

Report of the General Presbyter

Dr. Kevin Yoho

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(1st Edition, online)



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

GP Proclamation

South Orange, NJ: First Presbyterian & Trinity
03/22: Session meeting.

Liberty Corner, NJ: Liberty Corner PC
03/25: Retooling Ministry 11 NP pastors.

Livingston, NJ: Livingston PC
03/25: Session Meeting.

New Brunswick, NJ: First PC
04/12: NJ G/EP's meeting. Convener.

East Orange, NJ: Elmwood United PC
04/17: Session meeting.

Newark, NJ: Third PC
04/17: Church Survival Strategies Conference.

Little Neck, NY: Korean PC
04/27: Korean PCA and PCUSA consultation.

Upper Montclair, NJ: PC of Upper Montclair
04/27: Session meeting.

Stony Point, NY: Synod of Northeast
04/28-4/30: EP Collegium. Convener.

Bloomfield, NJ: Bloomfield College
05/04: Westminster Foundation Advisory Board.

New Brunswick, NJ: First PC
05/10: NJ G/EP's meeting. Convener.

Liberty Corner, NJ: Liberty Corner PC
05/20: Retooling Ministry 11 NP pastors.

South Orange, NJ: First Presbyterian & Trinity
05/23: Worship.

Irvington, NJ: First Presbyterian
05/23: Worship.

Irvington, NJ: First Presbyterian
05/23: Session meeting.

Verona, NJ: First Presbyterian
05/27: Session meeting.

Baltimore, MD: Baltimore Presbytery
06/03: Urban presbytery consultation.

Montclair, NJ: Central PC
06/06: Worship.

Orange, NJ: First PC
06/06: Worship.

Orange, NJ: First PC
06/06: Congregational meeting.

Presbyterians are ready for a change.

GA219 is a unique opportunity. Are we ready? Are you?

Friends, don't slack off in doing what is good. (2Thessalonians 3.13).

Change and Transition

Change is the physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual decision of moving from one place, thing, or idea to a different place, thing, or idea. We change every day. Experiencing change invites important emotional work that helps us transition through the stages of change.

Our sessions, pastors, and congregations are contemplating enormous "emotional work" as they move through these stages. Every presbytery committee and staff are focused on assisting in every way possible. During my recent session visits, I have been impressed with the depth of commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and an openness to the Spirit's leading. Each session is doing the very best they can, and they realize that God offers a hopeful future, and they are beginning to embrace it. Paul urged, "Don't slack off in doing good."

Every business, civic, and volunteer organization is transforming in varying degrees. Our connectional Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is transforming, too. This summer, we will see if Presbyterians are ready for a change as we gather as the 219th General Assembly in Minneapolis, July 3-10.

GA219 is a unique opportunity.

I think Linda Valentine, Executive Director, and the General Assembly Mission Council (GAMC), are leading the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) toward the right path. They are inviting all of us, at every ministry and governing body level to courageously embrace God's preferable future with hope.

I believe Presbyterians must again be empowered to be the salt and light in more effective ways on the street, across the nation, and around the world. We have accomplished a great deal. We all know we can do better.

The 219th General Assembly can identify what's important, help us internalize it, and initiate responsible action. The Assembly docket offers opportunities for action now that may be gone by the time we hold the next gathering in 2012.

We Pray

A spirit of prayerful urgency and courage is just what this Assembly seeks. Newark Presbytery joins in this prayer. Visit our website for resources, news, and links to events as they unfold before, during, and following this year's gathering.

Pray for our Commissioners, Elder Connie Cosgrove (Prospect), the Rev. Robert Burkins, and alternates, Elder Doris Peterson (Elizabeth Avenue-Weequahic), and the Rev. Todd Shumpert; and our Youth Advisory Delegate Lucinda Jo Landon from the Presbyterian Church of Upper Montclair. This year, we are sending an Overture Advocate, the Rev. Alfred Johnson. Our Stated Clerk, Elder Warren McNeill, will join me at the Assembly, as well. Together, NP's delegation is our investment in our ministry future.



