westminster. Because of the brevity of such a comprehensive project, from proposal request to completion within ten-months and inclusion of a consultant based in another city, its methodology fell short of designed protocols at several points (short lead time, communication glitches, scheduling conflicts, planned video and/or audio recording of dialogue sessions by arranged locally did not happen, and such). Church members and clergy were to have been involved with the concurrence of sessions from participating churches committing financially to the project and the like. An ambitious effort, its short lead time made it difficult to implement the project effectively among participant congregations. As a result, the Urban Visioning project included only four dialogues took place (Northeastern, Northminster, Redeemer, and Westminster) and three dialogues were phone interviews with pastors (Faith, Pilgrims, and Sargent).

Part 1 of this report begins with a synopsis of the project’s intended aims, methodology, and dialogue questions. Part 2 is an annotated chronology of activities & meeting minutes. A summary of the dialogues with churches and pastors⁷

⁷ Written responses to dialogue questions were received only from Redeemer. Sessions

constitutes Part 3. These are followed by Part 4, a digest of themes that emerged during the church and pastor dialogues in response to the pre-set dialogue questions. Part 5 is the summary observations and recommendations concerning the definition and establishment of an Urban Ministry Network within the Presbytery going forward. This section concludes the report's attempt to offer some thoughts that National Capital Presbytery might consider as it moves forward as a *"relational network, celebrating the diversity among the citizens of the realm of God in service to God's mission."*

Part A:
GETTING STARTED

In January 2015, the Black Presbyterian Caucus (BPU) of National Capital Presbytery (NCP) forwarded a proposal for assistance to explore the formation of an Urban Ministry Network to Presbytery's Mission Committee entitled the *Urban Visioning Project* (UVP). With funding granted, during its first project meeting with the consultant in March, BPU's UVP coordinating group⁸ intentionally defined the target group for its planned Urban Ministry Network as NCP churches *in the District of Columbia* that are historically Black churches active in BPU as well as historically Euro-American churches of the District of Columbia.⁹

Methodology:

The BPU Coordinating Committee chose to engage the services of Rev. Ronald Peters, Ed.D., beginning in March 2015 through December 2015, as *Urban Ministry Visioning Project* consultant. This decision was based on the group's prior identification of his book on *Urban Ministry: An Introduction* as the theoretical basis from which to explore options for the possible formation of the Urban Ministry Network (UMN).

While the group was anxious to begin the project as soon as possible, much remained to be done to identify realistic parameters of the effort such as contacting and securing commitments from the several congregations targeted for possible participation. It was determined that the urban ministry consultant would facilitate a discernment process concerning what an UMN might look like and accomplish in the Presbytery through coordination of study, church and community self-

⁸ Those in attendance at the monthly BPU meeting held March 9, 2015.

⁹ Consultant Notes from *NCP/BPU Urban Visioning Project Initial Meeting* held at Sargent Memorial, 12 March 2015.

examination and reflection on urban ministry, dialogue, and planning activities with participating congregations.

Working with *a coordination team of two individuals* identified by the NPC's Black Presbyterians United caucus (Dr. Brian Hamilton and Rev. Nancy Thornton) the consultant proceeded to arrange for contact with identified participating congregations. This discernment process was structured as a four-phase endeavor:

Phase 1 (March/April) = Definition.

Assisting participants, through sharing of congregational stories, in analysis of their present context of ministry.

Phase 2 (May/August) = Examination. Examination of issues involved regarding the challenges of once-mainline urban churches, with particular attention to Black and other PCUSA congregations in the District of Columbia, in reaching out to core-city communities.

Phase 3 (September/October) = Analysis/Strategy Review. Identifying emergent dialogue themes that may suggest possible foci and/or action steps going forward.

Phase 4 (November/December) = Report/Recommend. Refine UVP insights for crafting recommendations for consideration by participant congregations and Presbytery Mission Committee.

The following questions were drafted as discussion questions for congregational dialogues and phone interviews:

**2015 URBAN MINISTRY NETWORK
Church Representatives Summer Dialogue
QUESTIONS**

1. What makes this congregation unique?
2. In your opinion, what are *THE two characteristics* of your church that best serve the needs of the: (a) members? (b) surrounding community?
3. What is the single most important challenge facing your church today? (a) Why? (b) How is your church responding?
4. Given neighborhood information sampled from your church's ZIP code, what opportunities and/or challenges should your church consider going forward?
5. Does wide-spread fear and cynicism reflected in society (metal-detectors in public places, random violence, fear of strangers) affect your church's faith, worship, and/or other activities? If so, how?
6. How do urban and non-urban churches differ in character? What do they share in common?
7. What do you feel Presbyterian churches in the District are doing separately that might be strengthened by joint participation in an *Urban Ministry Network*?
8. What would you like to see an *Urban Ministry Network* do for your church?

**Part B:
Annotated Chronology of Activities
Phase 1 - Project Definition (March/April)**

MARCH

<u>Tuesday, 10 March</u>	#/hrs
1. Meeting materials prep:	
• Review background papers (2011 Survey)	6.0
• 10-Mar 2015 ph conversation/Brian Hamilton re 12 March meeting:	1.0
 <u>Wednesday, 11 March</u>	
2. Travel Pgh – D.C. 10:00A – 2:30P	4.5
3. Meet with Gayraud Wilmore, Allie Latimore, Brian Hamilton: 2:30 – 5:30p	3.0
Purpose = Review plans for 12 March meeting 3050 Military Road NW, Washington, D.C. 20015	
 <u>Thursday, 12 March</u>	
4. NPC/BPU Urban Ministry	
5. Visioning Meeting: 8:00a – 12:30p	4.5
SARGENT MEMORIAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH 5109 N. H Burroughs Ave., NE Washington, D.C. 20019	
6. Travel D.C. to Pgh: 12:30 – 4:30 pm	4.0

INSERT 1

**NCP/BPU Urban Visioning Project Initial Meeting
Sargent Memorial Presbyterian Church - 12 March 2015 / 9:00 – 11:35a**

Present: Faith Presbyterian Church: Bernice Parker Jones; Gina Askew (sp); Northeastern: Nancy Thornton, Allie Latimore; Sargent Memorial: Gayraud Wilmore (Honorably Retired); Southminster Church: Eleanora Giddings Ivory; Westminster: Brian Hamilton; Cameron Byrd (Honorably Retired), Donald Humphries, and Consultant, Ronald Peters

Dialogue Focus Points:

- **Consultant reflections: Urban Ministry Network Visioning Project (UMVP) & Urban Ministry's Focus on Social Justice:** Matthew 5:1-20, Jesus' description of agape/love characteristics, can be understood as qualities typifying a truly *just* society where life-affirming values are reflected. Passage challenges believers (vs. 20) to aspire to higher ethical values than society's usual ethical & policy leaders ("scribes, Pharisees"/economic-political-intellectual-religious elite). Also reflects a recurring aspiration in the human spirit to articulate ethical, legal/political, or religious foundations for justice in society that are core to "urban ministry." The Black experience in the U.S.A. provides stellar exemplars of this human quest for realization of a more just and life-affirming society: R. Allen, J. Gloucester, H. Tubman, F. Douglas, S. Truth, H. H. Garnet, Craft Laney, M. Bethune are representative along with legions more of the unnamed like them.

Benjamin Mays' *The Negro's God as Reflected in His Literature*, James Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power*, *God of the Oppressed*, *The Spirituals and the Blues*, Gayraud Wilmore's

Black Religion and Black Radicalism, Katie Cannon's *Black Womanist Ethics*, Jacquelyn Grant's *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus*, or Wilmore's *Black and Presbyterian: The Hope and the Heritage* (1983; updated 1996) are a sampling of resources written from Black religious experience that inform the bottom-up theological approach to urban ministry articulated in Peters' *Urban Ministry: An Introduction*. NPC/BPU's **urban ministry network visioning project (UMVP)** seeks to define a process by which "the heritage and hope" of this theological outlook can inform 21st century future NPC and other ministries.

- **2011 BPU Congregational Survey Results.** Survey revealed **top 5 priorities of respondents** regarding what they would like churches to add: (1) Larger attendance, (2) Programs for Youth; (3) Programs to aid poor; (4) Singles Ministry; and (5) Music/Choir. **Family/household composition of respondents:** 31% single; 27% married with children; 21% single with children; 11% single with other adults; 10% Single with children. **Age of respondents:** 31% 50-69; 26% 70+; 20% 30-49; 12% 18-29; 11% <17. **Overall focus of survey** was to identify information pertaining to current parish characteristics/goals as a means of informing possible future ministry directions. It did not attempt to assess perspectives concerning the wider communal context.
- **Gayraud Wilmore's 1983/1996 Black and Presbyterian: The Heritage and the Hope** editions could provide a conceptual "launch pad" for this year's Urban Ministry Visioning Project study and suggests a possible UMVP "product outcomes" visioning framework (to be determined).
- **BPU's Historic Emphasis for a Future Context.** How is BPU's historic emphasis on the Black heritage potentially helpful to a more ethnically plural urban ministry context so as to involve potential non-historically Black congregations (Euro-American, African, or other District and non-District churches included in the wider urbanized context of the metropolitan arena).
- **Potential congregations/constituencies not currently involved.** How to involve: (a) Historically Euro congregations in the District that may not see themselves as involved in "urban" ministry; (b) Suburban congregations outside the District that should be potential partners in UMVP; (c) Those who currently ought to be attending BPU meetings but who do not respond to notices and invitations; (d) Youth frustrated with church programming as currently structured & voting "with their feet" by absence from many struggling District congregations; and (e) Is it possible to structure "Minutes for Mission" presentations to promote the UMVP?
- **Technology Resources.** How will this UMVP creatively engage and address methodologies, values, and resources reflected in the Gen-X culture? For example, how can UMVP utilize media recording resources (video-documentaries shared via You-Tube, Twitter, Instagram and such)? How can UMVP involve many among participant congregations who are adept in recording, formatting, editing, and uploading this work for wider constituencies?
- **Reservoir of Retiree Resources.** This effort cannot forget the many retirees in our churches who are an under-utilized resource; they are a large skills & knowledge bank with potential for many forms of effective ministry if engaged.
- **Urban Ministry: An Introduction as UMVP Methodology.** Structure UMVP process of examining tenets/approaches of this text as subject matter of on-going presentations.
- **Meeting Times/Formats.** Schedule future UMVP "core" planning group sessions as

follows: (a) **An event-type format featuring presentation by REP** followed by dialogue; UMVP "core" planning group will finalize plans for these events via conference calls between face-to-face or Skype gatherings. (b) **Scheduling UMVP events at participant church just prior to a Community-oriented activity of the host congregation** (examples: **Faith Presbyterian's First Friday "Open Public Forums"** event; **Westminster's Jazz Nights on Fridays & Mondays**).

- **Next UMVP Face-to-face** event to take place at **Faith Presbyterian** - Bernice Parker Jones, Host Pastor. 4161 South Capitol St SW, Wash., D.C. 20032; Ph: 202.562-2035 at **April 24, 2015** Food will be served. UMVP event publicity, attendance confirmation (reservations for food?) to be determined (Rev. Parker Jones to coordinate??). **April UMVP Planning Team conference call: Thurs/April 16, 2015 /10-10:45a.**
- **September UMVP Face-to-face** event to take place at **Westminster Presbyterian** - Ruth Hamilton and Brian Hamilton, host pastors. 400 Eye Street SW, Wash., D.C. 20024; Ph: (202) 484-7700 at **4-5:45p Sept 21, 2015**. Food will be served. UMVP event publicity, attendance confirmation (reservations for food?) to be determined (Brian to coordinate??). **September Presbytery Meeting**. Don Humphries and Cameron Byrd to work on arrangements for REP to speak at NPC Presbytery meeting **Sept. 22, 2015.**
- **Introductory Letter**. Generic draft introducing UMVP crafted by RP; forwarded to all for final edit & determination as to who should send & sign.

