

**PRESBYTERY OF SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE PRESBYTERY ROUNDTABLE
March 12, 2020**

The Roundtable of the Presbytery of Southern New England met via Zoom teleconference. The meeting was called by the Co-Chairs, the Rev. Julie Emery and the Rev. Virginia Smanik, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The meeting came to order at 2:05 p.m., with a reading from Romans 15 by the Co-Chair of the Roundtable, the Rev. Virginia Smanik.

A **QUORUM** was present.

Present were: Julie Emery, Virginia Smanik, J. C. Cadwallader, Stephen Hart, Barbara Riihimaki, John Merz, Ruth Herron Smalt, and Chris Tate.

Also present were: *ex-officio* members Shannan Vance-Ocampo, General Presbyter; and David Baer, Stated Clerk.

Excused was: Kevin White. (In view of the short notice of this meeting, other members of Roundtable not in attendance are to be considered excused.)

A **QUORUM** of the Roundtable was present.

The General Presbyter offered her assessment of the developing situation. She would like the Presbytery to serve as a focal point for communication and online gathering, so that pastors and other leaders feel less isolated and more equipped with resources. She encouraged the Roundtable to communicate resources and recommendations to the Presbytery, and she urged a focus on the theological framing of the situation and the church's response.

Members of the Roundtable discussed a draft communication prepared by the General Presbyter and the Stated Clerk. After discussion, the Roundtable **VOTED** to **APPROVE** the following text:

Dear Members and Friends of PSNE,

The Apostle Paul writes to us in Romans 15 that "Those of us who are strong and able in the faith need to step in and lend a hand to those who falter, and not just do what is most convenient for us. Strength is for service, not status. Each one of us needs to look after the good of the people around us, asking ourselves, "How can I help?" That's exactly what Jesus did. He didn't make it easy for himself by avoiding people's troubles, but waded right in and helped out. 'I took on the troubles of the troubled,' is the way Scripture puts it. Even if it was written in Scripture long ago, you can be sure it's written for *us*."

Today the Roundtable met and strongly encourages our sessions to consider suspending public worship and other gatherings at least until the end of March.

Decision-Making

In our system of polity, the decisions around gatherings, worship and other events at your congregation or place of worship are yours alone to make. G-3.0201a: ***“the session has the responsibility and power to... provid[e] a place where the congregation may regularly gather for worship, education, and spiritual nurture...”*** In W-1.0304 we are reminded that: ***“Christian worship is contextual--emerging from a particular community and incorporating the words, images, symbols, and actions that best convey the good news of Jesus Christ in that gathering of God's people.”*** In all things we encourage you to maintain the spirit of the Prophet Jeremiah: ***“But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”***

Virtual Worship

At the Presbytery meeting, pastors gathered over a meal to discuss plans to collaborate and create a virtual worship experience for all members of our congregations and presbytery. The first of these worship services will be made available for church members to experience on Sunday, March 22.

Pastoral Support

We will offer online Zoom video-conferencing conversation groups for clergy in the Presbytery who are engaged in worship leadership. These conversations will be led by the Rev. Shannan Vance-Ocampo, General Presbyter as an open and generous space for clergy to talk, cross-resource and support each other. These conversations will begin with a prayer space for your spiritual nurture. Grab a cup of coffee and join your colleagues in PSNE for support as you need it!

Insert image with Clergy Conversations

Communications

We have developed a COVID-19 resource page on the PSNE website. Please bookmark and check this page frequently as it will continue to be updated and is your go-to information hub from the Presbytery. Please do not forget to share with us what you are doing in this time so we can learn from you and share your best practices with others around the Presbytery community.

BUTTON to PSNE PAGE ON COVID-19

Presbytery Staff Support

All Presbytery staff are continuing to work their regular hours and are available to support you. Please reach out to any of them with needs you have. We are here for you and to help your ministry thrive in this time. Please remember that our Presbytery Chaplain, the Rev. Dr. Jim Glenn is also available to have confidential pastoral conversations with you if you find yourself isolated and in need.

