

## **Metropolitan Association Spiritual Life & Professional Development Committee**

Spring Meeting  
April 2026

The Spiritual Life & Professional Development Committee continues to center its work on the care, connection, and ongoing formation of clergy and authorized ministers within the Metropolitan Association. Grounded in our shared covenant, we remain committed to nurturing spaces where clergy are supported not only in their work, but in their well-being, renewal, and spiritual vitality.

Since the Fall Meeting, the committee has continued to discern how best to respond to the needs of clergy across the Association. Earlier conversations explored the possibility of launching a Metro-wide Community of Practice; however, due to limited participation, this initiative was not pursued at this time.

At the same time, the committee has remained attentive to the importance of intentional connection and support, particularly in light of

- Increasing pastoral demands
- Ongoing congregational challenges
- The emotional and spiritual weight carried by clergy

### **Committee Restructuring & Collaboration with COM:**

The committee has been actively engaged in conversations regarding structural changes within the Association, including the transition of this body into a subcommittee of the Committee on Ministry (COM).

This shift reflects a shared recognition that while COM provides authorization and oversight, there is a growing need for sustained relational and pastoral support for clergy.

The Spiritual Life & Professional Development Committee is positioned to help strengthen this support through Clergy care initiatives, opportunities for connection and renewal, and intentional outreach and accompaniment.

Ongoing collaboration with COM leadership is focused on ensuring clear communication, coordinated outreach, and avoidance of duplicated efforts.

### **Clergy Retreat & Gathering Initiatives:**

A central focus of the committee's work has been the development of clergy gatherings, including both a Metro-wide clergy retreat and smaller regional gatherings.

Planning for a clergy retreat is currently underway, with early work including:

- Identification of potential locations
- Initial program concepts centered on rest, renewal, and restoration
- Formation of a planning team (ongoing)

In addition, regional gatherings are beginning to take shape. For example, a Bronx/Westchester clergy gathering recently took place, focusing on relationship-building and shared Lenten practices.

These efforts reflect a broader commitment to creating accessible, meaningful spaces where clergy can connect with one another, share experiences and challenges, and receive spiritual and pastoral support.

### **Listening to Clergy Needs:**

A key insight guiding the committee's work is the importance of listening directly to clergy. Rather than assuming needs, the committee is working toward:

- Gathering input from clergy across the Association
- Identifying priorities for retreat programming and support structures
- Ensuring that future offerings are responsive and relevant

This listening posture reflects our belief that effective ministry support must be collaborative, contextual, and grounded in lived experience.

### **Emerging Focus: Clergy Care & Connection**

Across meetings and conversations, a consistent theme has emerged:

Clergy are faithfully caring for others, often without sufficient space to receive care themselves.

In response, the committee is prioritizing

- Spaces for mutual care and encouragement
- Opportunities for prayer and spiritual grounding
- Rhythms of connection and accountability among clergy

Even simple practices such as regular check-ins or informal gatherings are being recognized as essential forms of pastoral support within our Association.

### **Chair's Reflection**

As Chair, I have become increasingly aware of how much our clergy are carrying in this season—holding space for others while often setting aside their own need for rest and care. This work has deepened my commitment to creating spaces where clergy can pause, be supported, and reconnect with both God and one another. It is my hope that the work of this committee continues to nurture not only what clergy do, but who they are as servants of the Church.

## **Looking Ahead**

In the coming months, the committee will focus on:

- o Advancing clergy retreat planning
- o Expanding regional clergy gatherings
- o Strengthening collaboration with COM
- o Continuing to listen, discern, and respond to clergy needs

We remain committed to cultivating a ministry culture in which clergy are not only supported in their roles, but also sustained, renewed, and deeply connected to one another.

## **Invitation**

We warmly invite clergy and lay leaders across the Metropolitan Association to:

- Share ideas, needs, and hopes
- Participate in upcoming gatherings
- Join in shaping this work of care and connection

Respectfully submitted,

Maria D. Vives, Chair

Spiritual Life & Professional Development Committee

Committee Members:

Rev. Dr. Christopher K. Ponnuraj

Rev. Joyce Dugger

Rev. Todd Farnsworth

Terry Calhoun

Concheter Brown

Rev. Jerry Greene