APRIL

		#/hrs
	<u>Thursday, 16 April</u>	
7.	Prep time: Organizing initial presentation	2.5
	<u>Tuesday, 23 April</u>	
8.	Meeting materials prep:	
	• The City Theological Prep time	5.0
	• 23-April 2015 Ph Conf Call/BPU core team re 1 May presentation @ Faith Church meeting	1.0
	<u>Wednesday, 29 April</u>	
9.	Travel Pgh - D.C. 2:00 - 6:30P	4.5
	<u>Thursday, 30 April</u>	
10.	Meet w/ Rv Todd Sutton - 11:00 AM - 1:15 PM Church of Redeemer, 1423 Girard Street, NE 20017	2.0
11.	Meet w/Rv Bernice Parker Jones - 3:00 - 5 PM Faith Church, 4161 South Capital St SW, 20032	2.0
12.	Meet w/Dr. Brian Hamilton - 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM Westminster Church, 400 Eye Street SW, 20024	2.0
13.	Combined appointments travel time.	1.0

**Phase 2 - Activity Summary (May - August)
Examination**

MAY-JUNE

	#/hrs
<u>Friday, 1 May</u>	
14. Meet w/Nancy Thornton – 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM Northeastern Church, 2112 Varnum St, 20024	2.0
15. 6p Presentation at Faith Presbyterian Church 4161 South Capital St SW, 20032 (5:30 – 9:30p)	4.0
Travel D.C. to Pgh: 12:30 – 4:30 pm	4.0
<u>Wednesday, 13 May</u>	
16. Prep Time: review assess May 1 event and begin planning of next steps for summer/fall agenda	5.0
<u>Monday, 18 May</u>	
17. Call Brian Hamilton re Review/Feedback on next steps for summer	0.5
18. Call Nancy Thornton re Review/Feedback on next Steps for summer	0.5
<u>Wednesday, 20 May</u>	
19. Conference call w/Brian & Nancy Re Review/Feedback on next steps for summer	#/hrs 1.0
20. Juan Guthrie re establish mtg time: 2p	0.5
<u>Thursday, 21 May</u>	
21. Conference call w/Core BPU Team –11:10 – 11:50a Re follow-up on 1 May initial presentation/group meeting and next step plans for summer	1.0
<u>Friday, 22 May</u>	
22. Prep time: summer & fall activities/arrangements	8.25
<u>Tuesday, 26 May</u>	
23. Call Gail Nelson re establish mtg time = 10:06a	#/hrs 0.5
24. Juan Guthrie /text exchanges re meeting time	0.25
25. Brian re letter	0.5
26. Admin time: confirming appointments 11-15 June	3.0

JUNE

<u>17 – 18 June</u>	
27. Round Trip Travel Pgh-D.C.	#/hrs 10.0
28. Mtg w/Rev Gail Nelson / 17 June/ 5-6p	1.0
29. Northminster PC Mtg: 17 June /6-8p with Church Representatives (Rev. Gail Nelson, Ms. Reva Squire, Mr. Mark Sturdivant; Dr. Brian Hamilton, videographer)	2.0
30. Correspondence:	3.0

Insert 2

**URBAN MINISTRY NETWORK
of National Capital Presbytery**

May 26, 2015

Dear Friends,

As you know, our Presbytery has recognized a special urgency for a more contextual and dynamic interracial ministry in our area and has made a concerted effort to support congregations in D.C. On May 1st we met at Faith Memorial Presbyterian Church. We began this process with Rev. Dr. Ronald Peters, an Urban Ministry specialist in theology, theory, and practice, who began our dialogue with a presentation on *The City: A Theological Paradigm of Human Relationships*.

THIS SUMMER... in follow up to our initial gathering, we are inviting representatives from participant churches to explore options for moving forward in expanding our newly created urban ministry network. During June and July, Dr. Peters will be available at scheduled times to meet with representatives of participant congregations. These dialogues will explore issues involved in strengthening congregations and the Presbytery's Mission Coordinating Committee implementation of an Urban Ministry Network agenda in 2016. Church representatives are invited to schedule a two-hour meeting, to be held on site at their church and facilitated by Dr. Peters regarding congregation and community issues in addressing urban ministry challenges. Meeting dates and times are:

A) June 17 / 2:30 PM – 4:30 PM	D) July 15 / 2:30 PM – 4:30 PM
B) June 17 / 6:00 – 8:00 PM	E) July 15 / 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM
C) June 18 / 10:00A – 12:00 PM	F) July 16 / 10:00A – 12:00 PM

Once church representatives have indicated their preferred meeting time, confirmation details, the agenda, and preparatory reading materials will be shared. Background reading for all summer dialogue sessions will be (a) *Urban Ministry: An Introduction*, chapters 5 (“Urban Theology: A Bottom-Up Perspective”, p 55-74) and 10 (“Seeing with a Divine Lens: Issues and Networks in the City,” p 157-167).

THIS FALL... on September 21st at 4:00 PM, all Urban Ministry Network congregation representatives are invited to meet at the Westminster Church (400 Eye St, SW, 20024). During this two-hour gathering, the group will review learnings; affirm, refine, and explore ways to adjust ministry strategies in light of new insights from summer dialogues. We will identify: (a) implications for urban ministry with particular attention to emergent dialogue themes and potential focus areas; and (b) ministry strengths/interests as related to particular focus areas among participant congregations. On November 17, 2015 at Presbytery's special forum, insights from our Urban Ministry Network study/dialogue this year will be featured. Dr. Peters also will be the speaker at this Presbytery meeting. Please mark your calendars and plan on taking an active part in helping our Presbytery frame an effective *Urban Ministry Network!*

On behalf of the Urban Ministry Network Visioning Team
of Black Presbyterians United,

Rev. Nancy E. Thornton (Northeastern Church) and
Rev. Dr. Brian E. Hamilton (Westminster Church)



National Capital Presbytery: 2015 Urban Ministry Visioning Project PHASE 2 Activities

JULY	#/hrs
<u>15-16 July</u>	
31. Round Trip Travel Pgh-D.C.	10.0
<u>Wednesday, 15 July</u>	
32. Mtg. w/Westminster/10a – 12p With Rv Dr Brian Hamilton & 7 church reps	2.0
33. Mtg. w/Church of the Redeemer/3-4:45p With Pastor Todd Sutton & 4 church reps (Elder Jacobed Jordan and 3 others)	2.0
34. Mtg. w/Northeastern PC/6:00 – 8p With Rv Nancy Thornton & 4 church reps	2.0
AUGUST	#/hrs
35. Analysis, Prep: 14 (Aug 4.0); 17 Aug (2.0)	6.0
<u>Tuesday, 20 August</u>	
36. Phone consultation: Dr Brian Hamilton/ 1:45-3:15p Re: D.C./NCP realities	1.0

**Phase 3 - Activity Summary (September/October)
Analysis/Strategy Review**

SEPTEMBER	#/hrs
<u>Tuesday, 8 September</u>	
37. Phone Interview: Rv Bernice Parker Jones/ 1:45-3:15p Re: Faith PC/12:30-1:15P	1.0
<u>Wednesday, 9 September</u>	
38. Phone Interview: Rv Jeff Krehbiel/4:10-5:25 1:45-3:15p Re: Church of the Pilgrims PC/12:30-1:15P	1.0
<u>Thursday, 10 September</u>	
39. Phone Interview: Rv Juan Guthrie/1-2:10p Re: Sargent Memorial PC/12:30-1:15P	1.0
40. Phone Consultation: Dr. Brian Hamilton/ 3:45-4:30p Re: Prep for 21 Sept. D.C. meeting	1.0
41. Analysis; prep time for 21 Sept. D.C. meeting	2.0
<u>Monday, 21 September</u>	
42. Round Trip Travel Pgh-D.C./21 Sept	10.0
43. UMP Meeting @ Westminster PC/4-9PM	5.0

Insert 2

**URBAN MINISTRY DIALOGUE /BPU-NCP
SEPTEMBER 21, 2015 – R. Peters Notes**

Attendance:
Bob Bell (15th Street), Kendra Bellamy (Westminster), Jeanette Blackman (Redeemer), Karen Chamis (NCP), Vyllory Evans (Westminster), Brian Hamilton (Westminster), Ruth Hamilton (Westminster), Gerry Hendershot (Pilgrims), Elenora Giddings Ivory (Southminster), George Kerr (Westminster), Jeff Krehbiel (Pilgrims), Bernice Parker Jones (Faith), Juanita Robinson (Redeemer), Todd Sutton (Redemer).

Meeting opened at 4:05p with welcome and opening prayer by Brian and was immediately followed with sharing brief introductions among attendees. Ron led the group through the original wording of the envisioned purpose of this year's activities (see attached) and *summarizing activities and reflections on UMN activities* through this point:

- A. MAY 1 – Introductory UMN Gathering – Faith Church
- B. CHURCH SUMMER DIALOGUES (June – July)
 - Northminster
 - Northeastern
 - Church of the Redeemer
 - Westminster
- C. PASTOR CONVERSATIONS (Early September)
 - Faith – Bernice Parker-Jones
 - Pilgrims – Jeff Krehbiel
 - Sargent – Juan Guthrie

D. CONSULTANT PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS FROM CHURCH/PASTOR DIALOGUES:

1. Very Tentative approach/many questions regarding Urban Ministry Vision (within the District)
2. Questions evident regarding purpose, goals, benefits to participant churches/wider presbytery
3. Lack of consensus on what UMN group means by "urban" ministry

E. RECOMMENDATION CONSIDERATIONS (*DISCUSSION AT THIS MEETING*):

1. **Define urban ministry in D.C.** (There is a lack of clear vision of urban Ministry as this relates to the D.C. context)
2. **BPU/District Participating congregations need to develop consensus /decision to craft what they mean by "collective approach" to urban ministry in this context:** Leadership should make a decision to collaborate rather than independently compete.
3. **Identify UMN Collaborative Goals** (in parish and public ministry spheres): Relationship Building among participant churches and racial justice dialogue regarding D.C. realities.
4. **Identify UMN goals (benefits/relationship to) NCP/Mission Cmte & Churches**

DIALOGUE SUMMARY (*not verbatim, but broad summaries or paraphrase from notes. Speakers identified are asked to correct any misrepresentations*):

Suggestions of what UMN definition and concrete goal identification should include:

JEFF: What is the purpose of the Urban Ministry Network? I/our church works to address a number of important issues in the city (for example, via *Washington Interfaith Network (WIN)* and *Next Church* dialogue). What is the UMN seeking to accomplish? We do not need "something else" to do unless addressing concerns not otherwise addressed.

GERRY: What is urban ministry? How is this UMN group defining it?

BRIAN: We're Presbyterian (connectional).

- We must address congregational revitalization & mutual support.
- There is no "one" urban anymore, but many "urbans."
- Redevelopment is part of what we must address for challenged urban churches in the city.
- BPU is concerned about the challenges facing our churches in the city: gentrification, high cost of housing, limited resources...
- The UMN network must be a caucus within NCP to help these churches do ministry in their communities.

ELENORA: BPU is interested in how churches in the District/Urban Network can work together jointly to achieve Black Presbyterian United goals for unity and equity throughout the Presbytery. We need to consider that urban ministry in D.C. does not refer to the poor only, but also includes middle-class (black and white) and wealthy.

BERNICE: Build relationships; we must share resources (examples include: Christian Education resources, a *skills bank* of available resource individuals among UMN congregations available to help participant network churches, shared training activities such as elder orientation, baptismal preparation classes).

RUTH: Urban Ministry must focus on justice, not labels. Perhaps we should use another title for this and leave "urban" out of it.