In all things, we want to emphasize that this challenge, like all, presents the opportunity for us to be the Church and to show the love and light of Jesus Christ in our communities. Our Lord Jesus Christ calls us to focus first on those on the margins of our society, those who are left out and those who are lost. We do not believe this is a time of turning inwards, but a time of turning

outwards. The greatest challenge we face is in how to continue to not just show but offer the light and love of Jesus Christ in this time. It will require our best selves, rooted and grounded in prayer and the work of the Spirit in our lives.

As the Apostle Paul reminds us, *Strength is for service, not status. Each one of us needs to look after the good of the people around us, asking ourselves, "How can I help?" That's exactly what Jesus did.*

Blessings,

The Presbytery Roundtable

The Roundtable adjourned with prayer at 2:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

-signed-

Rev. David A. Baer, Stated Clerk

**PRESBYTERY OF SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE PRESBYTERY ROUNDTABLE
March 19, 2020**

The Roundtable of the Presbytery of Southern New England met via Zoom teleconference. The meeting was called by the Co-Chairs, the Rev. Julie Emery and the Rev. Virginia Smanik, to continue coordinating the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The meeting came to order at 9:05 a.m., with a devotional reading by Ms. Smanik from Rev. Hannah Adams Ingraham, the chaplain at Franklin College, "O God, I'm Spinning Out: A Prayer."

A **QUORUM** was present.

Present were: Julie Emery (co-chair), Virginia Smanik (co-chair), Lisa Baker, J. C. Cadwallader, Stephen Hart, Barbara Riihimaki, John Merz, Ruth Herron Smalt, and Chris Tate.

Also present was: *ex-officio* member Shannan Vance-Ocampo, General Presbyter.

Excused was: David Baer, Stated Clerk. (These minutes were prepared by Mr. Baer from a video recording of the meeting.)

The General Presbyter gave a report about her work during the past week. She summarized her written report as follows: It is the recommendation of the General Presbyter and the Stated Clerk that the Roundtable plan for an online-only Stated Meeting of the Presbytery on May 16. While the Presbytery could conduct business during this meeting, many of the planned activities, including the "blanket exercise," would need to be postponed to a separate gathering, which the Stamford church is willing to host when it is possible to do so. Presbyterian Immigrant Ministry (PIM) reports that the immigration detention facilities have been closed to visitors, and so it is not possible for them to continue this aspect of their work. Ms. Vance-Ocampo has been hearing of impacts of the outbreak on communities across the presbytery.

Members of the Roundtable reported on the anticipated impact on the work of their committees.

Ms. Riihimaki offered a preview of the work of the Committee on Ministry during this time. The installation of the Rev. Nancy McLaren as Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Hartford will likely need to be postponed from the planned date of May 3. She inquired as to whether it would be possible for the First Presbyterian Church of Greenwich to hold its congregational meeting to concur in the request of their Pastor, the Rev. Sean Miller, to dissolve the pastoral relationship. Based on advice from the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, it appears that the congregation could hold a "consultation" via Zoom, in spite of the lack of provision in their bylaws for electronic meetings.

Kevin White reported on the work of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry. The committee is planning to go forward with its April 21 meeting, which will be a fully virtual meeting. The committee will be engaging in annual consultations with inquirers and candidates, and Mr. White is currently making contact with those under care.

Lisa. Baker participated in a webinar on Wednesday regarding a faith-based response to COVID-19. Some issues to think about in the area of advocacy include schools in marginalized areas. There was conversation about federal stimulus legislation under consideration, and the importance of staying aware of these discussions. Ms. Vance-Ocampo reminded the Roundtable of Ms. Baker's admonition, at the January meeting, that the Roundtable needed to update the Presbytery's disaster preparedness plan, a need that has certainly become much more pressing! Ms. Vance-Ocampo will meet separately to discuss this further.

Ruth Smalt, the Moderator of the Presbytery, reported that wealthy individuals are fleeing New York City on private planes to open their summer homes on Nantucket. The community's response has been mixed, with year-round residents expressing pride at serving as a refuge, while also feeling apprehensive about the potential for the spread of infection on this otherwise isolated island. The church she serves is reorganizing its food pantry to respond to emerging needs.

