

Responses to Questions – Presbyterian Foundation

F-1.0404: Openness

“In Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all creation, the Church seeks a new openness to God's mission in the world.

In Christ, the triune God tends the least among us, suffers the curse of human sinfulness, raises up a new humanity, and promises a new future for all creation.

*In Christ, Church members share with all humanity the realities of creatureliness, sinfulness, brokenness, and suffering, as well as **the future toward which God is drawing them.***

The mission of God pertains not only to the Church but also to people everywhere and to all creation.

As it participates in God's mission, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) seeks:

*- a new openness to the sovereign activity of God in the Church and in the world, to a more **radical** obedience to Christ, and to a more **joyous** celebration in worship and work;*

- How does the agency demonstrate that it is open to God's activity in the church and in the world?
 - Openness to God's activity in the church and in the world is core to the Presbyterian Foundation's operation. Our strategic plan is built on continuing conversations with pastors, lay leaders, and donors about what they need in order to fund the mission and ministry to which God calls them. This frequent and repeated asking and listening has helped us to identify and create new areas of service for which there are demonstrated needs among God's people.
 - One example is the Foundation's online giving system. Churches told us that they needed more relevant ways to accept gifts, especially from younger donors who don't use check books and don't carry cash. The Foundation created an online giving system which is now used by nearly 500 PCUSA congregations, and signing on more every month. The system processes millions of dollars in gifts each year, and grows monthly in number of gifts, value of gifts, and number of donors.
 - Another example is our new Church Financial Literacy and Leadership program, developed as part of the Lilly Endowment's National Initiative to Address Economic Challenges Facing Pastor Leaders.
 - Over the course of the last few years the Mission Agency has determined it needed to exit certain programs. While this has expanded the scope of our operations, we have willingly assisted because these are vital ministries of the denomination.
 - Other examples of new ways we are responding to needs and requests of the church include expanding our Donor Advised Funds program, moving to an Outsourced Chief Investment Officer model to reduce costs and fees while increasing opportunity, and adding more flexibility in investment options.

- How does the agency engage in prayerful discernment as it seeks to be obedient to Christ?
 - Our senior staff begins each week with a time of prayer for the agency, for our denomination, for our staff, and for the needs of the world around us. We invite God's presence within and among us, asking the Holy Spirit to guide our words, thoughts, and deeds.
 - Prayer is an important part of our staff's life together as well – a standing feature of our all staff worship times, meetings, and fellowship events, and a recurring theme of messages to staff as specific needs and concerns appear.
 - We are similarly committed to regularly and systematically seeking and out input from constituents throughout the Church – hearing their needs and concerns and seeking God's guidance on how best we can help meet those.

- What could the agency do to bring more joy to its staff, to members of the church, and to the world?
 - One of the biggest obstacles to joy that we have observed in the Church is a pervasive scarcity mindset. Too often, we see pastors and members, agency and mid council leaders, and others focused on what they don't have – rather than what God has given them. We believe that recognizing God's abundance and working from that mindset leads to more joy-filled ministry and life.
 - To that end, we try to spread that sense of God's abundance and our gratitude for it. We work closely with churches and presbyteries to help them see the possibilities of who and what God has placed in their midst. Time and again, this emphasis has helped God's people make the turn from fear to joy.
 - This work in turn brings us joy. Our staff and board celebrate the positive response we've seen in recent years among churches, councils, donors and others to the ways we are able to serve them. We make it a point to celebrate individual achievements among our staff as well, which furthers the joy we share in each other.

- a new openness in its own membership, becoming in fact as well as in faith a community of women and men of all ages, races, ethnicities, and worldly conditions, made one in Christ by the power of the Spirit, as a visible sign of the new humanity;

- How does the agency foster community within the agency? How can the agency build greater trust among the agency staff?
 - We foster community within the Foundation through regular times of all-staff worship and fellowship. We meet regularly throughout the year as a full staff to report news from board meetings, share updates on projects, and to celebrate accomplishments and anniversaries among members of our team. We gather on special occasions for prayer at times of crisis or concern. We bring our board leaders and members to the office to meet local staff and strengthen a sense of family among board and staff alike.

- We know these efforts are working. We recently engaged an outside firm to survey our staff, and learned from them that our results were among the most positive they've ever seen among their many clients. That was heartening news. At the same time, employees responded to the survey with suggestions of ways we can still do better. We are working through those answers now, including some helpful critiques about how we solicit and make best use of employee input. Our goal is to foster an open and affirming environment that welcomes input and ideas. We can continue to build trust by making sure everyone feels like their voices and ideas are heard and that they can contribute in meaningful ways to how we set direction for the Foundation.
- Knowing that there is always room for improvement, and that we want the Foundation staff to reflect the wonderful diversity God has given us, we are evaluating ways to increase diversity recruitment and engagement.
- How does the agency promote unity and connectedness in the whole church? How can the agency build greater trust within the PC(USA)?
 - We are systematically aggressive in trying to build unity and connection within the Church. This begins at the very top, modeling an approach that our whole staff seeks to emulate. We try to build genuine relationships and openness with peers at the other agencies, mid councils, and congregations. The recent changes in leadership at OGA and PMA, and the coming change at PPC regarding congregational publishing, present renewed opportunities to continue on this path.
 - One means to do this, especially among the national offices, is to ensure that the Foundation is always engaged in some ongoing common project with each of the other agencies. The list of collaborations which we provided earlier this year gives examples of these projects.
 - We also continue to strive for open and honest conversations at peer meetings. Again these start with modeling at the top by the board chairs and agency executives in their regular meetings. Our field staffs, communicators, attorneys, HR staffs, CFOs and IT staffs, among others, all communicate regularly with their peers at other agencies, seeking to build the same collegiality and sense of shared mission.
 - The communications role is an ever adapting and challenging one that is a current area of focus as we determine the best manner to explain the work of the Foundation.
- What are your thoughts about white privilege in the PCUSA? How can the agency contribute to building a church that truly honors God, celebrates the diversity of God's creation by lifting up all people, and demonstrates that we are all one in Christ Jesus?
 - Our board and senior staff have been developing and implementing a Diversity and Inclusion initiative over the course of the last two years. It continues to be a top priority for board and leadership, spearheaded by the CEO. The effort seeks to achieve and demonstrate genuine diversity and a truly inclusive working environment at all levels of our staff and