TODD: Concerns include:

- Challenged congregations such as Redeemer and issues of viability, vitality;

- Small church (80 members on roll)
- Congregational redevelopment; wellness
- Cooperative leadership development opportunities
- Encouragement
- Accountability

MEETING RECESSED from 6:00 to 7:00p for dinner break and opportunity to briefly partake of *Monday Blues Jazz Ministry* of Westminster Church

Next steps:

1. **FIRST READ DRAFT REPORT.** Ron will forward to *Urban Ministry Vision* participating congregations and *BPU Core team* to review by November 9th.
2. **URBAN MINISTRY VISION** participating churches and *BPU Core Team* will meet at **Church of the Pilgrims, November 16.**
3. **PRESBYTERY MEETING - NOVEMBER 17:**
 - a. **Open Space (4:00 – 5:30p)** - Presentation to be structured by an *Ad Hoc group* of ministers present (Brian, Bernice, Bob, Elenora, Jeff, Ruth, and Todd) & BPU Core Team consulting together and *coordinated by Brian*. This group will also reach out to those of BPU leadership not present at this gathering. Open Space potential workshops might include possible topics as (not complete list of suggestions): *Sharing Best Practices; Relationship Building; City Ministry Leadership Training; Ministries that Transform City Churches; Difficult Conversations in the City.*
 - b. **Presbytery Worship** - To be designed by NCP in consultation with Brian, Don and others with Ron as preacher for the service.

Meeting adjourned at 8:00 PM with closing prayer by Todd.

**Phase 4 - (November/December)
Report/Recommend**

NOVEMBER	#/hrs
<u>Monday, 16 November</u>	
44. Round Trip Travel Pgh-D.C./16 Nov.	10.0
45. UMP Meeting @ Pilgrims PC/6-8P	2.0
<u>Tuesday, 17 November</u>	
46. Open Space Presentation prior to National Capital Presbytery meeting convenes and Preach during Worship Service portion of the gathering	2.0
 JANUARY 2016	
<u>Sunday, 31 January 2016</u>	
47. Round Trip Travel Pgh-D.C./31 Jan 2016	9.0
UMP Meeting @ Westminster PC/2:30 – 4:30P	2.0

Part 3:

Seven Samples of Urban Ministry:

Summary Dialogues

Faith Presbyterian Church
Rev. Bernice Parker Jones

Church of the Pilgrims
Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Krehbiel

Church of the Redeemer
Rev. Todd Sutton

Northeastern Presbyterian Church
Rev. Nancy Elaine Thornton

Northminster Presbyterian Church
Rev. Gail Nelson

Sargent Memorial Presbyterian Church
Rev. Juan P. Guthrie

Westminster Presbyterian Church
Reverends Brian and Ruth Hamilton

FAITH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Rev. Bernice Parker Jones – Pastor (Temporary Supply)

Rev. Parker-Jones is an A.M.E. pastor “doing business as” a Presbyterian. She has been a “Temporary Supply” at Faith Church for 16 years following an invitation to help congregation in developing a Strategic Plan for church renewal. As a second career person, she had recently graduated from Howard Divinity School and an ordained A.M.E. minister (Metropolitan AME Church). When she came to Faith Church, Presbytery was considering closing congregation and considered merging it with Garden Memorial, but the congregation refused. Thus, she was invited to this church with the idea of assisting it to think strategically and plan development for the future. The membership has grown.

1. What makes this congregation unique?

One of the things that makes Faith Church unique is its willingness to explore new ideas and try new approaches, activities: the “open-mindedness” of the congregation. In spirit, it is not stuck in “we’ve always done it this way.” This is an active congregation in spite of its modest size.

For example, the church has a monthly *First Friday Night F.L.O.W.* program. This is an “open mic” night karaoke-type event where local artist (poets, musicians, comedians, and such) are able to perform in the church’s lower

auditorium in a type of religious “supper club” atmosphere. Cover charge is

The handout is a flyer for an event titled "1st Friday Night F.L.O.W. OPEN MIC NIGHT \$5.00 COVER CHARGE". It is dated "Friday, June 5th 7:30 pm". The flyer features a large, vintage-style microphone on the right side. Below the title, it says "FEATURING..." and lists several names: "Lashawn Frazier", "Lashawn Frazier", "Lashawn Frazier", and "Lashawn Frazier". The text describes the event as "Friday Night FLOW is an inspirational poetry and Open Mic Night held every 1st Friday at FAITH. We are looking for artists to sign up for open mics and feature spots." At the bottom, it provides contact information for Faith Presbyterian Church, including the name of the pastor, Rev. Bernice Parker-Jones, and the address: "3941 North Capitol St NE Washington DC 20011". The website "www.fpcfaith.org" is also listed.

Handout Announcing 1st Friday F.L.O.W. Faith Presbyterian Church – Wash., D.C.

minimal: \$5. The program is organized by laypersons. FLOW promotion mostly via Twitter, Facebook, cards. Other ministry ideas include: Game Night, Movie Night, "Sidewalk" Sunday School (hop-scotch/bible verses; sidewalk ministry to passers-by). Novel evangelism strategies needed; "old-school" methods do not work.

Average 11 AM Sunday attendance is about 45-50 except during summer when services are held earlier at 10 AM and attendance is about 25. Yet, church programs are offered that open the church on more than on Sundays & Wednesdays. The *Building Your Faith Institute* meets during the week (Tuesday and Thursday) and is led by laypersons. This ministry is dealing with women's issues and men's issues, addressing various topics in four-to-six week sessions.

We are learning from these exploratory experiences to try different approaches to reach out to the community. We've found it wise to (a) stick with "start-up" projects long enough for them to become more viable; and (b) learn from mistakes; if it doesn't work, try something else.

2. In your opinion, what are THE two characteristics of your church that best serve the needs of the: (a) members? (b) surrounding community?

One of the things that helps the church serve the needs of the congregation is its willingness to explore new ideas and try new approaches, activities. When a church is faced with limited financial resources and other types of challenges, this "open-mindedness" and not being stuck in the "we've always done it this way" attitude helps members to be more open to exploring options that strengthen their potential.

This benefits the church and the community. For example, Faith partners, where possible, with other neighborhood congregations regardless of denomination, to engage in community outreach ministry. For example, a

Street Ministry church that meets at Faith has been meeting at Faith Church for 5 years. The pastor of this ministry approached Rev. Parker Jones about possibilities of holding some activities, like Bible class or meetings at Faith and the partnership has continued since.

An additional challenge that cannot be overlooked is the fact that families are in transition as well as the society. People who have moved away must travel long distances to come to church.

**3. What is the single most important challenge facing your church today?
(a) Why? (b) How is your church responding?**

Finances or the lack of adequate funds is perhaps one of the most challenging problems facing the church. We struggle to pay bills. Meeting payroll is something larger churches, urban or suburban do not have to confront like congregations in poorer and more socially challenged communities like the Bellevue-Congress Heights neighborhood of Faith Church. New York Avenue Presbyterian Church does not have to deal with building repair or upkeep problems like Faith Church (asbestos tile still on the floor; needed funding to make the church handicapped assessable). This limits the ability of the congregation to address community needs.

We were once asked to partner with a neighborhood organization to assist with drug counseling, but could not because lavatory facilities are not ADA.¹⁰ Only the sanctuary is so equipped; but not lower auditorium. Although there are about 60-70 people on the church roll, there are only 50 persons actively involved and giving is modest. Our numbers and annual congregational income is too small for the church to get a loan to update the physical plant.

¹⁰ ADA or "Americans with Disabilities Act" signed into law 1990 by President George H.W. Bush.

4. Given neighborhood information sampled from your church's ZIP code, what opportunities and/or challenges should your church consider going forward?

The opportunity for this church is that this is a neighborhood with a lot of young people. You can see that especially in the apartments and new town homes with young adults. There are younger adults in the nearby new apartments that have been built. In the older homes, there tend to be older people who have been in the neighborhood longer, but in new housing, the people are younger. One of the real challenges our church must consider going forward is finding ways to reach these young people. Also, we must find a way to engage our young Black men and more children. The weakest area of current church ministry is children's programming.

There is also a lot of redevelopment in the community. There was a ribbon cutting for new housing complex with stores to be located on the first floor. There is economic interest on the part of some for development to build a new strip-mall down the street from us (Church trees abutting the property of the proposed new mall). There is also anticipation of new people moving into the community. So there is a lot of opportunity to reach out to a growing community.

Yet, this opportunity also presents us with a real challenge we must address: we must contemporize the worship style. Young people like to move away from the rituals; they like the lack of rituals (confessions, printed prayers, and such). There are real ideological, cultural style differences in society today: style of worship... more "old school," traditional and structured liturgy (elaborate printed program) as contrasted to a more "freestyle," contemporary, and less structured liturgy (little or no printed program at all; more video resources in worship).

One Sunday during worship, I simply invited members to build a "stone of help" as a way to us remember a time in our life when God clearly was very

present. The Communion Sunday order of service was altered to remove some of the ritual. Both amendments to worship were well received by the congregants. This effort to reach out to young people is "a work in progress." I must assure older people that "I'm not attempting to leave them out." At least one Sunday per month, we have a contemporary service and one Sunday, a very participatory (more traditional) service.

5. Does wide-spread fear and cynicism reflected in society (metal-detectors in public places, random violence, fear of strangers) affect your church's faith, worship, and/or other activities? If so, how?

Yes. People are worried because there is a lot of the crime that happens in the city occurs right here in our community. While the neighborhood of the church is a nice looking area, at night it is very dangerous. As winter approaches, people are afraid to come out at night and will not come to Bible study at night. Crime and negative social and economic factors are a problem.

I think the District has exceeded its murder statistics from last year for all of year, and we are only 9 months into 2015.¹¹ I would suggest that a significant number of the City's crime (don't know the statistics) takes place in this area and areas like this one.

There is a new effort to stop synthetic marijuana.¹² A lot of corner stores sell this stuff. Mayor Bowser's effort to close this out has really caused a lot of

¹¹ D.C. 2015 Murder statistics - (WUSA9), August 2015. The District of Columbia is now on pace for its deadliest year since 2008. The number of homicides in D.C. stands at 124 this year. In 2014, the homicide total was 105, according to Metropolitan Police Department's published crime data. Source: <http://www.wusa9.com/story/news/local/dc/2015/08/20/how-dc-2015-homicide-numbers-compare-other-years/32044145/> 11-Jan-2016

¹² Synthetic cannabinoids ("synthetic pot") refer to a growing number of human-made and mind-altering chemicals that are either sprayed on dried, shredded plant material so they can be smoked (herbal incense) or sold as liquids to be vaporized and inhaled in e-cigarettes and other devices (liquid incense). Often misleadingly called "synthetic marijuana" (or "fake weed"), they are frequently marketed as "safe," legal alternatives to that drug. In fact, they may affect the brain much more powerfully than marijuana, their actual effects can be unpredictable and, in some cases, severe or even life-threatening. Manufacturers sell these products in colorful foil packages and sell similar

anger. So there is a real concern about safety. There are a lot of young people who are unemployed and many of the more hopeless among young people are drug addicts and/or engaged in prostitution. Part of the problem is that our society and our churches are not engaging them positively.

6. How do urban and non-urban churches differ in character? What do they share in common?

That's something I'd have to give some thought to. Let me ponder this, because I wasn't sure that we defined what an urban church was. I'm still wrestling with what an urban church is because some of the urban churches and some of the suburban churches have some of the same issues. Visited a Korean church in a suburban area; listening to these pastors was like listening to my own story.

7. What do you feel Presbyterian churches in the District are doing separately that might be strengthened by joint participation in an *Urban Ministry Network*?

Not sure.

8. What would you like to see an *Urban Ministry Network* do for your church?

Immediate benefit would be sharing of information among participating congregations and resources available to do ministry. Also, a network of skilled people shared within the Urban Network (painters, electricians,

liquid incense products, like other e-cigarette fluids, in plastic bottles. They are sold in drug paraphernalia shops, novelty stores, gas stations, and through the Internet. Easy access and the belief that synthetic cannabinoid products are "natural" and harmless have contributed to their use among young people. Moreover, standard drug tests cannot easily detect many of the chemicals used in these products. Source: <http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/synthetic-cannabinoids> / 11-Jan-2016

plumbers, Christian Educators,) for small congregations that cannot afford these services. If a Northeast church had their electrical system done well and in cost effective way, let us know who did it. Maybe the contractor might provide us (Faith) a discount.