John Merz commended Ms. Vance-Ocampo's management of the Presbytery staff during this time. He noted the challenges faced by Erika Hagen and David Baer, who have young children in their homes. Mr. Baer's work, he said, ebbs and flows during the course of the year, and this is a time when it is appropriate for him to focus on accomplishing mainly the essentials for the Presbytery, while attending to the needs of his family and the congregation he serves.

Julie Emery noted the importance of clergy being present to members of their congregations in virtual gatherings that are particular to each church, but she asked whether it might be appropriate to organize a Presbytery-wide worship service online for a special occasion like Easter Sunday. Members of the Roundtable engaged in a discussion of how to provide appropriate resources for virtual worship to the Presbytery's clergy and congregations.

Members of the Roundtable also discussed pastoral responses to the outbreak. There are varying levels of awareness about the risks posed by COVID-19 and the need for "social distancing," and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance could be a helpful resource for explaining the situation. Clear recommendations from the Presbytery can provide support for clergy making difficult decisions about canceling church events. Ms. Vance-Ocampo stressed that this is an opportunity to model faithful discipleship. Weddings and funerals need to be modified or postponed.

The Roundtable adjourned with prayer offered by the Rev. Julie Emery at 10:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

-signed-

Rev. David A. Baer, Stated Clerk

PRESBYTERY OF SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE PRESBYTERY ROUNDTABLE
April 2, 2020

The Roundtable of the Presbytery of Southern New England met via Zoom teleconference. The meeting came to order at 9:05 a.m., with scripture and a prayer offered by the Co-Chair of the Roundtable, the Rev. Virginia Smanik.

A **QUORUM** was present.

Present were: Julie Emery, Virginia Smanik, Lisa Baker, J. C. Cadwallader, Stephen Hart, Dick Hasbany, John Merz, Anne Marie Meyerhoffer, Barbara Riihimaki, Ruth Herron Smalt, and Chris Tate.

Also present was: *ex-officio* member Shannan Vance-Ocampo, General Presbyter.

Excused was: David Baer, the Stated Clerk. (These minutes were prepared from a video recording of the meeting.)

The agenda for the meeting was **APPROVED** as presented.

The General Presbyter highlighted two items from her written report. She noted that some presbyteries are taking active steps to make funds available to support their churches during the COVID-19 pandemic. She raised the question of how best to support churches, bearing in mind the significant financial disparities around the Presbytery and our current commitments to remedying existing racial inequities. Ms. Vance-Ocampo has not received any specific requests for assistance from churches. She has assisted the Hyannis fellowship in obtaining a grant from Presbyterian Disaster Assistance.

Ms. Vance-Ocampo also noted her ongoing coaching work with Jessica Vasquez-Torres, which of late has focused on how to continue our conversations about anti-racism during this very different time. Much of Crossroads' work involves traveling to give presentations and workshops, but with their staff grounded from traveling, they may be available for some online work with our Presbytery.

There followed a period of conversation about how to offer support to the Presbytery's churches. One concern is the lack of availability of Presbytery funds. Roundtable members suggested that the Presbytery office could communicate resources to our churches, including information about federal stimulus funds. Engaging our churches in conversations centered on church practices might allow Presbytery leaders to identify specific needs which they could seek out resources to meet. Ms. Vance-Ocampo advised the Roundtable that she has been made aware that the Synod is not currently proposing to provide financial support to its presbyteries.

The Roundtable also engaged in conversation about the inequities being exacerbated by the ongoing crisis, and the need to continue talking about matters of racial and economic justice. Members of the Roundtable expressed an interest in continuing to work with Jessica Vasquez-Torres, in whatever way might be possible at present.

Ms. Vance-Ocampo advised the Roundtable of an upcoming meeting of the Permanent Judicial Commission on Saturday, April 4, to consider an Alternative Form of Resolution

agreement. Should the PJC approve this agreement, it will be necessary for their decision to be announced at a meeting of the Presbytery. Ms. Vance-Ocampo and Mr. Baer, the Stated Clerk, are recommending that the Roundtable call a special meeting of the Presbytery for this purpose. Upon a motion properly made and seconded, the Roundtable **VOTED** to **CALL** a special meeting of the Presbytery, if the way be clear, for the purpose of reading the decision of the Permanent Judicial Commission, and to **WAIVE** the fee for a special meeting, as permitted under the Bylaws of this Presbytery. The meeting will be held via Zoom teleconference on Tuesday, April 21, at 4:00 p.m.

