

Synod of the Southwest Mid-Council Task Force: “Minority Report” Approved November, 2025

In August 2020, the Synod of the Southwest (the Synod), received a letter from the Presbytery de Cristo and the Presbytery of Grand Canyon Leadership Teams “to request [the Synod’s] participation in a mid-councils’ conversation on sustainability, viability, and ability to provide ministry and mission support to our constituent congregations, mission partners, and pastors” (see Appendix A). A task force was formed with members from each presbytery (see Appendix B) to discuss the following issues:

- ***Per Capita:*** Why do we pay per capita? What are the functions of the Synod and its four presbyteries? Is per capita the correct funding model or is there an alternative, more effective model?
- ***Missional Purpose:*** What is the missional purpose of the Synod in the context of its four presbyteries? What presbytery functions require (or can be improved with) the support of the Synod?
- ***Shared Opportunities:*** What shared opportunities exist between the New Mexico and Arizona presbyteries the Synod can support through facilitation, communication, or funding?
- ***Historic Mission:*** How can the Synod encourage, facilitate, and support its historic ministries to Hispanic and Native congregations as well as emerging ministries to African and immigrant communities within its bounds?

Process

Personal Dialogue and Study

The MCCTF met for the first time on June 21, 2021. In this first and in subsequent meetings, members of the task force discussed,

- their personal stories and experiences,
- their understanding of the Synod’s organization, role, and function as a PCUSA mid-council,
- the biblical, theological, and polity foundations for Synod ministry, especially as related to the denomination’s Matthew 25 project, and
- the values that would guide their work, defined as:
 - conversation and engagement of all voices,
 - sustainability, viability and ability to provide ministry and mission support,
 - radical inclusion and hospitality, especially to “the least of these,” and
 - open and transparent communication to commissioners, presbyteries, and congregations.

Survey

The Task Force subsequently covenanted with the denomination’s Research Services to develop and distribute a survey to leaders and members in each presbytery (see Appendix C). While over 300 people responded to the survey, it was deemed ineffectual due to the lack of “synod awareness” among respondents. A majority of respondents rated their knowledge of synod as poor or non-existent, while only 4% rated their knowledge as excellent. Further, 78% of respondents had “no involvement with the synod in the previous five years.” The disconnect was / is staggering and dates back to previous synod visioning reports in 2006 and 2013. This is a historic problem. Due to this lack of functional knowledge about the synod’s purpose and role, the survey data is minimized in this report’s conclusions.

Accomplishments

The task force also reviewed and discussed the Synod's "accomplishments" since its last visioning committee in 2013 and articulated 38 distinct items. In reviewing its work, the task force noted the majority of the Synod's work—20 distinct items listed—focused on financial support and scholarships for congregational, educational, presbytery, and Presbyterian Mission Agency ministries (e.g. Menaul School, Frontera de Cristo, Seminary Scholarships). Of note among this list is that the Synod was instrumental in securing \$250,000 in funding for essential food relief for Native communities during COVID.

Secondarily, the Synod sponsored or facilitated six (6) kinds of leadership development events for biblical preaching, stewardship, Native American CP training, Native American ministry, Hispanic/Latinx ministry, and GA commissioner training. Of note in this list is that the six categories organized and facilitated by the Synod cumulatively amount to twenty-three (24) training events, including the Theocademy training of Native American Commissioned Pastor candidates.

Finally, the Synod hosted groups for educational tours (e.g. Synod executives in Native American congregations or on the border) five (5) times and listed two (2) instances in which Synod staff provided impactful advocacy support for racial-ethnic ministries.

Mission and Vision

Seeking to apply the above articulated values, combined with the work of the Synod over the last 11 years, the task force reviewed the Synod's mission and vision statements. This minority report suggests the following statements for Synod approval:

Mission Statement

The Synod exists to:

- support leadership development among pastors, commissioned pastors, and ruling elders,
- support racial-ethnic ministry and small churches, and
- facilitate robust communication and collaboration among its presbyteries that enhances each presbytery's health, vitality, and missional purpose.