CHURCH OF THE PILGRIMS
Rev. Dr. Jeffrey K. Krehbiel

The following are responses of Rev. Dr. Jeff Krehbiel to dialogue questions of the UVM Project given during a phone conversation with the Consultant on September 9, 2015. Dr. Krehbiel has been Senior Pastor at Pilgrims since 2000.

1. What makes this congregation unique? Adaptation to its changed context over the years.

The Societal Differences in D.C. "then" and "now." We're in part of city where lots of young adults live. Back in the 1920s, people moved to D.C. to take advantage of the growing opportunities in government work. At that time, Pilgrim Church (COP) was designated as the national church of the Southern Presbyterian Church. If you were part of the PCUS, this is where you would come to worship in Wash D.C. In the 1960s, during the era of Civil Rights, "white flight" began to affect the city. Pilgrims lost membership like with rest of D.C.. Between 1960 and 1980, the population of D.C. went from about 900,000 to 500,000. Similarly, in 1960 COP was a 900-member church, but by the 1980s it was a 300-member congregation. When I came in 2000, the church had 100 members. By this time, the Civil Rights era, reunion of the Northern and Southern Presbyterian Churches, and the secularization of culture all had taken place.

We're in part of the city where lots of young adults live. The congregation's ability to change over time in effort to adapt and respond to changes in society, while not always easy, has been a constant factor that makes this congregation unique.

2. In your opinion, what are THE two characteristics of your church that best serve the needs of the: (a) members? (b) surrounding community?

Three things are important: (A) Make the church more appealing to new people; (B) To see ourselves as others see us; and (C) Being open to change.

(A) Making the congregation more appealing to new people. When I arrived, figuring out how to engage new people coming to D.C. and to COP was a big issue for the church. Image of Presbyterianism was not a factor. Very transient young people often are here in D.C. only to go to college, grad-school, and get “start-up” job. They will be here for a time until they finish their education and get their start in life and then they move on. To a great extent, other downtown churches have faced similar challenges: NY Ave, Western, Georgetown have similar dynamics.

Churches have to create *a reason for being* that is more attuned to young people today. This involves an approach to church involvement that includes them in leadership, perhaps even before they become members. The approach works. Over this time, the average age in the church has gone down from 60 to about 40 although we have not grown numerically.

(B) Seeing Ourselves as Others See Us. This has to do with the changing age demographic & geographic demographic. The young people coming to the church today may not have been Presbyterian at all or, if they were, they bring today’s issues and interests with them. Things that had been motivating factors for people to come to the church a generation before are no longer motivating factors for these new people to come to COP. We had to work hard to be able to see ourselves as others saw us. The issues of the 1960s and 1970s were not the concerns of the newer generation.

(C) Being Open to Change. People in any congregation where they feel connection and where they are invested, if new people come who are not like me and are different in age, background, race, nationality, or what have you... the question always arises: “will this still be a place for me?” This basic fear about change (leaving me out) is at the root of all resistance to change church leaders face in attempting implementation. There needed to be a planning

process to allow time to be sure that all participants were included and heard. We had to develop relationships in order to have meaningful and creative change.

**3. What is the single most important challenge facing your church today?
(a) Why? (b) How is your church responding?**

One of the most important challenges facing Church of the Pilgrims today is the inherited infrastructure of the building (old and in need of much maintenance). This remains the biggest challenge. The building really is too big for the present population. Yet, our congregation is heavily identified with the present structure and perceived mission of the church.

The challenge is that with its heavy maintenance costs, younger people are not able to contribute financially the amounts needed to help support the church in keeping with their numbers. The changed economic reality in the wider society is a factor. Older persons who bought homes long ago with a \$600 per month mortgage are in a very different situation from a young person right out of college today making \$60,000 per year in D.C. with \$2,000 per month rent to pay. They can't afford car payments much less a church pledge. It is even harder if one did not grow up in the church and not familiar with stewardship and church support. Today, sharing the building with ministries such a daycare center, the National Center for Coalition for Homeless, a Youth Offenders group, & Dance Instruction group are ways to help address facilities costs and meet the needs of the community we are called to serve.

4. Given neighborhood information sampled from your church's ZIP code, what opportunities and/or challenges should your church consider going forward? (Church of the Pilgrims' Neighborhood Demographics/statistics shared with dialogue questions)

Neighborhood demographics are different for churches like Faith and Sargent as compared to Church of Pilgrims. Sargent's neighborhood has higher poverty, but less homelessness. Pilgrim's neighborhood has higher homelessness, but lower poverty. Pilgrims has had a pretty active homeless ministry for 35 years. Pilgrims has long history of focusing outside its doors: long history of engagement with urban poverty (hands on ministry with Pilgrimage: a youth hostel service learning center. 1700 youth per year from various contexts around the country come and are hosted as youngsters learn about urban poverty. Pilgrims active in WIN (Washington Interfaith Network) that addresses.

5. Does wide-spread fear and cynicism reflected in society (metal-detectors in public places, random violence, fear of strangers) affect your church's faith, worship, and/or other activities? If so, how?

With our church located in DuPont Circle, this is not much of an issue. When I pastored in Wilmington, DE in a more challenged locale and context with members driving in from other areas, evening programming, for example, was difficult. Not here so much in this neighborhood.

6. How do urban and non-urban churches differ in character? What do they share in common?

I think 30 years ago, I would have had different ideas about that. But my experience now is that distinction is less and less than it used to be. When I was first ordained & the PCUSA had redevelopment conferences, what they meant by that was urban churches = inner city churches; churches that used to be White, but is now going to Black majority communities and how to deal with it. Today, hardly a church in the denomination is not facing issues of change in society. They are dealing with it in Fairfax, a long way away from Pilgrims. Issues like an influx of immigrants, homelessness, affordable housing, ESL: things that 20-30 years ago were unheard of such areas. Now,

these issues are found in Fairfax as well as in the inner city and faced by churches like New York Avenue and Church of the Pilgrims.

These are things Pilgrims talks about in our community organizing work with the Washington Interfaith Network (WIN).¹³ We have churches involved in WIN that are White, Black, Hispanic, middle-class, upper-class, and from poor neighborhoods. Take affordable housing, for example: we have young people who are working as teachers and firefighters, who can't afford to live in the city. Is there a housing strategy in D.C. that doesn't require every D.C. resident to make six-figure incomes to live here? Across lots of different demographics, disappearing middle-class housing in the District is a fact and the only ones being left in D.C. are either very rich or very poor.

7. What do you feel Presbyterian churches in the District are doing separately that might be strengthened by joint participation in an Urban Ministry Network?

One of my hopes for this effort is that it would bring about two conversations that have been going on in our Presbytery largely in isolation from one another. One of those is the conversations BPU has had over the years is about the particular challenges that Black churches in D.C. are facing in their mission and ministry. A lot have been struggling with changing demographics and changing neighborhoods, participation, and generational challenges unique to the Black Presbyterian experience that a church like Pilgrims does not share in the same type of way.

The other conversation happening in our Presbytery, largely among White congregations, is the *Next Church* movement (a national conversation, but

¹³ Jeff Kehiel. 16-Nov-15 email to UMV participants entitled *Follow up on Urban Min Network Dialogue*. - "I have shared previously about our deep involvement with the Washington Interfaith Network (WIN), a city-wide, multiracial, interfaith citizen's association.... I continue to believe that community organizing is one of the most fruitful ways that congregations can engage their communities in ways that make a real difference, and hope there is an opportunity at a future gathering to share more about WIN and our organizing work."

has its own particular formation in NCP involving what does it mean to be the church in the 21st century). How is the church going to be the church in a very changed environment? This conversation has been a fruitful one for Pilgrim, but has been largely among White church leaders little participation from African American and other leaders. Answers coming out this latter conversation give attention to community organizing & building relationships: an important strategy for COP.

8. What would you like to see an *Urban Ministry Network* do for your church?

Where are we going with this? What are the goals and objectives of this process? My goal is attempting to discern: where is this effort going to go? A priority of the next (future) meetings should be building relationships: are these the folk I would like to spend time working with and being involved with?

If church revitalization is part of the goal, what does “revitalization” look like? The Church self-assessment tool used by the Presbytery to determine (“holy cow consulting”) seeks to help congregations CAT-SCAN to determine “energy-level” for change. Perhaps this could be a useful tool in this process.

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

Pastor Todd Sutton

Dialogue date: 15 July 2015 / 3:00 – 4:45 PM

Church of the Redeemer Participants: Rev. Todd Sutton (pastor); Elder Jacobed Jordan, Jeanette Blackman, and 2 other persons.

Church of the Redeemer (COR) was organized in 1958 to better position the denomination to respond to civil rights challenges of the mid-twentieth century.¹⁴ Accordingly, COR members and leaders focus on aspects of the Christian faith that teach reaching out to the poor, oppressed, outcast, excluded, affirming God's love for people of every race and creed.

The church is in the Brookline area of the District, a largely Catholic neighborhood. Church of the Redeemer has 80 members on roll with an average Sunday attendance of 40-50 persons. 2015 Easter Sunday, attendance was about 60. The Rev. Todd Sutton, now in his fifth year as pastor, serves the congregation on a three-fourths time basis. The previous pastors were the Reverends Jefferson P. Rodgers (founding pastor), Cameron Byrd (9 years), Gregg Busby (5 years), and John Grabley (5 years). The church's original structure and sanctuary was built during the tenure of its founding pastor, Rev. Rodgers. There have been several additions to the edifice since then, the most recent taking place in 2002, which added offices, renovation of the Fellowship Hall, and retrofitting the facility to include access for disabled persons (ADA accessibility).

This mission statement seems to inform the ethos of the church's current functioning although its congregational activity is much reduced in size from former years. While the average age of its membership is older than when organized fifty-eight years ago or even twenty-nine years ago during the 1980s, COR's representatives engaged in this dialogue seemed clearly focused on "taking seriously Jesus' direction to the Disciples to 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" as its website indicates. Keenly aware that "society's

¹⁴ <http://www.thechurchofredeemer.com/index.php/programs/> accessed Nov13, 2015.

challenge today still is reconciling issues of class, race, sex and ethnicity within the context of fulfilling the Christian imperative”¹⁵ The congregation’s website provides introduction to COR’s current ministries and communal outreach foci.

Two COR representatives, Pastor Sutton and Elder Jacobed Jordan, submitted written responses to the dialogue questions and these are printed below:

1. What makes this congregation unique?	
<u>Member Response:</u>	<u>Pastor Response:</u>
Long history (55 + years) of mission work throughout the DC Community; long history of civil rights action coalition/group interaction.	Lots of things. History of work in civil rights movement and start-up w/ support of the Presbytery. Connections to the immediate neighborhood, but also the larger community. Small numbers, but solid giving, good bldg, lots of experience, etc. Still, we’re not all that different from lots of churches in our denomination. We’re struggling with numbers, finances, outreach, etc.

2. In your opinion, what are <i>THE two characteristics</i> of your church that best serve the needs of the: (a) members? (b) surrounding community?	
<u>Member Response:</u>	<u>Pastor Response:</u>
a) Caring spirit; historical pride. b) Fairly stable; transforming diversity.	I think we’ve only served the needs of our members for a long time. For the past few years, things have been pretty stable. The characteristic of our church that best serves the community is our building. During the past few years, we’ve done a better job (still, with lots and lots of rooms to grow) of opening our doors to the community.

¹⁵ Ibid.