Ms. Vance-Ocampo requested prayers for the PJC as it meets this Saturday.

The next stated meeting of the Roundtable is scheduled for April 23. Ms. Vance-Ocampo inquired as to whether the Roundtable wished to meet before then. It was the sense of the Roundtable that with Holy Week and Easter, and the upcoming special meeting of the Presbytery, it seems best to wait for the Roundtable's next stated meeting.

The Roundtable adjourned with prayer offered by the Rev. Julie Emery at 10:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

-signed-

Rev. David A. Baer, Stated Clerk

PRESBYTERY OF SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND
STATED MEETING OF THE PRESBYTERY ROUNDTABLE
April 23, 2020

The Roundtable of the Presbytery of Southern New England met via Zoom teleconference. The meeting came to order at 9:35 p.m., with a poem from John O'Donohue by the Co-Chair of the Roundtable, the Rev. Virginia Smanik.

A **QUORUM** was present.

Present were: Julie Emery, Virginia Smanik, Lisa Baker, J. C. Cadwallader, Stephen Hart, Dick Hasbany, John Merz, Anne Marie Meyerhoffer, Barbara Riihimaki, Ruth Herron Smalt, Chris Tate, and Nate Taylor.

Also present were: *ex-officio* members Shannan Vance-Ocampo, General Presbyter; and David Baer, Stated Clerk. The Rev. Jim Glenn, the Pastor to Clergy, and Erika Plank Hagan, the Presbytery Communicator, were also in attendance.

Excused was: Kevin White.

The agenda for the meeting was **APPROVED** as presented.

At the invitation of Ms. Smanik, the members of the Roundtable briefly described their feelings in the moment.

The General Presbyter gave her report, which was provided in writing. She highlighted a number of grant applications she had pursued on behalf of the Presbytery. In particular, the situation in the Hyannis fellowship has stabilized. The whole membership of that fellowship is out of work and is dependent on the local food pantry. The pastor, the Rev. Alonso Dacunha, has taken advantage of the Zoom gatherings provided by the presbytery. Ms. Vance-Ocampo expressed concern about the ability of the Presbytery to meet the needs of the MLK Church in Springfield through the appeals to other churches as had been previously planned, though \$30,000 has been received from the Synod of the Northeast.

The Roundtable had authorized \$3,000 for use related to the judicial case that has just been resolved. Of that amount, a little more than \$300 remains unspent. Ms. Vance-Ocampo thanked the Roundtable for providing these funds.

Ms. Vance-Ocampo turned to a discussion of the regular conversations being offered to the Presbytery's clergy during the COVID-19 outbreak. She solicited feedback from the Roundtable about the content of these conversations, and about whether the scope of invitation should be extended beyond the Presbytery's pastors. She also asked about the Presbytery's anti-racism work, and how the Presbytery can pursue these conversations during the ongoing crisis.

The Stated Clerk, the Rev. David Baer, presented his report. Upon his recommendation and a motion properly made and seconded, the Roundtable **VOTED** to **APPROVE** the minutes of its stated meeting on February 6, and the minutes of the special meetings held on March 12 and March 19.

Mr. Baer presented a proposed docket for the Annual Meeting of the Presbytery on May

16, which will be conducted via Zoom teleconference. He recommends the use of Zoom polling for voting where a voice vote or division would ordinarily be used. He and Ms. Vance-Ocampo, together with the Roundtable Chairs, the Moderator and Vice Moderator, and the Presbytery Communications Manager, will work together on finalizing procedures for this meeting.

Mr. Baer noted the resolution of the recent disciplinary case, which he reported at this week's Stated Meeting, and he informed the Roundtable that he had notified the Office of the General Assembly of Sean Miller's temporary exclusion from ordained office, as required by the Rules of Discipline (D-12.0104(g)).

After a brief recess, the Roundtable welcomed the Presbytery Communicator, Ms. Erika Hagan, who presented a proposed Communications Plan for the Presbytery (attachment 1). Upon a motion properly made and seconded, the Roundtable **VOTED** to **APPROVE** the Communications Plan.

