

Report of the General Presbyter

Dr. Kevin Yoho
March 21, 2009



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Together Transforming
Lives, Congregations, Communities, World
Connected to the Synod of the Northeast and Presbyterian Church (USA)

GP Proclamation

Orange, NJ: First PC

11/11/08: Session meeting

Roseland, NJ: Roseland PC

11/16/08: Preaching and worship

Montclair, NJ: Trinity PC

11/18/08: Session meeting

Hightstown, NJ: First PC

11/22/08: PPG meeting

Montclair, NJ: Trinity PC

12/09/08: Session meeting

Stony Point, NY: Conference Center

12/10-12/08: Synod Executive Collegium.

New Brunswick, NJ: First PC

01/12/09: NJ Executive Collegium

Newark, NJ: St. Paul's PC

01/09/09: Session meeting

Bloomfield, NJ: Van Fossen Center

01/17/09: Presbytery meeting

Montclair, NJ: Grace PC

01/24/09: Session meeting

Aston, PA: Neumann College

02/03/09: Soul of an Organization conference

Montclair, NJ: Trinity PC

02/04/09: Session meeting

West Orange, NJ: Pleasantdale PC

02/09/09: Session meeting

Bloomfield, NJ: PC on the Green

02/18/09: Presbytery Overtures discernment

West Orange, NJ: St. Cloud PC

02/24/09: Session meeting

East Orange, NJ: Harambee

02/25/09: Synod Co-Executive for Partnerships

Orange, NJ: First PC

03/05/09: West Orange Stakeholders meeting

Stony Point, NY: Conference Center

03/06/09: Synod Mission Design meeting

Newark, NJ: Memorial West PC

03/07/09: PTC/CTC meeting

In a downturn, generosity wins. Race, don't chase, reduced revenues to the bottom and build ministry capacity.

Jesus went on: "Does anyone bring a lamp home and put it under a washtub or beneath the bed? Don't you put it up on a table or on the mantel? We're not keeping secrets, we're telling them; we're not hiding things, we're bringing them out into the open. "Are you listening to this? Really listening? "Listen carefully to what I am saying—and be wary of the shrewd advice that tells you how to get ahead in the world on your own. Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity. Stinginess impoverishes." (Mark 4:21-25)

Jesus challenged his listeners to really pay attention to how they use their resources. In the current world-wide economic downturn, resources are more precious than ever. As families, we are cutting expenses and conserving resources. Layoffs, upside-down mortgages, and financial commitments made during a more prosperous time diminish resources fast. Most volunteer associations, including churches, are being forced to adapt to the reduced giving of their contributors. In the Presbyterian Church (USA), the General Assembly Mission Council is set to announce restructuring efforts later this month.

In the Gospel text above, Jesus asserts that the lamp (the resource) is not to be hidden or kept for oneself. Its purpose is to release its abundant light to all. In the same way, Jesus says, we should not be stingy with our resources. Then as now, the advice to keep everything for ourselves and get all we can was turned upside down as Jesus urges us to be generous, an action that yields even more generosity.

What this downturn needs to see is the courageous church of Jesus Christ continuing to be generous with its resources. How do we do that? Many healthy businesses practice the discipline of Race, Don't Chase. Race, Don't Chase simply means that in an economic downturn, when your revenues begin to fall off, you cut expenses FASTER than the data you're getting about revenues suggests you should. Rather than getting data about last month's spending and then spending less than last month's revenues in THIS month, you make your expenses RACE your revenues to the bottom, hoping that they beat them there. If your expenses drop faster than your revenues in a down market, you can actually increase your resources in a down market. Resist the urge to cut a percentage amount equally across the board from each mission or ministry category. Instead, each session should refocus its energy to achieve its ministry goals inline with its vision.

For example, say you want to reduce expenses by \$10,000 from a budget of \$100,000. That's a 10% total reduction. Instead of reducing each ministry category by 10% equally, look carefully at your vision and determine key goals to be accomplished. Some categories may not directly have an impact on achieving these goals, so reduce them, for example, by 25%, while other categories of spending may add value and help you achieve your goals. Increase these areas to achieve more by 5% or more, for example, so that the net reduction to the budget matches your target reduction of \$10,000. Presbytery Center is ready to assist your congregation in financial and ministry review. Please call me.

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(Your congregation may have come up with several adaptive, creative ways of achieving the same outcomes. Login to our new presbytery website and post your ideas and comments on the blog category: Economic Downturn: Race, Don't Chase. To receive your own login permissions, please click the green Login button, then Request Account.)

In the Synod of the Northeast, I have participated in several forums and design consultations. Recently I have learned that many of our sister presbyteries will be forced to supplement their revenue by cashing out of their low-value stocks since they did not set aside cash reserves in past years.

I am grateful for our presbytery and financial teams' wisdom that allows me to report that Newark Presbytery has a 3-4 year cash reserve position. We do not have to sell now under-valued stocks to pay our current or future expenses. We are not forced to liquidate our market positions and hope to ride out the economic downturn until it rebounds.

We will, of course, keep a careful eye on our financial resources and reduce expenses inline with our goals. Each month we schedule a phone consultation with our account managers. We pay attention to revenue and expenses so they are optimized to help the presbytery achieve its purpose in the world. I am applying the Race, Don't Chase principle to our operations budget with a goal to reduce our budget requirements by 10% this year by re-focusing on key goals and generously delivering what our congregations and committees require to achieve their own goals as part of the Body of Christ.

God's abundant grace empowers all our congregations to reveal God's light in our communities. We can direct new ministries to our neighbors who face, as we all do, difficult decisions in the midst of financial uncertainty. So put your lamps on the tables and mantels, act generously, reduce your expenses faster than last month's data suggests, reallocate your resources to achieve your key ministry goals with joy, and you can increase your capacity for ministry.

If I haven't visited with your session recently, please call to schedule a time. I want to hear first hand your congregation's story and discern together with you how the presbytery can be a more effective partner with your unique and important ministry in your community. To God be the glory. I am grateful to be with you in ministry.

Dr. Kevin Yoho,
General Presbyter