3. What is the single most important challenge facing your church today? (a) Why? (b) How is your church responding?	
<u>Member Response:</u>	<u>Pastor Response:</u>
Growth and engagement with the wider at-large community. (a) An aging congregation with declining energy or desire to be involved. (b) A handful tries to reach out to the youth and younger population through schools and community programs.	Lots of challenges. I'm not sure I can say which is the most important, because they're all important and all revolve around the same issue. We're experiencing diminishing numbers, energy, mission, dollars, etc. We're supportive of our current members, but we're not reaching our community. We're responding by doing the same things we've done in the past. Except for our people (those already here), it's not working very well. We are in the process of doing a comprehensive assessment of the church's energy and satisfaction. This will be a good look in the mirror. It will give us opportunity to really assess where we're at right now.

4. Given neighborhood information sampled from your church's ZIP code, what opportunities and/or challenges should your church consider going forward?	
<u>Member Response:</u>	<u>Pastor Response:</u>
Utilize more opportunities to invite community activities to our church to engage and in what we might do to help move them forward.	The opportunities are endless. DC offers just about any ministry we might choose. There are NO lack of opportunities for ministry in our neighborhood.

5. Does widespread fear and cynicism reflected in society (metal-detectors in public places, random violence, fear of strangers) affect your church's faith, worship, and/or other activities? If so, how?	
<u>Member Response:</u>	<u>Pastor Response:</u>
I believe so. The specifics about race relations, brutality, economic decline and violence seem to have taken a toll on how involved we might become.	I don't think so, but I also think this question is a bit loaded.

6. How do urban and non-urban churches differ in character? What do they share in common?	
<u>Member Response:</u>	<u>Pastor Response:</u>
<p>Urban churches tend to be more reliant on legacy and strongholds wherein non-urban tend to be more involved in transformation into diverse activities. They share common practices of the presbytery, the polity, and basic theology.</p>	<p>Obviously, there are geographical differences, population differences, economic differences, etc. But many churches face the same difficulties of (attracting) new people in new ways. And many aren't doing too well.</p>

7. What do you feel Presbyterian churches in the District are doing separately that might be strengthened by joint participation in an <i>Urban Ministry Network</i>?	
<u>Member Response:</u>	<u>Pastor Response:</u>
<p>Network with programming such as offerings of youth/young adult programs, resources or groups.</p>	<p>Lots. Probably too much to state here. Our small churches could greatly benefit through the sharing of programs (i.e., leadership training, shared educational programs and mission trips, emergency pastoral care, etc). Even more so, learning together and supporting each other could strengthen us all.</p>

8. What would you like to see an <i>Urban Ministry Network</i> do for your church?	
<u>Member Response:</u>	<u>Pastor Response:</u>
<p>How we might utilize our strengths to enhance our outreach to younger people of faith.</p>	<p>See the above. Connection, education, sharing, support, etc.</p>

NORTHEASTERN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Pastor – Rev. Nancy Elaine Thornton
Dialogue date: 15 July 2015 /6:00 – 8:00 PM

Northeastern Church Participants: Rev. Nancy Thornton (pastor) and three other participants from the congregation.

A dialogue-dinner meeting (6:00 – 8:00 P.M.) was arranged by Rev. Thornton included three active members of the congregation’s leadership team. The meeting followed the dialogue agenda closely and after the consultant’s presentation including the power-point presentation, a lively conversation took place regarding the Northeastern’s ministry and response to the eight dialogue questions.

While participants were to submit written comments in light of the discussion to the consultant after the meeting, this was not possible. The pastor’s later illness and hospitalization occasioned a brief interruption in Northeastern’s otherwise vigorous support of and involvement in this process, resulting in the absence of more detailed documentation of its input therein. The church’s website (<http://www.nepc-dc.org/index.cfm>), like all of the congregations participating in the UMV project provides an ample overview of the congregation’s history, vision, and ministries, both internal and community outreach focused.



**Northeastern Presbyterian Church
Vision Statement (website)**

NORTHMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Pastor – Rev. Gail Nelson
Dialogue date: 17 June 2015 / 6:00 – 8:00 PM

Northminster Church Participants: Rev. Gail Nelson (pastor); Ms Reva Squire, Ms Mark Sturdivant; Guest: Rev. Dr. Brian Hamilton (as videographer).¹⁵

Meeting Purpose:

The meeting's purpose was to examine three questions:

1. How can NCP strengthen the effectiveness of its witness in the city through an Urban Ministry Network? What is the current understanding of “urban ministry” and how can local core-city urban congregations help the Presbytery to shape a theologically sound, functionally effective, and spiritually healing and evangelistic Urban Ministry Network?
2. What are the congregations within the District's urban context doing individually in their respective contexts that can be strengthened going forward through more focused attention by means of its Urban Ministry Network?
3. Discuss the strengths/assets of the Northminster Church, both internally and in terms of communal outreach, and how these could contribute to and be enhanced by an Urban Ministry Network in NCP.

While this meeting with UMN church representatives deviated significantly from the originally proposed discussion format and topics, the discussion was rich in terms of ideas advanced. Essentially, the shape of the discussion transitioned into consideration of the following issues concerning the communal witness of this congregation both internally and in terms of its public witness to its surrounding neighborhood.

¹⁵ Unfortunately, there was a problem with video equipment and the session was not recorded.

Brief Historical Overview of Northminster and its Community:

Rev. Nelson has been leading the congregation since 2011, first as Stated Supply prior to assuming full pastoral duties.¹⁶ Northminster's history has witnessed many neighborhood and internal congregational changes over the years. Originally a predominately Euro-American congregation in a largely White community, the church's demographics changed ethnically as its neighborhood changes over the past 50 years. As Blacks moved into the neighborhood, Northminster became more integrated and eventually the congregation became overwhelmingly Black with a few remaining White members. Over time, the neighborhood continued to change as more persons from other countries moved into the neighborhood. Today, the congregation consists of ethnicities that include African-American and Euro-American along with Nigerian and Cameroonian.

In recent years, Northminster experienced challenges related to efforts to determine its future direction. This time of testing culminated in a significant decline in the church's active membership. Moreover, financial challenges and subsequent facilities issues (failed boiler) posed real problems for the congregation. Recently, Presbytery assistance was obtained to help Northminster get a new heating system.

Northminster Today:

Northminster, in spite of these challenges, remains a strong and cohesive congregation. It is clearly a "neighborhood" and family congregation with a strong sense of fellowship and self-identity. That many of its constituent members live within the surrounding community (several within walking distance or a short drive) is strong evidence of the congregation's deep roots within its neighborhood.

Although most Sunday attendees include mostly seniors (70+ age group), several young families and other more youthful congregants are regular participants in church life. UMN participants in this discussion were representative of this younger

¹⁶ The previous pastor of some 20 years, Rev. L. V. Latimer, passed away in 2009.

constituency. The young adult female, Reva, was not formally Presbyterian. Her family history is in AME and Baptist traditions. Her mother was her an AME Sunday School teacher. A neighborhood resident, Reva has been attending Northminster for several months. The young adult male participant, Mark, literally grew up in Northminster from childhood. His mother also was his Sunday School teacher there.

Participants described Northminster's worship style as reflecting the church's Presbyterian "quiet and spiritual" ethos although very lively and meaningful for regular attendees. Ordinarily, Sunday attendance ranges in the seventies and members occasionally partner with other neighborhood churches to engage in various outreach and service ministries (feeding meals to those in need among others).

Strongest Assets for Urban Ministry Network & Outreach:

Pastor Gail and church representatives were clear in affirming Northminster's strongest ministry assets as its *hospitality* (welcoming and affirming congregation), its *nurturing* approach, and its *authentic honesty*. Church representatives also were clear in affirming the importance of *a deep faith in Jesus Christ* and *the leading of the Holy Spirit in* sustaining individual and corporate spiritual life.

Both Reva and Mark particularly emphasized the importance of their family upbringing as key factors shaping their orientation as followers of Jesus Christ. As such, their strong sense of commitment to where God is leading them today on their faith journey helps define their sense of "call" to Northminster and interest in helping implement the goals of NCP's Urban Ministry Network approach to ministry. When they think of urban ministry, concepts of need, social justice challenges, and alleviating the pain and confusion experienced so broadly in society come to mind.

SARGENT MEMORIAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Pastor Juan P. Guthrie

The following are responses of Rev. Juan Guthrie to dialogue questions of the UVM Project given during a phone conversation with the Consultant on September 10, 2015. Rev. Guthrie has served as pastor of Sargent Memorial for 10 years.

1. What makes this congregation unique?

Sargent is a friendly congregation. It's warmth is its strength: member-to-member & members with guests. We try to exude a certain amount of warmth that make people feel comfortable and at home. There are two worship services each Sunday: 8:30 AM and 11:15 AM. Average attendance at the 8:30 AM service is 50 and at 11:15 AM, about 250. Weekday church programming includes mid-week Bible Study, a line-dance group, sewing/weaving group, and choir rehearsals.

2. In your opinion, what are *THE two characteristics* of your church that best serve the needs of the: (a) members? (b) surrounding community?

Continued connection with redevelopment in the community. For example, on World Communion Day, we literally have a tent outdoors followed by a meal. We serve communion during worship to all who attend. If you didn't come to the service, you can still get a meal; If you want to take a meal & go. Health screenings, info on HIV/AIDS, financial literacy classes, hot dogs, hamburgers, ribs, and so on. All free to the community. When parents bring kids & the children are school age, we give a backpack to school age children containing 3months of school supplies. Choirs come out and sing gospel. The Men's Choir Sings. A young man in church who is a DJ comes and we do everything from the *Electric Slide to the Wobble* and all that stuff.

3. What is the single most important challenge facing your church today? (a) Why? (b) How is your church responding?

For us, its trying to stay engaged enough with the neighborhood. Staying in touch with our neighbors is not really what I call outreach, it's just being neighborly. Been doing this since 2008, when Sargent celebrated its 100th anniversary. Sargent Memorial started in a tent funded by 15th Street Presbyterian Church for this small group in NE DC (about \$2 per week back then) sponsoring them. The 2008 worship in that tent on World Communion Sunday and successive annual celebrations reflects the spirit of what had been done by the founding ancestors in 1908 a tent worship service: it was open and welcoming to the community and continues to be.

Quite a bit of our members do not live in the community anymore. A lot of them live out in PG County, but the reality is that interesting that although they may not have lived in the immediate community of the church for 20 or 30 years, when these folk start talking they realize that they know one another: "O yeah, I knew your grandmother, your father, and I remember when you were born. Suburbanites, accustomed to grassed lawns and nice looking sidewalks, when they come to worship back in the neighborhood and get a chance to interact with inner city people whom they think are foreigners, the "veil" (of difference) seems to come down and they realize that really think that we're foreigners, at the end of the day find out that we are kin.

The 2nd year that this was done (the tent service), a homeless man shared with the pastor that before coming to this service, he had not partaken of Holy Communion in more than 40 years. He had been living in the street. While this gentleman has never been to a regular Sargent worship service, he did not miss the annual communion service under the tent on World Communion Day since except the last year.

4. Given neighborhood information sampled from your church's ZIP code, what opportunities and/or challenges should your church consider going forward?

The nature of the inner city/African American inner-city. Needs always change. One moment the need can be drug addiction, violence, gentrification; Urban ministry needs vary; no particular issue because of constant change in needs. For example, at the church across the street (Holy Christian Baptist Church), one of the ministries of that church is to funeralize and eulogize all the victims of homicides in the neighborhood who are not members of that church. On the wall of the lower auditorium of the church, he has the programs/bulletins of probably 1,000 such kids, young adults he has funeralized over the years. Right now, there is a spike in violence in D.C.. Up over previous years.

5. Does wide-spread fear and cynicism reflected in society (metal-detectors in public places, random violence, fear of strangers) affect your church's faith, worship, and/or other activities? If so, how?

Not really. It's not that violence, poverty, drug addiction, or crime are not problems, its trying to stay engaged enough with the neighborhood enough to stay in touch with our neighbors in ways that respond to the needs of the inner city where we are located. We must differentiate between "diversion issues" and the real life ethical and relationship challenges we face.