board, in order to better serve and build more enduring relationships with the diversity of God's people in the church.

- The initiative is already producing results, including the most diverse board of trustees the Foundation has had. (Nine of nineteen members are persons of color.)
- In addition, we analyze the ways in which we serve the Church to look for opportunities to serve smaller, more diverse congregations. For example, we saw online giving as a way to serve congregations with fewer resources. We intentionally created our Donor Advised Fund program to have one of the lowest entry points in order to serve a broader base of donors.

- a new openness to see both the possibilities and perils of its institutional forms in order to ensure the faithfulness and usefulness of these forms to God's activity in the world;

- What are some possibilities in the agency which would allow the agency to be more faithful and useful for what God is doing in the world?
 - The Foundation board and staff have been asking a similar question for the last several years – looking for limitations and opportunities in our form. Outsourcing our investment functions, for instance, has allowed us to better focus on our service to the church while shedding significant regulatory and bureaucratic burdens as well as their associated costs.
 - This question has also prompted us to explore ways we could broaden the audiences we serve within the Church. In recent years, we have developed fruitful relationships with full communion partners and with members of the Reformed family of churches. We have built strong relationships with the World Communion of Reformed Churches and a number of its members, serving both their particular needs and those of PC(USA) members who wish to support them.
 - We have engaged with the foundations of other denominations - looking for areas where our strengths and weaknesses complement each other. We've been developing these relationships over a period of years, and several have led to successful partnerships.
- What are some perils in the agency's institutional form which could inhibit faithful obedience to God?
 - Some of the ways that General Assemblies function in recent years present potential perils to the Foundation's (and other agencies') faithful obedience to God. Overtures are developed and promoted which may directly impact our work, perhaps without sufficient consultation with us. Committees have sometimes demonstrated a tendency towards fear about changes in the ways we serve. (e.g., that our efforts to more seriously engage with ecumenical partners could leave us spread too thin to serve the PC(USA), not recognizing that we've intentionally expanded capabilities through technology to dramatically improve our scale to serve all).

- Another area of peril involves longstanding approaches to cross-agency work that create bureaucratic road blocks between donors and the beneficiaries they wish to support. We've encountered a growing number of these instances around gifts for support of international mission partners where flexibility in structure is limited. In multiple cases, we have lost out on potential gifts to mission as a result.
- At times, other agencies make decisions that impact the Foundation's work and cause the Foundation to take on additional responsibilities.
- What are the things you hold on to as essential and carry forward, even as you are open to the new?
 - First and foremost, we maintain a strict adherence to the instructions of donors who have been the core supporters of Presbyterian mission and ministry through the Foundation's 218-year history. This has been and continues to be essential to building and maintaining trust with donors and their families over many generations.
 - Our approach to stewardship, which seeks to grow funds over time, keeping pace with inflation and balancing the needs of current and future beneficiaries is another element we hold onto. This can be challenging at times, especially when current beneficiaries feel stretched for funds.
 - We have also held to the denomination's longstanding (200+ years) check and balance division between where money is held and where it is spent. We believe that there are necessary aspects of independence among the agencies (flowing from their unique roles in service to the church) even as we work together to break down any unnecessary walls to ease and advance service to the larger church. Some of these necessary areas include maintaining donors' privacy building appropriate IT firewalls for information security, and recognizing the array of different laws and regulatory bodies to which particular agencies are subject.
- If you could change one thing within the agency which would create new opportunities to do the agency's job better, what would that be?
 - We would like to achieve greater flexibility (through mutual agency agreement) on ways donors get funds to mission around the world more quickly and with less administrative cost.

- a new openness to God's continuing reformation of the Church ecumenical, that it might be more effective in its mission."

- What new ecumenical partnerships and collaboration have been most effective in accomplishing the agency's mission? What new ecumenical partnerships would help the agency be more effective in mission?
 - We are big supporters of the Lund Principle (adopted by the 220th General Assembly (2012)), which states "Should not the Churches act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately?" In that spirit, and as mentioned above, we have built partnerships with other denominational foundations to better serve the body of Christ. We continue to build partnerships with Reformed

denominations around the world to serve their members and PC(USA) members who support them. We hope that future Assemblies will continue to support this ecumenical outreach.

- What is your agency saying “no” to right now in order to focus energy on what you need to say “yes” to? What would the agency love to do but cannot?
 - This is another question with which our board and staff are currently engaged. Specifically, we are looking at how best to steward recent financial improvements. Can we best serve the church by lowering fees charged against the funds we manage? Or by providing more service to churches through added staff? Or by ensuring that the Foundation has adequate reserves? Each option has its supporters, and answering this question may ultimately lead to saying “yes” to some but not others.
 - The Foundation has seen increasingly positive results over the last seven years (e.g., number of gifts increasing, services growing). Discerning the right answer to this question will be critical to continuing these positive directions.