The President of the Board of Trustees, the Rev. Anne Marie Meyerhoffer, provided a financial report to the Roundtable. She highlighted a grant received from the Synod of the Northeast for Valley Presbyterian Church. The Presbytery's application to the federal Paycheck Protection Program is complete and has been submitted. The Trustees are in the process of providing for a financial review. They are also developing a voucher system, so that the Presbytery's bookkeeper and treasurer can be confident that expenditures have been properly authorized.

The Rev. Chris Tate offered the report of the Nominating Committee. Upon the recommendation of the Committee, the Roundtable **VOTED** to **NOMINATE** Elder Nicole Aronson (West Hartford: Westminster) for election to a three year term on the Nominating Committee.

Elder Barbara Riihimaki presented the report of the Committee on Ministry. The Committee will be bringing Ms. Jessica Jones, a member of the Wilton church, for examination for ordination to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. The Rev. Deborah Packard will be moving to serve as the interim pastor of the Providence Presbyterian Church, beginning June 1. The Committee will be bringing a slate of nominees for the Sexual Misconduct Response Team to the stated meeting in May.

The Rev. Kevin White, though not present, send word that Dale Green had been certified ready to receive a call.

Ms. Vance-Ocampo welcomed Elder Nate Taylor (Wilton), the chair of the Emerging Ministries Team, to his first Roundtable meeting.

Ms. Baker and Ms. Vance-Ocampo reported that they had located the Presbytery's Disaster Plan, which they characterized as a plan for the evacuation of the Presbytery's former physical office in Old Saybrook. Therefore, they turned instead to a template provided by Presbyterian Disaster Assistance as the model for a new Disaster Plan, which is in progress. Ms. Baker and Ms. Vance-Ocampo highlighted some considerations related to the plan and solicited feedback from members of the Roundtable. They will bring the plan back to Roundtable for approval when it is completed.

Ms. Vance-Ocampo alerted the Roundtable to the upcoming need for a new

communication to churches about managing a return to in-person services. When state restrictions are lifted, churches will need to give consideration to how they will prepare to resume services and other gatherings, with due attention given to health and safety of church members and the community at large.

The Roundtable adjourned with prayer at 12:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

-signed-

Rev. David A. Baer, Stated Clerk

DRAFT



PSME

Updated Communications Plan

Roundtable Meeting: April 23, 2020

Objectives:

- To focus internal communications
 - Between PSNE and its member churches and clergy
- To broaden external communications
 - Between PSNE and the outside world
- To implement PSNE branded materials and reports
 - Style Guide: logos, fonts, colors

Research/Resources



PSNE

- Reviewed our current mailchimp/social media statistics
 - Good open/click rate mailchimp
 - Poor social media reach
- Interviewed 30 PSNE Members by phone/email
 - Retired/Active
 - Male/Female
 - Millennial/Gen X/Baby Boomer
- Researched other Presbyteries/Dioceses of similar size/function
- Commissioned Style Guide by Sanctified Art

Internal Communications

- Objective: Focus communications between PSNE and its member churches and clergy
- The current communications infrastructure uses all mediums to put out all messages to all audiences
- Getting Connected is clunky, being used to get information to PSNE churches and clergy, and also to pass along PC(USA) information, and also to highlight what PSNE is up to.
- Social Media (FB) passes along Getting Connected, viewable by the public, regardless of what is within that newsletter – some of which may be of little interest to a non-PSNE reader or may be of a nature that we'd want to more carefully handle the spread of content



PSNE

Internal Communications

- Define audience: clergy on rolls and member churches
- E-mail is the most used communication medium for this defined audience
- Two monthly e-mailed communications:
 - *Clergy Connection* – a monthly e-mail with necessary, time-specific, information for the next month – events, deadlines, birthdays, ordination anniversaries, prayer requests
 - *Spiritual Connection* – a monthly e-mail from the General Presbyter or Stated Clerk with a reflection or message, highlighting what they are focusing on or seeing around the Presbytery



PSNE

Internal Communications

- Targeted communications will be e-mailed as necessary
 - Presbytery Meeting Calls and Registration Info
 - Urgent Information (ex. Covid-19)
 - Pastoral Care
- Text Reminders
 - Rare and specific (interviewees who do text were open, but cautious about too many)
 - Opt-in/Opt-out
 - Example - Presbytery Meeting Reminder