A. There are real inner-city issues the church must address. The local ministers association folk, for example, have approached me to go down to the Wilson Building to protest homosexual marriage/lifestyle. Some of those same pastors have nothing to say about crack being sold on their church's door steps! The sexual orientation discussion is a diversion. Too often, we get caught up in dealing with social or *political issues* rather than *service issues* (feeding people's bodies, minds, addressing human need: poverty, unemployment, lack of opportunity, failing schools, crime, violence). Folk in my community are not

worried about gay people getting married. They worried about how they are going to survive, how they are going to eat, and pay rent.

B. Another issue is the fact that media is defining meaning of relevance. Young people more influenced by movies, media, cyberspace communication (instagram, Facebook, Twitter; Ipod downloads) than by interactions with Mom, Dad, Grandmother, Granddad, Uncles/Aunts, neighbor, teachers, and coaches. That is the real challenge. In that genre, we (the Church, parents, grandparents, teachers, and such) are *the Davids*. The new technology of cyberspace, media, and movies is the *Goliaths*.

How people learn and what they pay attention to? Media controls the discussion/and issues: Travon Martin, Michael Brown, and the like. There's no way to compete with the pervasiveness of this public and very global influence on our youth. Churches, in order to stay relevant, are going to have to find a way to interact with our youth in more relevant ways.

C. We also have a political leadership problem. *While there is much public focus on the role of out-of-control police officers and their pervasive abuse in inner city communities, the fact is that we do not have a policing problem.* Police get their orders from a Captain, Chief, Commissioner, (Baltimore, MD: Presidential Candidate, Rep. Martin O'Malley). ***The politicians work for corporate America.*** Politicians & corporate leaders cooperate. There are some real issues that the church must address in society and we must address the needs of our neighbors outside our doors, not hide from them.

6. How do urban and non-urban churches differ in character? What do they share in common?

Basically, there is no difference. The needs of the urban and non-urban church are pretty much the same except for the environmental aesthetics: suburban places are prettier and cleaner. They are more well kept than inner city communities so one looks better than the other. Suburbanites have the money

to make their communities look better. Suburban shopping malls may have the security and metal detectors while inner city corner stores may not have either, but the fear of violence is real in both communities. So the only real difference between urban and suburban is money. Yet, they face are the same social problems. If you've got more money you can dress better!

The violence we see in the inner city is now being reflected in so-called "safe" suburban areas: movie theaters, restaurants, shopping malls. But they have the same fears. Homicides in the inner city and suicides in suburban areas yield the same realities: death. So the stresses, fears of life kill in both places: just in different ways. Sounds like "nihilism" of Black youth (Cornel West's *Race Matters*, 1992). When did the neighborhood become "the 'Hood"? (This represents, more than anything else, a loss of community... neighborliness).

7. What do you feel Presbyterian churches in the District are doing separately that might be strengthened by joint participation in an *Urban Ministry Network*?

To tell the truth: everything! You name it. We do not work on anything together. I was president of BPU for 3-4 years. Cooperation was difficult. I'm 48 yrs, and we are still talking about and trying to dealing with stuff that happened long before I was born. Folk are still talking about stuff that happened back years ago.

Today, our churches are small. The fact is that our churches are strapped financially. And even if they have enough money, they do not have enough members. Many of our congregations are mostly populated by older folk. If we combined our efforts, we could do more, but because our churches do not feel good about themselves, they do not engage in ministry beyond the doors of their churches with people around them if they are not familiar with them.

Practical ministry support is needed. If core-city and poor churches had more support, the whole issue of transitions in (congregational) leadership would not be as difficult. Too many churches are attempting to be and to do what they

cannot be and do. For example, when you have a small church attempting to be mega-church. It is like a Mom and Pop business attempting to be corporate. The Mom and Pop store cannot be a huge corporation like Wal-Mart. The advantage of the Wal-Mart (like size, financial wealth and influence which helps it set and control price, choice, and location) is driving "Mom & Pop" out of business. The loss of competitive edge is not because of money alone, but essentially also because of "self-esteem". How does the "business" (large or small) *feel* about itself? Small churches must find their own niche and be proud to serve that constituency. They must avoid the low self-esteem of attempting to be something they are not and adopt the *can-do spirit* rather than the "*poor me*" *spirit*. This is why practical support is needed and cooperation should be encouraged.

That said, I need to see more. If we are going to do something, we need to do it, not just talk about it. I've got a Church, parents in N.C. I've got to see about, and twins in High School. I don't have time to go down a "dead-end" street of just talk.

8. What would you like to see an *Urban Ministry Network* do for your church?

That the Presbytery be engaged in ministry East of the Anacostia River (East/West racial divide of DC is also the dividing line of NCP ministry focus). Not just focusing on West Anacostia River communities (such as Rockville, Fairfax, Manassas, and such...) doing urban ministry in D.C. which is a major city in the USA, but also in the world. We also need to address the unspoken "elephant in the room:" the impact of race in society. What is the difference between James Blake, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and Juan Guthrie? When are we going to address the fact that there is no difference between Black or White in terms of aspirations and dreams (urban/suburban) for the welfare of their own family? The needs in urban society are needs to be addressed by the Presbytery as a whole.

**WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Co-Pastors – Brian and Ruth Hamilton**

**Church Dialogue date: 15 July 2015
November 4, 2015 Conversation with Rev. Brian Hamilton**

Westminster Church Participants: Reverends Brian and Ruth Hamilton (co-pastors) and Vyllorya Evans, George Kerr, Ruth Wasem, Kendra Bellamy and Margaret Westley.

This dialogue followed the outlined agenda and after the consultant's lecture including the power-point, a lively conversation took place regarding the Westminster's ministry and response to the eight dialogue questions. This dialogue was not recorded and participant's written responses to questions in light of the discussion were not submitted.

Ruth and Brian have been at Westminster for twenty years and the congregation is in the beginning stages of a major structural and organizational change in its approach to ministry. The congregation is finalizing details of its plans to sell a portion of its property in center-city D.C. and partner with a developer to construct a new moderately-priced and market-rate housing facility as well as a new multi-use and energy-efficient worship facility. This designed partnership is intended to provide a constant source of income for the congregation to continue and enlarge its capacity to address the needs of urban context long-term.

As one of the two primary organizers of the UMV project and author of its proposal, Brian and the consultant were in regular contact wherein Brian's ideas regarding the aims of this effort should be headed and what Westminster's future approach to its urban ministry would involve. Below are from the consultant's notes of a conversation with Brian on November 4, 2016 concerning preparation for the November 17th meeting of Presbytery's Open Space forum. While responses to dialogue questions 3-6 and 8 are not addressed here, excerpts from conversation notes are applicable to questions 1-4 and 7 and are included below:

The following are responses drawn from consultant notes taken during our phone conversation with Rev. Hamilton reproduced with his permission.

1. What makes this congregation unique?

Westminster has a long history of being a socially progressive and innovating congregation. For example, it was one of the early More Light congregations that, some three decades ago, intentionally welcomed and affirmed the LGBT community into the congregation and its leadership. Today, the congregation is widely known throughout the District for its vibrant weekly Friday Jazz and Monday Blues programs that draw people together for positive and uplifting musical experiences. We are using the arts to help bring people into the church that otherwise might not enter, all the while helping other folk with some employment opportunities.

2. In your opinion, what are *THE two characteristics* of your church that best serve the needs of the: (a) members? (b) surrounding community?

In addition to the above responses to question 1, the congregation's decision at this time to sell some of its property and partner with a secular housing development partner to build affordable housing is an effort to serve the needs of both members and the wider community. In addition to addressing these community needs, the plan also includes use of the remaining church property for a new, larger, energy-efficient, and flexible-use worship facility to be constructed in the process.

3. What is the single most important challenge facing your church today? (a) Why? (b) How is your church responding?

The changing nature of society and urban communities experiencing astounding change and the need of our church to try and adapt what we are doing to respond to these changes.

4. Given neighborhood information sampled from your church's ZIP code, what opportunities and/or challenges should your church consider going forward?¹⁶

At Westminster for the past couple years, we've been privileged to have a conversation about redevelopment that will allow us to reinvent ourselves architecturally and programmatically. We're small enough in numbers and finances that we are clear about the need to do this, but we're living in a rapidly changing parish/neighborhood such that we are being forced to reinvent ourselves to have any chance of being relevant to this very different social and cultural environment populating around us.

Throughout this process we have been thinking hard about what a new configuration might look like (architecturally and programmatically) to express our faith and wrestle with the values Ron speaks about in his book: God, love, justice, community, creativity, hope, reconciliation. How do we build an audience? How do we welcome neighbors, stakeholders, the poor/needy, more privileged donors/partners who share many of our values for love, justice, community, creativity, reconciliation even if they're not ready for the God conversation?

At Westminster we've been using the arts but maybe there are other facilitating programs/processes that can help build an audience. We all have to understand our assets and how those assets can be leveraged to advance our ministries.

7. What do you feel Presbyterian churches in the District are doing separately that might be strengthened by joint participation in an Urban Ministry Network?

A. The Presbyterian Connectionism: As Presbyterians, we seem to be losing the real sense of being a connectional church; we are very congregationally based. We're not really talking to each other much. We are not connecting culturally as Presbyterians. So much of this challenge is cultural. We will not be able to tweak this (what churches are currently doing and what we are doing as a Presbytery) in a few structural ways and expect a different outcome. This situation requires major change. Not everybody is ready for the serious redevelopment conversation and what it might require.

¹⁶ Brian E. Hamilton. The response to this question is a reprint from Brian's 16-Nov-2015 email to UMV participants entitled *Re: Follow up on Urban Min Network Dialogue*.

B. The Urban Challenge and Struggling Churches: Here we are (Presbytery) sitting around watching us (many urban churches) die. We are watching our total Presbyterian witness dwindle and go away. When you lose a church, it is a huge loss. Shifting the paradigm is hard work, but we have to be prophetic: nobody wants to sign on to a dying institution. The Urban Ministry Network is an expanding conversation, but is still very nimble at this point. We've got to define the methodology to do it and what it's curriculum will be.

C. The "Elephant in the Room": The "elephant in the room" in most of these troubled churches in the District is their physical plants. Most of our churches have not had the serious conversation about a different type of approach to ministry including the physical facility discussion. They haven't had the conversation about "*if you could change, what would you change?*" Many have not even put that on the table yet! We need to "blow many of these buildings up" and start again. These organizations aren't thinking this way and, maybe realistically, they don't have the capacity to do so.

While they may not literally be able to "blow up" the whole physical structure, they definitely will have to knock some walls down organizationally. Take some pews out. They're going to have to do something to shift what happens on the inside of these churches. As long as they make pastors get up there in staid old pulpits and robes and follow an order of service "the way it has always been done," the death of such churches is imminent. Leadership is going to burn out and go away tired and angry.

D. The Urban Ministry Network: Insofar as the urban ministry network, one of the first things we need to do is to establish a "development wing of this thing" and start hiring some people to do feasibility studies on redevelopment. I'm living with this cognitive dissonance between what we're trying to do at Westminster and what is feasible or even possible within the wider Presbytery regarding many of our troubled churches, especially in the District. Developing a more Presbytery-wide urban focus through an urban ministry network is a process: fact-finding, an honest conversation about our assets, hopefully an honest conversation about stewardship, and about what we're really willing to *give* and *give up*. That's the only conversation I think this urban ministry network really has to be!

Part D

EMERGENT THEMES:

Phase 3 (September/October) = Analysis/Strategy Review. This part of the process identifies dialogue themes that emerged throughout the conversations that may suggest possible foci and/or action steps going forward. What were the consistent dialogue themes emerging from among the dialogues that took place?

Question 1:

WHAT MAKES THIS CONGREGATION UNIQUE?

