

# Viability Task Force Description

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This Task Force shall relate and report to the Congregational Care Subcommittee of COM. Its task is to help congregations discern their viability and to offer options for their future in light of the mission, strategy and resources of the entire Presbytery

A Session or Pastor may contact the Committee on Ministry or the Committee on Ministry may initiate a conversation with the Session. The invitation to a period of discernment may be made when temporary and stated supply contracts are due for renewal, when the triennial visit is made or at any point at which it becomes evident that a congregation is struggling<sup>1</sup>. The Committee on Ministry is a partner with the Session in this process, and the aim is to come to mutual agreement about the future of the congregation through the discernment process. At the same time, either COM or the Session may recommend a specific course of action to the congregation and the presbytery without the support of the other. The final decision about the future of the congregation is always up to the presbytery.

**There will be at least one meeting with the Session.**

**Meeting #1** - A member of the Congregational Care subcommittee and a member of the Task Force on Discerning Congregational Viability will meet with the Session and pastor (or temporary or stated supply) to outline the process of discernment and briefly describe the options that will be presented during the process. The Session will be informed that there will be some preliminary work to be accomplished before the second meeting. The work will include preparing the "Financial Reality Checklist" and the "Snapshot of Church Finances" both provided by the Committee on Ministry, and an assessment of the condition of the property and an estimate of the cost of any needed repairs prepared by a professional contractor. It is at this meeting or at a Session meeting when Presbytery representatives are not present, that the Session will decide if it wishes to enter the process.

**If the Session agrees to enter into the discernment process, three more meetings are held.**

**Meeting #2** - Two members of the Viability Task Force will meet with the Session. The information gathered by the Session since the first meeting will be presented and discussed. The six options will be presented with an in-depth explanation of how each would affect the congregation. It is recommend that votes will not be taken at this meeting.

**Meeting #3** – The reflections from the first two meetings are reviewed. The group identifies the options that seem to be rising to the top of the discussion. Plans are made for the Session to vote on the options at the next meeting.

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<sup>1</sup> See Manual for Struggling Churches, pg. 3

#### **Meeting #4**

This meeting will be a review of past discussions and a time for the Elders to share their concerns and views. The Session will vote on which option they want.

The costs associated with members of COM and the Viability Task Force facilitating this discernment process will be borne by Albany Presbytery. If subsequent consultations are needed up to two meetings at a time may be negotiated, with the expense covered by the congregation. Upon the conclusion of their work the Task Force on Viability and the Session will submit a joint report to COM including an evaluation, conclusions and recommendations. If their conclusions and recommendations are significantly different, the Session and Viability TF members may choose to submit separate reports.

#### ***The Options***

- If the first option, that is, transformation or renewal is chosen, the Session will be referred to COM's Strategy Task Force. The Strategy Task Force may work with them over a period of 18 months.

While congregations are working for up to 18 months to reverse their decline, and/or moving toward discerning whether to become a house church or fellowship, their pastors will be strongly encouraged to participate in a support and equipping group of colleagues in similar circumstances, convened and facilitated by the General Presbyter.)

- If options 2, 3, or 4 are chosen, that is merging or becoming a house church or fellowship, the Session will be referred to COM and Trustees to work out the details of transition.
- If option 5 is chosen, that is, dissolution of the congregation and distribution of assets, the Session will be referred to COM and Trustees for help and resources.
- If option 6 is chosen, that is no significant change until the congregation's assets are depleted, COM and Trustees will recommend to presbytery that a certain amount of the assets be set aside for building maintenance and final costs related to dissolution. COM will continue to provide only basic care and support. This option is the least desirable, and COM will encourage the Session to study and reflect upon their theology of stewardship of resources.

**Updated January 6, 2011**