Presbyteries Practicing Change

All across the country, many governing bodies are taking a new approach. In the Synod of the Northeast, presbyteries and their leaders have been learning together and initiating ministry adaptation.

New Jersey's Presbytery Partnership Group is composed of synod commissioners from eight presbyteries, and they have also begun to chart a new course. In March, presbyteries were offered a learning strategy called the Listening Project to help them assess their own presbytery's mission clarity, vitality and effectiveness. Every presbytery in New Jersey, in its unique historical and geographic setting and phase of organizational life, can come to its own place of readiness. Assessment tools and funds have been provided. Our Self-Study Team will incorporate these resources into their work.

Are our New Jersey presbyteries ready? I believe they are. Clarity from the NJPPG Listening Project can provide the catalyst. Time will tell, but time is short.

A Remedy for Forty-Years of Decline

Elders often ask me, "What direction should we go in?" or "How do we know what to change?" These are the kinds of questions that indicate a positive readiness for change. My response?

There is a high correlation between church growth and church engagement with its immediate community. This suggests the remedy for decades of decline. In answer to the elder's question, community engagement is the direction to take. If a congregation is already engaged, become even more effectively engaged. It's the right thing to do. Keep doing that.

A key to the process of change is connecting the worshipping congregation to the community around it in a way that the community can recognize.

The church is transformed. Even more, the community is transformed. Not just individual transformation, but community transformation. Newark Presbytery's Community Transformation Corporation will be rolling out plans later in the year to help us live into this opportunity.

To get started on a community-engagement change initiative, ask yourself: How many individuals in your church volunteer in the community, in any way, from youth to senior activities? Do you know? If not, find out and then celebrate those connections. How many participate in civic groups, government, or business in your neighborhood? How many mentor kids, lead community watch, help build the community's sense of belonging and hospitality? Have we so encumbered our congregation with "in church" activities that we have drained their resources and their capacity for hospitality to such a degree that there is little left to share with those "outside" the church? If the church is in the world, there is no "inside" and "outside" experience of God's love and blessing. Church engagement can be evaluated by how many "in the community" come "to the church." More revealing however, is to assess church engagement by counting how many "in the congregation" actively participate and are present "with the community." When a session leads its congregation in a process of honest discovery and successfully realigns its resources and passions to focus mission in authentic ways outside the church, there will be a corresponding, reciprocal response from the community to the church. I stand ready, with our dedicated staff and every committee and team of the presbytery, to assist your session in this discovery and any community-engagement change initiative that may emerge.

You may ask, "What if re-engaging the community doesn't work?" I ask you, "What if it does?"

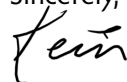
Here's what we know: If we keep church ministry the same as we have been doing, more congregations will dissolve, Newark Presbytery's net world-impact will continue to diminish, and the potential to partner with God in the transformation of 800,000 people that live within our bounds will be lost.

Here's a positive way forward: If your session listens afresh to the congregation's hopes and dreams, looks at valid data, surveys resources, builds collaborations, and re-engages your community by wrapping the congregation's arms around its neighbors, all will be calling out, "God is back, looking to the needs of people!" and the news of Jesus will spread all through the country (paraphrase of Luke 7:16-17). Newark Presbytery is ready for this change.

Incarnational, missional behavior transcends every current challenge and obstacle we face as a denomination, too.

Pray for our world and our 219th General Assembly and its commissioners. Presbyterians are ready for a change. GA219 is the opportunity. How ready are you? I am proud to join with you in getting our hearts around the world to not just make a difference in the world, but make the world different, to the glory of God, in the name of Jesus Christ. Let's not slack off in doing good, together.

Sincerely,



Dr. Kevin Yoho,
General Presbyter
Newark Presbytery