PSNE

External Communications

- Objective: Broaden communications between PSNE and the outside world
- The current communications infrastructure doesn't take advantage of the online resources available
- Our website is only used to store information for current members
- We do not have Instagram, or effectively use our YouTube channel
- Facebook posts are haphazard — our members do not use it as a resource, so we should focus on the outside audience



PSNE

External Communications

- Define audience: clergy on rolls and member churches in addition to everyone else
- E-mail is just the starting point for these communications
- One monthly e-mailed communication:
 - *Getting Connected* – a monthly emailed newsletter, telling the stories of what is going on in our Presbytery using highly visual media: videos, photos
- That e-mail is the springboard for sharing content:
 - *Website* – blog-style, to catch web searches
 - *Social Media* – Facebook and Instagram (age range)
 - *YouTube* – videos/interviews/webinars



PSNE

Why Storytelling?



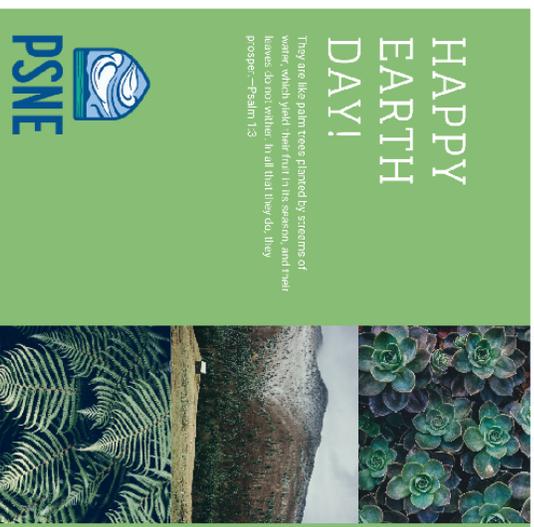
THE PRESBYTERY OF
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The theory of **narrative identity** postulates that individuals form an identity by integrating their life experiences into an internalized, evolving story of the self that provides the individual with a sense of unity and purpose in life. **It is the story we tell about ourselves to ourselves.**

- **Internal:** We want the story the members of our Presbytery tells about themselves to be similar across the whole PSNE to create a cohesive narrative identity as a Presbytery.
- **External:** By sharing our stories to a broader audience, we will invite them to participate in it in an authentic way – which will communicate better to the generations disillusioned by church institutions and infrastructure. This is evangelism through storytelling.

Social Media Fun

Use our social media (facebook and Instagram) to amplify the reach of our member churches, and to encourage engagement and sharing so our stories (external communications) reach more people.



Clean Data is Key



PSNE

- Rehaul of Breeze Directory
 - Clean and update contact information for new directory on website
 - Create targeted sub-groups for contacting, examples: Internal/External communications, By geography, Active/Retired
- Switch all registrations to Breeze to easily capture contact information for external communications
 - Trial run with Special Meeting of the Presbytery on April 21, 2020 – very successful
- Capture contact info:
 - Online: Click to subscribe button, e-mail signatures, social media forms
 - In Person: General Presbyter visits, PSNE events

Style Guide

- We hired Sanctified Art to design a Style Guide for us based on our existing PSNE Logo (complete)
- When people see material from PSNE, it should look like “us”.

Tasks:

- Create a Google document with instructions and logos for any PSNE communications – font, colors, sample template layouts
- Design letterhead, business cards, note cards using new Style Guide
- Communicate with committees and offer assistance in transferring existing materials to updated Style Guide

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Logos!



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Timeline:

- April – amend/approve Communications Plan, set up Instagram account
- May – clean Breeze data, update directory and contact lists, set up Style Guide communication, set up June e-mail communications, first Clergy Connection E-mail for June
- June – implement Communications Plan
 - 1st week of the month – Getting Connected E-mail
 - 2nd week of the month – Spiritual Connection E-mail
 - 4th week of the month – Clergy Connection E-mail
- September – gather data on new Communications Plan (interviews and metrics)
- October – discuss at next Roundtable Meeting – adjust as necessary