

Report of the General Presbyter

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

GP Proclamation

New Brunswick, NJ: First PC
11/09/09: NJ EP's meeting. Convener.

Newark, NJ: Archdiocese of Newark
11/10/09: Essex County Jail chaplain advocacy.

West Orange, NJ: Interfaith Hospitality Network
11/12/09: Annual support banquet.

Stony Point, NY: Stony Point Conference Center
12/02/09: Synod of the Northeast Executive Collegium. Convener.

Bloomfield, NJ: Korean United PC
12/13/09: Installation of the Rev. Youngchul Kim.

What's Happening?

Together, our response could transform our future.

1 Corinthians 9:19-25 Even though I am free of the demands and expectations of everyone, I have voluntarily become a servant to any and all in order to reach a wide range of people: religious, non-religious, meticulous moralists, loose-living immoralists, the defeated, the demoralized—whoever. I didn't take on their way of life. I kept my bearings in Christ—but I entered their world and tried to experience things from their point of view. I've become just about every sort of servant there is in my attempts to lead those I meet into a God-saved life. I did all this because of the Message. I didn't just want to talk about it; I wanted to be in on it!

How much are you willing to change your behaviors to reach the people in your community?

The Apostle Paul had the same question posed to him from the moment he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. Rigid, legalistic, controlling Paul was empowered to change his behaviors to become a resilient and adaptive change agent. Paul became increasingly authentic as he centered his life on the Risen Christ, a continual spiritual transformation connected his call to his context. He did not expect everyone he met to have the same encounter with Jesus that he did. As lead ambassador he did not expect a Pentecost experience to be normative in the life of the burgeoning church. Instead, Paul surmised that to really connect to the web of life he could not expect the world of the public square to change in order to meet Jesus. Rather, he would change with great personal sacrifice and by setting aside of personal preferences.

To fulfill the mission Paul had to choose to navigate outside his comfort zone. He asserted his vision to the disciples in the cosmopolitan and chaotic Corinth stating he was, "Free of the demands and expectations of everyone," (including their expectations). "I have voluntarily become a servant to any and all in order to reach a wide range of people (19)." The implications of this are huge.

Whatever our unique context, our missional opportunity is to become a servant of all so that everyone has an opportunity to experience the love of God through Jesus Christ. Laying aside our preferences and expectations empowers us to choose to change to more effectively connect to our context. Our congregations are not in a dress rehearsal. There are no stand-ins to do the ministry for us. I know we want to reach the people in our communities, and many of us are doing so quite effectively. But this is not enough. Can we, like Paul, become a servant of all to reach a wider range of people? I believe we can, but only by keeping our "bearings in Christ" can be "in on" what God is doing within our bounds and around our world.

From "What are you doing?" to "What's Happening?"

The Mission Council in the next few months will be engaging the presbytery in an evaluation of the presbytery mission design that was approved in 2005 and implemented in 2006. Our continuous ministry improvement model invites such an assessment of our presbytery life and witness together and I looking forward to the learning process ahead and implementing these improvements into our mission design and standing rules moving forward.



In the Presbyterian Church (USA), the presbytery is responsible for the mission and government of the church throughout its geographical district. G-11.0103 identifies the responsibilities of the presbytery. Almost every other presbytery in the country is engaging in a similar mission review. In March, our Mission Council will be invited to respond to a letter I helped draft signed by most of the twenty-two executive/general presbyters in the Synod of the Northeast requesting a dismantlement of the Synod and proposing inter-presbytery conversations about presbytery collaboration and even re-defining presbytery boundaries. It is no longer business as usual from Louisville to Syracuse to Newark. The entire church is actively seeking to respond to the challenge above from the Apostle: How much are we willing to change our behaviors to reach the people in our communities, and through out the world?

- The presbytery is a middle governing body.
- The presbytery is not a church.
- The presbytery is the connected congregations, represented by the ministers and elders of those congregations.

What is the purpose of the presbytery?

The key presbytery purpose is to ensure each congregation fulfills its purpose! Our call together as a presbytery is to empower each of our congregations to their ministry. The presbytery does not do it for them, instead the presbytery does everything it can to resource, guide, empower and equip every pastor, session, and congregation to change whatever is necessary to sustain a healthy, effective ministry.

Since the improvement of the presbytery's ministry is inextricably bound up with the improvement of its congregations' ministries, I am challenging each session to take a fresh look at its ministry vitality in 2010.

Our presbyterian culture normally expects congregations to undertake a mission study or congregation and community assessment during transitions of pastoral leadership. Though 25% of our churches are without a called pastor, and several are seeking pastoral leadership, all our congregations are in a transition of some kind or another. We are all in a period of transition, or should be; that is, transitioning from what has not been working so well into a phase of our congregational life where we begin to implement changes so our ministry is more vital, satisfying, welcoming, and effective.

Without reliable and valid data we are subject to tyranny and guesses.

I can read the Star Ledger multiple times today and I will learn nothing more in the fifth reading as I did in the first. More information is not what makes for an effective congregational or presbytery assessment. What adds the most value to a process of continuous ministry improvement is reliable and valid data that can resonate with our passion and help clarify our unique vision as congregations of faith and witness.

I will be meeting with each session in 2010 to listen and learn what God is up to in their congregational life. I want to celebrate and experience the blessings and the joy. Additionally, I will provide resources to each session through the Committee on Ministry liaisons so that every congregation can assess what they are currently doing, and assess what outcomes are being realized. Its not simply that we reflect together on what we are **doing**, as it necessary to reflect on what is **happening** by being together in ministry.

2010 will be a watershed year for Newark Presbytery, and I suspect for other presbyteries across the country, too. Newark is poised to impact the world within our bounds in extraordinary ways. The presbytery's mission is to ensure each congregation fulfills its unique purpose. I am committed to assisting in the delivery of every resource and asset we can to ensure each congregation achieves higher levels of vitality and ministry impact in 2010. Thank you for your prayers, passion, and partnership in our common ministry.

What's Happening? Together, our response will transform our future.

God bless you and your family, congregation, and community in 2010.

Listening,



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