1. **FAITH:** One of the things that makes Faith Church unique *is its willingness to explore new ideas and try new approaches...* the “open-mindedness” of the congregation... not stuck in “we’ve always done it this way.” ...an active congregation in spite of its modest size.
2. **PILGRIMS:** *The congregation’s ability to change over time in effort to adapt and respond to changes in society...* a constant factor making this congregation unique.
3. **REDEEMER:** (Member) = *Long history of mission work throughout the DC Community;* civil rights action coalition/group interaction. (Pastor) = *Good connections to the neighborhood; small numbers, but solid giving; good building, lots of experience...*
4. **NORTHEASTERN:** *...the to promote Christian faith and practice through evangelism, outreach, compassion and fellowship to our congregation and the wider community.*
5. **NORTHMINSTER:** *... strongest ministry assets as its hospitality (welcoming and affirming congregation), its nurturing approach, and its authentic honesty.* Church representatives also were clear in affirming the importance of *a deep faith in Jesus Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit in sustaining individual and corporate spiritual life.*
6. **SARGENT:** *Sargent is a friendly congregation. It’s warmth is its strength... We try to exude a certain amount of warmth that make people feel comfortable and at home.*
7. **WESTMINSTER:** *the congregation is widely known throughout the District for*

its vibrant weekly Friday Jazz and Monday Blues programs that draw people together for positive and uplifting musical experiences. *We are using the arts to help bring people into the church that otherwise might not enter, all the while helping other folk with some employment opportunities.*

Question 2:

**WHAT ARE *THE TWO CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUR CHURCH*
THAT BEST SERVE THE NEEDS OF THE
(A) MEMBERS? (B) SURROUNDING COMMUNITY?**

1. FAITH: One of the things that help the church serve the community needs of the congregation is its willingness to explore new ideas and approaches. When a church is faced with limited... resources and other challenges, this "open-mindedness" attitude helps members to be more open to exploring options that strengthen their potential. **2. PILGRIMS:** Three things are important: (A) Make the church more appealing to new people; (B) To see ourselves as others see us; and (C) Being open to change. **3. REDEEMER:** (Member) = ...A caring spirit, fairly stable, transforming diversity; (Pastor) = Serving the community by opening the doors of our building to the community.

4. NORTHEASTERN: ... *outreach, compassion and fellowship to our congregation and the wider community.* **5. NORTHMINSTER:** ... strongest ministry assets as its *hospitality (welcoming and affirming congregation), its nurturing approach, and its authentic honesty.* Church representatives also were clear in affirming the importance of *a deep faith in Jesus Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit in sustaining individual and corporate spiritual life.*

6. SARGENT: *It's warmth is its strength... We try to exude a certain amount of warmth that make people feel comfortable and at home.* Outreach to the community has got to be intentional. **7. WESTMINSTER:** the congregation is widely known throughout the District for its vibrant weekly Friday Jazz and Monday Blues programs that draw people together for positive and uplifting musical experiences.

We are using the arts to help bring people into the church that otherwise might not enter, all the while helping other folk with some employment opportunities.

Question 3:

WHAT IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT CHALLENGE FACING YOUR CHURCH TODAY? WHY? HOW IS YOUR CHURCH RESPONDING?

1. FAITH: *Finances or the lack of adequate funds is perhaps one of the most challenging problems facing the church. We struggle to pay bills. Meeting payroll is something larger do not have.* **2. PILGRIMS:** *The challenges of the inherited infrastructure of the building (old and in need of much maintenance). This remains the biggest challenge.* **3. REDEEMER:** (Member) = *Growth and engagement with the wider at-large community.* (Pastor) = *An aging congregation with declining energy or desire to be involved. We're experiencing diminishing numbers, energy, mission, dollars, etc.*

5. NORTHMINSTER: *a significant decline in the church's active membership. Moreover, financial challenges and subsequent facilities issues (failed boiler) posed real problems for the congregation.* **6. SARGENT:** *For us, its trying to stay engaged enough with the neighborhood to stay in touch with our neighbors is not really what I call outreach, it's just being neighborly. The reality is that... quite a bit of our members do not live in the community anymore.* **7. WESTMINSTER:** *The changing nature of society and urban communities experiencing astounding change and the need of our church to try and adapt what we are doing to respond to these changes... The "elephant in the room" in most of these troubled churches in the District is their physical plants. Most of our churches have not had the serious conversation about "if you could change, what would you change?" Many have not even put that on the table yet!*

Question 4:

GIVEN NEIGHBORHOOD INFORMATION SAMPLED FROM YOUR CHURCH'S ZIP CODE, WHAT OPPORTUNITIES AND/OR CHALLENGES SHOULD YOUR CHURCH CONSIDER GOING FORWARD?

1. **FAITH:** This is a neighborhood with a lot of young people. *One of the real challenges our church must consider going forward is finding ways to reach these young people. Also, we must find a way to engage our young Black men and more children.*
2. **PILGRIMS:** Pilgrim's neighborhood has higher homelessness, but lower poverty. *Pilgrims has had a pretty active homeless ministry for 35 years. Pilgrims has long history of focusing outside its doors: long history of engagement with urban poverty.*
3. **REDEEMER:** (Members) = Utilize more opportunities to invite community activities to our church to engage and in what we might do to help move them forward. (Pastor) = DC offers just about any ministry opportunity we might choose.
5. **NORTHMINSTER:** ... is clearly a "neighborhood" and family congregation with a strong sense of fellowship and self-identity. *That many of its constituent members live within the surrounding community (several within walking distance or a short drive) is strong evidence of the congregation's deep roots within its neighborhood.*
6. **SARGENT:** *The nature of challenges in the African-American inner-city always change. One moment the need can be drug addiction, violence, or gentrification; Urban ministry needs vary; no particular issue. ...One of the ministries of the church across the street is to funeralize all the victims of homicides who are not members of his church. On the wall of the lower auditorium... there are programs of probably 1,000 such kids, young adults funeralized over the years.*
7. **WESTMINSTER:** We've been privileged to have a conversation about redevelopment that will allow us to reinvent ourselves... *We're living in a rapidly changing parish/neighborhood such that we are being forced to reinvent ourselves to have any chance of being relevant to this very different social/cultural environment populating around us.*

Question 5:

DOES WIDE-SPREAD FEAR AND CYNICISM REFLECTED IN SOCIETY (METAL-DETECTORS IN PUBLIC PLACES, RANDOM VIOLENCE, FEAR OF STRANGERS) AFFECT YOUR CHURCH'S FAITH, WORSHIP, AND/OR OTHER ACTIVITIES? IF SO, HOW?

1. FAITH: *Yes. People are worried because there is a lot of the crime that happens in the city occurs right here in our community. While the neighborhood of the church is a nice looking area, at night it is very dangerous.* **2. PILGRIMS:** *With our church located in DuPont Circle, this is not much of an issue. When I pastored in Wilmington, DE in a more challenged locale and context with members driving in from other areas, evening programming, for example, was difficult. Not here so much in this neighborhood.* **3. REDEEMER:** *(member) = I believe so. The specifics about race relations, brutality, economic decline and violence seem to have taken a toll on how involved we might become. (Pastor) = I don't think so, but I also think this question is a bit loaded.* **6. SARGENT:** *Not really. It's not that violence, poverty, drug addiction, or crime are not problems, its trying to stay engaged enough with the neighborhood to stay in touch with our neighbors in ways that respond to the needs of the inner city where we are located.*

Question 6:

**HOW DO URBAN AND NON-URBAN CHURCHES DIFFER IN CHARACTER?
WHAT DO THEY SHARE IN COMMON?**

1. FAITH: *Let me ponder this, because I wasn't sure that we defined what an urban church was. I'm still wrestling with what an urban church is because some of the urban churches and some of the suburban churches have some of the same issues. Visited a Korean church in a suburban area; listening to these pastors was like listening to my own story.* **2. PILGRIMS:** *...My experience now is that distinction is less and less than it used to be... Today, hardly a church in the denomination is not facing issues of change in society. [Urban churches] are dealing issues... that 20-30 years ago were unheard of such areas. Now, these issues are found in [suburban areas] as well as in the inner city and faced by churches like New York Avenue and Church of*

the Pilgrims. **3. REDEEMER:** (Member) = Urban churches tend to be more reliant on legacy and strongholds wherein non-urban tend to be more involved in transformation into diverse activities. (Pastor) = There are geographical differences, population differences, economic differences, etc. But many churches face the same difficulties of (attracting) new people in new ways. **6. SARGENT:** Basically, there is no difference. The needs of the urban and non-urban church are pretty much the same except for the environmental aesthetics: suburban places are prettier and cleaner... Suburbanites have the money to make their communities look better. Suburban shopping malls may have the security and metal detectors while inner city corner stores may not have either, but the fear of violence is real in both communities... The violence we see in the inner city is now being reflected in so-called "safe" suburban areas: movie theaters, restaurants, shopping malls. They have the same fears.

Question 7:

WHAT DO YOU FEEL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES IN THE DISTRICT ARE DOING SEPARATELY THAT MIGHT BE STRENGTHENED BY JOINT PARTICIPATION IN AN URBAN MINISTRY NETWORK?

1. FAITH: Not sure. **2. PILGRIMS:** One of my hopes for this effort is that it would bring about two conversations that have been going on in our Presbytery largely in isolation from one another. One... is the conversations BPU has had over the years is about the particular challenges that Black churches in D.C. are facing in their mission and ministry... The other conversation happening in our Presbytery, largely among White congregations, is the *Next Church* movement (a national conversation, but has its own particular formation in NCP involving what does it mean to be the church in the 21st century). **3. REDEEMER:** (Member) = Network with programming such as offerings of youth/young adult programs, resources or groups. (Pastor) = Lots... Our small churches could greatly benefit through the sharing of programs (i.e., leadership training, shared educational programs and mission trips, emergency pastoral care, etc)... Learning together and supporting each other could strengthen us all.

6. SARGENT: To tell the truth: everything! You name it. We do not work on anything together. I was president of BPU for 3-4 years. Cooperation was difficult... Today, our churches are small... [often] strapped financially. ...If we combined our efforts, we could do more... Practical ministry support is needed... That said, I need to see more. If we are going to do something, we need to do it, not just talk about it.

7. WESTMINSTER: As Presbyterians, we seem to be losing the real sense of being a connectional church; we are very congregationally based. We're not really talking to each other much. We are not connecting culturally as Presbyterians....The Urban Ministry Network is an expanding conversation... We've got to define the methodology to do it and what it's curriculum will be.

Question 8:

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE AN *URBAN MINISTRY NETWORK* DO FOR YOUR CHURCH?

1. FAITH: Immediate benefit would be sharing of information among participating congregations and resources available to do ministry. Also, a network of skilled people shared within the Urban Network (painters, electricians, plumbers, Christian Educators,) for small congregations that cannot afford these services. If a Northeast church had their electrical system done well and in cost effective way, let us know who did it. Maybe the contractor might provide us (Faith) a discount. **2. PILGRIMS:**

Where are we going with this? What are the goals and objectives of this process? My goal is attempting to discern: where is this effort going to go? A priority of the next (future) meetings should be building relationships... If church revitalization is part of the goal, what does "revitalization" look like?

3. REDEEMER: (Member) = How we might utilize our strengths to enhance our outreach to younger people of faith. (Pastor) = Connection, education, support, sharing of programs (i.e., leadership training, shared educational programs and mission trips, emergency pastoral care, etc). **6. SARGENT:** That the Presbytery be engaged in ministry East of the Anacostia River (East/West racial divide of DC is

also the dividing line of NCP ministry focus). Not just focusing on West Anacostia River communities (such as Rockville, Fairfax, Manassas, and such...) doing urban ministry in D.C. which is a major city in the USA, but also in the world. We also need to address the unspoken "elephant in the room:" the impact of race in society.