Vision Statement

God is weaving the Synod of the Southwest into a tapestry of cultures, peoples and dreams – an "Ojo de Dios" that envisions God's kin-dom of wholeness, grace and beauty. Therefore, the Synod supports its presbyteries, congregations, and mission partners to promote health, vitality, and sustainability as together we express the kin-dom of God in the unique historical and cultural confines of the southwest.

Proposed Work of the Synod

Given the utter disconnect between the Synod and its members as highlighted in the survey, the task force focused much of its energy on creating a communication strategy that will link the Synod to its presbyteries, congregational leaders, and mission partners. Borrowing a phrase from real estate, there are three keys to ministry: communication, communication, communication. Therefore, the Synod—its staff, officers, and commissioners—covenant to the following:

Leadership Development

- Offer an annual conference during the summer for ministers of Word and Sacrament and Commissioned Pastors on preaching and teaching the Bible.
- Offer an annual conference for all church leaders on a topic of ministry, rotating the themes among congregational formation, missional formation, and spiritual formation.
- Expand the support and scope of Commissioned Pastor training to target racial-ethnic pastors within the Native American, Hispanic/Latinx, African, and African-American congregations for both full (e.g. serving as the local pastor of a congregation) or limited (e.g. celebrating the sacraments, offering pastoral care) service.

Racial-Ethnic and Small Church Ministries

- Continue to staff and fund the work of the Native American Ministries Coordinating Committee (NAMCC) and Hispanic/Latinx Ministries Coordinating Committee (HMCC) to support collaborative mission projects and learning events among their constituent groups. In addition, establish, staff, and fund the work of an African Ministries Coordinating Committee (AMCC) to support collaborative mission projects and learning events among African congregations and fellowships within the Synod.
- Research, discern, and distribute resources to assist smaller churches (under 50 members), including offering CP training to assist in leadership and pastoral care.
- Initiate and facilitate conversations between smaller churches working with other smaller churches or with larger churches on special projects (e.g. elder training, VBS, or mission projects).

Communication

- *Over-communicate the vision:* When people ask, “So what does Synod do?” the answer will be pervasive and automatic: “Synod supports leadership development, racial-ethnic ministry and small churches.” The staff, officers, and commissioners will routinely report on these foci—concretely and continually, with specificity.
- *Update and maintain the website:* Staff, in consultation with the IT services of the Synod of the Sun, will craft and post descriptions of all Synod activities and ministries, a calendar of synod and presbytery-level events, and links to all presbytery pages and mission partners.
- *Use technology as a communication tool:* Distinguishing between business meetings and relational ministry that builds the Body of Christ, the Synod will increase their utilization of Zoom meetings for all committee gatherings, as the work of business meetings is conducive to the use of Zoom. However, recognizing that Christian faith is relational and incarnational, continue in-person gatherings at least once a year as an overnight event. In order to optimize the time and quality of in-person interactions, business conducted at in-person meetings should utilize consent motions for report approvals whenever possible.
- *Create and distribute newsletter information to the presbyteries:* Staff, in consultation with presbytery, congregational, and mission partner leaders, will send Synod information and share ministry stories for inclusion in the presbytery newsletters. The purpose is to tell stories of **innovation and impact** to promote creative, engaging expressions of leadership development, racial-ethnic engagement, and small church vitality.

Stories can be conveyed through written word or as video—the goal is to connect through creativity! A target goal is for the Synod to communicate to each presbytery one or two articles per month, preferably with photos included.

- *Connect presbytery leadership:* The Synod will initiate quarterly gatherings of presbytery leadership by Zoom or, if agreed to by all, in-person for the purpose of communicating about each presbytery's needs, questions, current and upcoming challenges, and how to resource one another for the common good. In previous years, this gathering was informally known as the *synod collegium*. It is time the *collegium* returned.

