

**FROM THE ASSOCIATION GENERAL MINISTER | June 2021
TO THE COUNCIL OF LIVING WATER ASSOCIATION, OHIO NORTHEAST, UCC**

The Landscape of Ministry continues changing. We are living through cultural moments that present new challenges and new opportunities. In fact, I believe we are living through the rebirthing of the Church. The traditional approaches to church growth and vitality have not been working. There are no prescriptions or “one size fits all” solutions. There are no cookie-cutter or ready-made strategies. There are no maps or navigation systems except the Holy Spirit’s.

As the Living Water Association comprised of 149 congregations, we provide resources and support for the wellbeing of our congregations. During our last annual meeting we agreed that in cultural moment the Spirit is calling us to EXPLORE, EXPERIMENT, EXCITE! To that end believe it is time to be more explorative and experimental as well as purposeful and intentional about the future of our Association, hence our congregations.

I suggest the creation of a **PANEL FOR CHURCH** that will be about **FUTURING CHURCH** as well as Traditional Vitality. Panel will consist of two teams - Traditional Vitality and Futuring Church.

A PANEL FOR CHURCH

Aware and grateful that the future of the church as well as its present are in the hands of the Holy Spirit, we seek the Spirit’s guidance for the road ahead, so we are not lost but intentional and purposeful.

FUTURING CHURCH

What is Futuring?

Futuring actively views the present world as a window on possible future outcomes. Futuring watches trends, assesses situations, anticipates future needs, practices foresight, and explores possibilities. Futuring focuses on signals, uncovers patterns, looks back to look at the future, and cultivates readiness for new possibilities.

What is a Panel?

A panel is a group of persons called to think together, study, advise, judge and discuss. A panel can provide guidance and resources toward our readiness for our own future.

The Panel for Church will be a think tank made up of authorized ministers and lay people with demonstrated gifts for insight and foresight, who will work with our Association Ministers to:

- Focus on the bigger picture of our Association, its local churches and their possibilities for the future
- Foresee, discern new possibilities for the Association
- Help develop a culture of intentionality and purposefulness especially for the future of church
- Imagine opportunities for new ministries, new prospects for ministry partnerships, etc...
- Explore possibilities for collaboration in the Association by considering Missioninsite, trends, situations, location, theology, worldview, assets, current ministry, life cycles, etc..
- Function as advisory to our local churches considering their future

Working with our Association Ministers, The Panel for Church's work will:

- Resource our congregations for exploring possibilities for their church's future, including becoming Resurrection churches when the time comes (previously legacy)
- Review their congregation's present state
- Assess their ministry and involvement in community around them
- Determine where they are on the cycle of church life
- Evaluate their energy and willingness to engage in foresight and transformation
- Consider collaboration, sharing buildings or pastors, using buildings for mission, etc...

The panel, at its inception, will function as advisory, consultative, offering counsel to the Association Ministers. This function might expand as the vision unfolds.

The Panel will comprise authorized ministers, lay persons, unchurched persons including some from our mission partners – a pool of up to 15 persons. The pool of the panel may change as the vision unfolds. The pool will shift considering duration of service, gifts and skills, and function of the panel at any given time.

TRADITIONAL VITALITY

Traditional vitality has generally included processes that I characterize as “maintenance”- upgrade and upkeep, such as:

- Church Ministry/Vitality Assessment
- Discerning a New Vision or Revisioning
- Restructuring Church Governance
- Conflict management and resolution
- Leadership Development and Nurturing Gifts
- Generosity and Stewardship development
- Worship development and technology
- Faith in action and community engagement
- Missioninsite reports

In our current cultural moment vitality can be about “right-sizing.” As congregations decrease or increase in size they would greatly benefit from “right sizing” their ministries, buildings, staff, finances, programs toward effective ministry.

As we embark on this journey of futurting we have to remember that:

- The future is in the Spirit's hands
- The future is a study of change and possibility
- The future is complex and evolves through processes of rapid changes
- Hence, we have to constantly improvise and adapt

Thanks be to God for The Spirit's creative work within and among us!