



**A Test Run**  
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Rachel Yates

We often take things out for a test run before we commit. Perhaps it's a test drive of a new vehicle. Mattress companies are devising innovative ways for you to test out their products before buying. I test out shoes by limping around in one of them in the shoe store. If I've got enough patience, I'll slip on both new shoes and do a little jog around the displays – as if I'll actually jog anywhere in them.

Our last dog adoption involved a test run of a rescue beagle at the local pet food store. To see if the beagle would react negatively toward other dogs or people, I was allowed to put her on a leash and lead her around the store. My husband's favorite test is to grab the dog's lower jaw and shake it gently, as if he's wrestling something away. He growls just a bit to make it realistic. Fortunately for my husband, all the dogs have passed this test. It's only going to take one biter to make him second-guess this approach.

With the Presbytery, we, too, take things out for a test run. We try an approach and tweak it if we see a better way. From time to time, we shake our heads and say, "Well, that didn't work as planned. What should we try instead?" I've written before about the value of experimentation -- of taking small, reversible steps to try out an approach or a ministry before committing all our resources and energy.

We're at another point where we need to take something out on a test run. At our September Presbytery meeting, you'll be asked to consider some changes to how four of our commissions do their work, including the two that perform functions mandated by the Book of Order (Commission on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) and Commission on Ministry (COM)). The Council and Partnership Commission round out the group of four. A few years ago, we intentionally empowered the commissions to act on behalf of the Presbytery on matters affecting individuals or particular congregations. This approach entrusted people with the most direct knowledge to make informed, quicker decisions and created room in our business meetings for consideration of those matters affecting the Presbytery as a whole. Our one-hour business meetings, coupled with excellent education opportunities, are by-products of that thoughtful restructuring process.

The COM took on significant responsibility in that restructuring: church conflicts (yes, it happens on occasion), pastoral transitions, pastoral care, and congregational vitality. Whew!

In the last couple years, the needs of our congregations have changed. About half our congregations are in the midst of pastoral transitions. Even as we celebrate the arrival of a new pastor in one congregation, we learn of the departure of another. This is likely to continue for some years, particularly as our Baby Boomer pastors contemplate retirement. COM's time is more than occupied by these transitions, and its members are candid about their inability to attend to the competing needs of pastoral care and congregational vitality -- the proactive measures that might reduce the number of transitions.

So, the four commissions are proposing some tweaks to better support our congregations and leaders. The main changes have been discussed among the commissions and their moderators, and they agree that we should "kick the tires" on a new alignment of responsibilities as follows:



Commission on Transitional Ministries (formerly COM): focus on transitions only. We'll offer training to help our CTM volunteers be valuable facilitators for our congregations in transition or in conflict.

Commission on Pastoral Ministries (formerly Commission on Preparation for Ministry): historically our CPM supported individuals exploring a call to ministry. We have only two people in that exploration process right now, and it is not likely to pick up significantly in the next several years. With the realignment, the CPM would take a cradle-to-grave approach, focusing on the needs and health of our teaching elders at any stage of their ministries.

Congregational Vitality Commission (formerly Partnership Commission): This commission would now be responsible for congregational vitality initiatives. Along with its continuing grant-making functions, the commission would oversee our vitality projects, such as Holy Cow assessments or the recent Small Church Vitality project. Whether congregations need money, advice, or training, this commission will facilitate getting these resources to our churches.

Council: The Council will retain its vision, financial, and administration functions, and will take the lead Presbytery role with churches that want to pursue new forms through merger, assimilation, or closure. The Council will have more responsibility for ecumenical and covenant partner relationships.

The meeting papers, to be posted on our website no later than September 18, will include a more detailed explanation of the suggested realignment.

I've been delighted by the willingness of each of the affected commissions to give it a shot. Members of those commissions want the Presbytery to support you in the best way possible -- because they *are* you! The commissions are comprised of volunteers from among our pastors and congregations. We are all facing similar struggles and, like you, they're hoping for direction and change. They have our best interests at heart and see the need to make some adjustments.

We propose to try this realignment out for a year before amending the Manual of Operation. That will give us time to see what works well and what could use further adjustment. We'll put the new structure on a leash, as it were, and take it out for a walk.

As you read about the responsibilities and roles of each of these commissions, I hope you'll pray about whether God is calling you to serve on one of them. Or, perhaps you know someone who is gifted in one of these ministries, and you will invite someone else to consider serving. Experience is not required, and training is offered so you'll feel comfortable with the work. Our Nominating Committee is actively seeking people interested in serving on these commissions and other ministries of the Presbytery. Lance Loveall ([lloveall@att.net](mailto:lloveall@att.net)) is the Moderator of the Nominating Committee and would gladly field your inquiry.

We look forward to your feedback both before the meeting and, if the way be clear, during our test run.