Recommendations

Staffing

This minority report recommends the following:

1. that current staff be directed to shift their functions to support the recommendations listed in the above section on the proposed work of the Synod,
2. that an Interim Stated Clerk / Executive Nominating Committee, consisting of two people from each presbytery, be elected no later than the November 2025 stated meeting,
3. that upon election of an Interim, current staff be given severance to continue full salary and benefits until December 31, 2026,
4. that Synod staff be reduced to one person to serve as an Interim without permission to be elected as the installed Stated Clerk / Executive; this will empower the Interim to discuss a “reduced function” synod without any self-interest in maintaining the current structure or becoming the permanent Stated Clerk/ Executive,
5. that the Interim be tasked with the following:
 - a. evaluating the feasibility of fulfilling the duties described above in the section (“Proposed Work of the Synod”) as a single staff person,
 - b. facilitating a discernment process regarding the wisdom and advisability of becoming a “reduced functioning” Synod in accordance with Book of Order G-3.0404, including
 - i. a description of the practical, polity, and personnel requirements for a reduced functioning Synod, and
 - ii. input from other Synods currently functioning in this manner and each of their constituent presbytery leaderships.

Structure

No recommendations.

Per Capita

That per capita remain at current levels for 2026 and 2027 to allow for stable funding during a transitional period.

Respectfully submitted,

Brad Munroe, Tiffany Lo-Finch, Bart Smith, Elizabeth Smith, and Sara Ver Burg

Appendix A

Request for Visioning Process from Arizona Based Presbyteries



August 31, 2020

To: Synod and presbytery leadership in New Mexico and Arizona

From: Brad Munroe

RE: Request for conversation among mid-councils' leadership within the Synod of the Southwest

Dear Colleagues,

I write at the request of both the Presbytery de Cristo Leadership Commission and the Presbytery of Grand Canyon Leadership Team to request your participation in a mid-councils' conversation on sustainability, viability, and ability to provide ministry and mission support to our constituent congregations, mission partners, and pastors. Before I say more, a bit of background is in order to provide context to these conversations.

During 2020 both Arizona-based presbyteries conducted a visioning process due to the fact our shared staffing plan is no longer affordable to de Cristo in its current 68%/32% cost sharing arrangement. This visioning process examined what is constitutionally mandated, what we actually do, and what our congregations need from us. The result of the task force work is that both presbyteries will vote at their fall meetings on a proposal that offers three options: (1) independent presbyteries with separate staff, (2) adjustment to the shared staffing arrangement, and (3) organizational merger.

As finances are a significant driver in these discussions, both presbyteries' leadership think it is necessary to invite the synod and our New Mexico-based presbytery colleagues into a wider conversation about how we can best serve as ministry partners. Because finances are a driving force in these conversations, the issue of synod per capita is a presenting issue. However, I believe our best path forward is to seek a broader conversation about ministry and mission that includes finances as but one concern or interest among many.

A faithful conversation will address finances, yes, but also articulate each presbytery's ministry priorities, interests, and ability to support each other in the work before us all. How can we work together to create sustainability, viability, and ability to provide ministry and mission support? This question can only be answered through dialogue and discernment.

On behalf of the Presbytery de Cristo and the Presbytery of Grand Canyon, I respectfully request this dialogue be initiated at the October Synod meeting. I imagine this conversation may take 12 to 24 months to accomplish the sufficient depth of dialogue, shared horizons, and creative thinking that will provide substantive ideas for support and provision of our congregations, mission partners and pastors. I imagine this conversation may prove to be difficult yet life-giving. I imagine, most of all, this is a conversation whose *kairos* has come.

Grace and peace,

Brad Munroe
Presbytery Pastor

Appendix B

Those Who Have Served the MCCTF (in alphabetical order)

CP Josefina Ahumada
Rev. James Baylor
Ruling Elder Nelson Capitan
Rev. Dr. Craig Lindsey
CP Nancy Muschak
Rev. Jose Olagues
Synod Stated Clerk Conrad Rocha, *ex officio*
Rev. Martha Sadongei
Rev. Takako Terino
Rev. Dr. Judith Todd
Rev. Bill Voigt

Appendix C

Synod Survey Results

For a comprehensive review of the synod's survey results, please consult the majority report, pages 42-126.