7. WESTMINSTER: Developing a more Presbytery-wide urban focus through an urban ministry network is a process: fact-finding, an honest conversation about our assets, hopefully an honest conversation about stewardship, and about what we're really willing to *give* and *give up*.

Part E:

OBSERVATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

OBSERVATIONS

Facing the Challenge. The serious challenges characterizing today's culture (alienation, fear, hatred, and violence) define all the contexts of ministry. Given the reduced influence of the church in society's increasing secularization, several questions arise in light of Presbytery's mission statement. First, how are 31,000 Presbyterians in to craft an effective *urban ministry network* to give the best witness to Jesus Christ in National Capital Presbytery's parish: the Washington metropolitan area with its seven-million plus people?

Second, what can Presbytery do to proactively serve as catalyst to the creation of an *Urban Ministry Network* especially defined to include the fifteen congregations of the District of Columbia? How can Presbytery assist these churches toward a heightened collaboration that bears prophetic and public witness to the powers and principalities of the world based on the love, truth, and justice of God revealed in Jesus Christ?

Third, given the persistent plague of race-bias, racial-profiling, out-of-control and militarized policing among people of color, how is this Presbytery going to more effectively engage the economic, cultural, and racial divide in society represented in the "East/West" racial divide of ministry and economic inequity shaping the Presbytery's landscape?

Embracing Presbytery's Mission. Seen through the lens of Presbytery's Mission statement, two additional questions arise. Would an *Urban Ministry Network* defined among the congregations of the District be a more effective way to enable these congregations toward collaborative relationship that increases their effectiveness in proclaiming the Gospel in their congregations and in the arena of public ministry?

Would such a network provide a forum for these District-based congregations to provide a forum for their leaders and congregation members to reflect theologically on engagement of these challenges?

What the Dialogue Revealed. Before addressing the above questions, it is appropriate to consider some of the realities that were evident in the process of carrying out this ten-month project.

1. **FATIGUE:** Early on, low expectations from this process revealed little willingness to commit more than minimal effort toward its success from many participants. Also, some “front line” urban practitioners seemed a bit overwhelmed by a feeling of “being in this alone” with regard to coping with the demands of limited resources ministry. The “we’ve tried this before with little success” refrain also was prevalent in much of the informal dialogue, rehearsing previous efforts, successes and/or failures, of the past. *Not much energy seemed to be left to invest in more than minimal cooperation.*

2. **URGENCY:** The time-span for implementation of this 2015 project was too brief: 10 months start to completion. This limited planning period, especially in light of demands on the time of busy pastors and congregations with advanced plans already in place, took its toll. Designated to examine difficult realities in congregational functioning and public ministry, focused on a particular geographic context, and exploring a possible amendment to Presbytery’s strategic approach among its congregations, this effort was ambitious, at best, and seriously underestimated its task. As a result, only 7 of 15 of District churches were involved with hastily structured organization that allowed little time for the coalescing of relationships, planning, and gathering of insights needed for success.

1. **A LACK OF CONSENSUS ON URBAN MINISTRY AND PROJECT FOCUS:**
There was little consensus on what “urban ministry” meant. Few seemed to

have read the assigned book, R. Peters' *Urban Ministry: An Introduction*,¹⁷ which addresses many of the recurring questions and lack of clarity around urban ministry, especially as envisioned by this project. Indeed, there was some understandable opinion that reading another book on urban ministry was not going to be much help to seasoned clergy practitioners in the urban context or church members who live in these neighborhoods all the time. Also, the lack of commitment to exploration of new ideas together as Presbyterians churches regarding urban ministry was striking.

As previously stated, the haste with which the project was undertaken provided insufficient time for a engagement with the text in a way relevant to the real-world experiences of the practitioners involved in the project. Consequently, participant's lack of clarity about the phrase "urban ministry" and general "buy-in" regarding society's designation of "urban" as a negative code-word to be shunned frustrated participant focus of potential steps to be considered in formation of an urban ministry network.¹⁸

4. **SKEPTICISM:** There was serious question regarding the viability of a uniquely Presbyterian approach to urban ministry. For some, the needs of individual congregations are so pressing that the best thing an urban network can do is to share resources, although with little confidence expressed that this would be done. For others, where partnership is possible, it often is outside the denomination with other community partners. Low expectation was evident for a denominational "fit" regarding collaborative work on "urban ministry." Consequently, there seems to exist some significant skepticism about the usefulness of the denomination regarding its ability/willingness to be helpful to the congregations in greatest need.

¹⁷ Particular reference here is to chapters 4-6 of the *Urban Ministry: An Introduction*.

¹⁸ See chapter 4, "Bridging the Chasms in Urban Ministry," (p 19-28), especially p 25-28 in *Urban Ministry: An Introduction*. Nashville, Abingdon. 2007.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The above observations notwithstanding, this effort was a start in the right direction. It acknowledged and took steps, however imperfectly executed, to recognize and acknowledge the validity of the problems faced by the Presbytery and its congregations. The following recommendations are put forth in the hope that National Capital Presbytery, with the assistance of its Mission Committee and Black Presbyterians United, will continue to view crafting an *Urban Ministry Network* as a strategically important resource for strengthening its witness to the Gospel.

It is recommended that:

1. **Presbytery should Invite/Encourage an Urban Ministry Conversation Among All District of Columbia Churches:** NCP's Mission Committee and BPU should jointly arrange to invite/encourage a dialogue between all fifteen churches of the District of Columbia (Chevy Chase, Faith, Fifteenth Street, Garden Memorial, Georgetown, National, New York Avenue, Northeaster, Northminster, Pilgrims, Redeemer, Sargent, Sixth, Western, and Westminster) to intentionally explore the possibility of an *Urban Ministry Network* with the participation of all these congregations.
2. **Black Presbyterians United Should be Assigned as Presbytery's Designee to Convene the Conversation:** Most of the churches in the District are BPU-related congregations. BPU-related churches face ministry challenges clearly typical of some of the most distressed contexts and congregations throughout the Presbytery. These congregations cannot address these challenges alone nor need they in a connectional church tradition. More fundamentally, the urban context of the District and the wider Washington Metropolitan area while significantly, is not exclusively Black. If anything, the urban context of ministry is defined by its plural

tradition. More fundamentally, the urban context of the District and the wider Washington Metropolitan area while significantly, is not exclusively Black. If anything, the urban context of ministry is defined by its plural nature. As such, all churches of the District should be involved in this dialogue, but it will be important for BPU to be at the core of pulling such an effort together.

Particular attention will be necessary to insure that the unique experience, contribution, and future relevance of the Black Presbyterian heritage and hope is not dissipated or assimilated into insignificance given the more affluent and culturally hegemonic reality represented by the White congregations in the dialogue.¹⁹ Indeed, *the aim will be to craft a new way of being uniquely Presbyterian together in the District* so as to help strengthen the wider Presbytery in enhancing its potential for a more inclusive and collaborative approach to ministry among other congregations.

- 3. Community Organizer:** A part-time Community Organizer should be hired by the Presbytery to contact these congregations and facilitate this process going forward. Due to the press of pastoral obligations, congregational demands, and scheduled activities of District churches, exploration of potential options for crafting a viable and functional *Urban Ministry Network* in National Capital Presbytery is not likely to take place without this step being taken. By contrast, with the services of even a part-time, but professional and experienced community organizer dedicated to help pull this effort together, prospects for creation of such a network become bright

¹⁹ For further exploration of these considerations, see resources addressing structural racism in society such as Joseph Barndt's *Understanding and Dismantling Racism: The Twenty-first Century Challenge to White America*. More specific to the context of urban ministry in this project, see chapters 5, "Urban Theology: A Bottom-Up Perspective" (p 55-74), chapter 6, "Antecedents of a Top-Down Theological Perspective" (p 75-83), and chapter 7, "Antecedents of a Bottom-Up Theological Perspective" (p 84-108) in R. Peters' *Urban Ministry: An Introduction*, previously referenced.

indeed. The type of relationship building needed to engage the variety of context and congregations to be involved for exploration of shared consensus and common ground among participant churches will require this type of focused staff attention.

4. **Common Ground Trial Period of Significant Duration:** However much they differ socio-economically, racially, culturally, and even among their differing nuances in theological perspective, it is recommended that *these congregations be invited and encouraged into common dialogue as to what and how they might collaboratively embrace*. Explorations should examine *aspects of ministry in common for a trial period of some significant duration* (for example, three to five years) through the intentional establishment of an Urban Ministry Network.

5. **A Repeatable Template:** The goal of this Urban Ministry Network exploration should be *to strengthen the witness of National Capital Presbytery in the District* through its participant churches therein. *This effort would concurrently have as one of its aims, exploration of this smaller regional model as a template for informing its usefulness in other contexts* within and beyond the boundaries of the Presbytery.

Rationale: Unlike dominant contemporary perceptions that the Bible arises from essentially non-urban settings, scripture is replete in its witness to God's repeated revelation of divine Presence in and through urban contexts. The arrogance of human pride in Babel (Genesis 11:1-9), Moses' ability to speak truth to power on behalf of oppressed Hebrews at the seat of governmental authority before Pharaoh (Exodus 4-13), Jesus' birth in a city too crowded to accommodate his birth except outside as the child of "homeless" parents (Luke 2:1-7), or the revelation of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in city of Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-13), represent just few such

examples. Moreover, the New Testament contains letters to a number of churches located in urban settings: Rome (a city of about a million people at the time of Jesus of Nazareth), Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, or Thessalonica among others referenced.²⁰

Connected but not Collaborative: While District of Columbia churches share a common Reformed theological frame of reference and denominational polity connection, the realities of our secular and increasingly fractionalized society, urban and non-urban, tend to encourage an isolation and even competition among these churches rather than collaboration and complementary learning and interaction in ministry.

CONCLUSION

Our denomination faces challenges regarding the effectiveness of its witness in a variety of urban and non-urban settings given the swiftly changing public and personal contexts of ministry. Establishment of a denominationally-rooted and multi-congregation structured model of urban ministry collaboration as the *Urban Ministry Network* concept represents, if successful, would be not only tremendously helpful to National Capital Presbytery, but a very significant development for our denomination nationally. Transforming society's tendencies toward unhealthy conflict and competition borne of alienation, fear, and violence into examples of community healing cooperation and collaboration that exhibit the reconciling power of Jesus Christ would be a stunning example of National Capital Presbytery's mission: to be a "*relational network, celebrating the diversity among the citizens of*

²⁰ For a more full exploration of urban ministry in scripture, see Chapter 4 entitled "Looking Back: Ancient and Modern Urban Ministry" in R. Peters' *Urban Ministry: An Introduction*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2007.

the realm of God in service to God's mission."²¹ Such an example would prove to be a blessing far beyond the Presbytery's own boundaries.

Exploration of a *uniquely Presbyterian collaborative ministry-model* intentionally focused on engaging the urban context in could be beneficial not only for this Presbytery, but for the wider Church and beyond. If implemented, this *Urban Visioning Project* will have been well worth the effort. Clearly, National Capital Presbytery has taken a significant step in fulfilling the first of its three strategic emphases identified through 2017 to *challenge, equip, and support our congregations and their leaders in their discernment of God's invitation to discipleship.*²²

²¹ *Vision Statement* of National Capital Presbytery, adopted 24-Jan-2012. See website: <http://www.ncp.devholder.com/about-us/vision-statement> / accessed 24-Sept-2016.

²² *Ibid.*

Ronald E. Peters

Ron Peters is an advisor on social witness policy and urban theological education, serving on the Association of Theological Schools Board of Directors. His writing and academic work in urban ministry reflect his deep commitment to enhancing the quality of life for “the least of these” through interfaith collaboration for justice ministry, especially in the challenging environment of our global and urbanized society. Dr. Peters served as the president of the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia, an ecumenical consortium of six historically Black theological schools until retirement in 2013. Prior to ITC, Dr. Peters was Henry L. Hillman Professor of Urban Ministry at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and founding Director of its Metro-Urban Institute.