

[OVT-006] On Establishing a General Assembly Administrative Commission on Mid Councils—From the Synod of the Northeast.

Source: Presbytery
Committee: Unassigned

IOB Link: <https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/3000516>
Event: 224th General Assembly (2020)
Sponsor: Synod of the Northeast
Type: General Assembly Full Consideration

Recommendation

The Synod of the Northeast overtures the 224th General Assembly (2020) to establish a General Assembly Commission on Mid Councils for the purpose of deliberation and approval of mid council business that has significant time pressures such that it cannot wait for action or would suffer severely from having to wait for action until the 225th General Assembly (2022).

By direction of the 224th General Assembly (2020), upon a majority affirmative vote of the affected presbytery or presbyteries or a majority affirmative vote of the presbyteries in the affected synod or synods, the commission is authorized to act as the General Assembly upon requests of synods and presbyteries, with the authority of the General Assembly by “approving the acts of synods to organize, divide, unite, or combine presbyteries or portions of presbyteries” according to G-3.0502e. The actions of the commission shall require a two-thirds majority for approval.

Rationale

Since May 2017, members of the seven presbyteries in New Jersey have been meeting to envision new missional communities that remain responsive to the changing contextual realities of the church and presbyteries and to the leading of the Spirit. For decades congregations, and thus presbyteries in New Jersey, have been declining in membership until, like a tiny congregation in a huge old building, time, energy, and resources are spent maintaining outdated and inefficient structures and systems, to the detriment of presbyteries’ mission as the body of Christ in the world.

Through listening sessions in each of the New Jersey presbyteries, there was constant confirmation that now is the time to radically change the structure and function of these presbyteries to embrace an understanding of mid councils as spiritual communities rather than legal and administrative organizations. This is not to diminish the work of the current presbytery structure. The old wineskins have been wonderful containers for the old wine, but the new movement of the Spirit in this *kairos* moment calls for a new sort of structure.

The visioning group discerned that God’s provision for ministry is taking a new form: fewer separate entities and greater collaboration, bringing about a new, statewide missional community. The visioning group was commissioned to explore several considerations as they imagined ways of redrawing the boundaries of seven presbyteries. In the end they produced a map of four presbyteries. The boundaries are soft, and presbyteries will have time to determine the final boundaries based on what will maximize health and effectiveness. The group envisions that shortly

after the four new presbyteries are initially established, they will cooperate in a New Jersey missional community to accomplish goals no single presbytery can achieve on its own.

Currently, four of the seven presbyteries have voted unanimously to accept the invitation to participate in the New Jersey New Missional Communities. The three remaining presbyteries will be voting over this fall and winter. Once the votes are taken, a design and transition group will be assembled that will consider among other items legal and financial implications of redrawing presbytery boundaries, its impact on restricted funds, particular organizations that currently are within a presbytery, etc. This group will ultimately be authorized as an administrative commission of the synod to work through the issues that need attention before the proposed boundary changes can be brought to General Assembly.*

Clearly, this work will not be completed by the 224th General Assembly (2020). However, given the desire of presbytery members to move into new missional communities as quickly as possible, once the work has been completed it will be to the detriment of the current presbyteries and the dreams and visions of their members to have to wait until the 225th General Assembly (2022) in order to make the changes people eagerly await.

The Synod of the Northeast is aware that other presbyteries and synods around the country are in the midst of transformation and can also benefit from a General Assembly Commission on Mid Councils that allows those who are pressing forward to begin the work they are called to do in the 21st century.*

*Most of the rationale is taken from *Invitation to Participate in New Jersey New Missional Communities*, written by the New Jersey Mission Structures Working Group. It was approved by the Synod Mission and Ministries Commission on September 28, 2019, per the Reverend Nancy Talbot, Synod Stated Clerk.