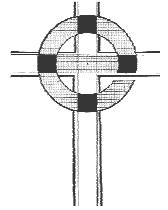




# The Presbyterian

## of The Presbytery of Elizabeth



Volume 1, Issue 8

May 21, 2010

### **"A Lesson Learned" Message from the outgoing Trustees President, Gerry Nelson**

#### **Devotions – May 2010 Presbytery Council Meeting – Gerry Nelson (Liberty Corner)**

In asking me to do the opening devotions today, Sue took advantage of me. Unless something like an unscheduled meeting intervenes, this will be my last meeting of the Council as President of the Presbytery Trustees. For some – or maybe all – that may be a cause for a sigh of relief at the prospect of fewer questions and, therefore, shorter meetings. So, I'm going to return Sue's favor and take advantage of all of you for a few moments.

The organization where I worked for a good portion of my corporate life had a tradition of requiring departing managers and executives to share with their colleagues at least one "lesson learned" – a sort of "last lecture" or "last sermon." I'm going to import that tradition – at least temporarily – here.

The first lesson – I'm impressed by the faithfulness of the people who have met around this table, month after month – in addition to serving as committee and unit chairs with the commitment of many hours of unpaid labor that entails. The lesson is to be hopeful.

The second lesson – an observation really – is that we face some formidable challenges as a church: an intellectual challenge from some bright and talented writers who challenge even the idea of faith in God to what one writer called "apatheism" – think apathy and theism together – of our broader culture. The lesson is that we really need help to meet these formidable challenges.

The third lesson – from an impeccable source: my wife. I have for some time been engaged in lengthy "email conversations" on such compelling subjects as: whether the Federal Reserve Board has been too rapid or too slow in raising or lowering interest rates; whether raising or lowering marginal income tax rates increases or lowers tax revenues to the government; whether or not the large positive balance in the Social Security Trust Fund would preclude the need to raise taxes to fund future benefits; well you get the picture.

One day, my spouse climbed the stairs to my office to remind me of a luncheon date and asked "What're you doing?" I responded that I had just collected the data to clearly and unequivocally refute a correspondent's argument on the future of mortgage interest rates. She responded "You're turning into a real Mrs. Jellyby; when are you going to clean the basement and replace those worn light switches in the family room?"

"Mrs. Jellyby?" I responded. "Yes," she said; you know the character from Dickens' novel Bleak House – giving me "that look" that English Lit. majors give engineering and economics majors when we don't understand a literary reference from 19<sup>th</sup> century British literature. So, I did what econ majors do in such cases – I rented the movie.

Mrs. Jellyby, it turns out, is the proprietress of a boarding house whose main project is not looking out for the welfare of her children who are often unfed and poorly clothed, or for the needs of her paying tenants – but rather it is in writing letters and speaking to raise money to do good works in faraway places. My wife's point, you can read, research, write, and correspond on topics which interest you because you have a place to do those things – and caring for that place is a necessary condition to doing things you like to do there.

Now for the lesson: the church's ability to do important things, things it is called to do – like disaster relief, foreign missions, local mission organization support, and speaking out on moral issues facing our culture – is contingent upon the church comprising healthy local congregations. So, we should give top priority in our time, attention, and efforts, to enhancing the health of our local congregations where we build up the faith and nurture stewardship of those who are already there, provide an inviting presence to those whose faith has "lapsed," and convince those who have not yet come to faith in our Lord. And, always keep in mind that in order to be successful at that, we need the help of an "invisible hand" – and I don't mean the invisible hand of the marketplace.



<sup>1</sup> May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, Selah

<sup>2</sup> that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.

(Psalm 57: 1-2)

## Metrics Require Courage

As you know, church work takes courage.

Speaking the truth to power, encouraging transformation of life, calling people to repentance, loving the outcast and welcoming the stranger – all those take courage.

It also takes courage to do effective metrics and to make decisions based on outcomes. Nothing is harder in congregational life than pulling the plug on a program or dream.

Every program develops a constituency. Even when an offering fails and no longer justifies allocating resources to it, those constituents have a hard time letting go. One more year, they say.

To avoid a contest of personalities, church leaders need a solid basis for action: demonstrated outcomes backed by reliable metrics.

For metrics to be indicative and trustworthy, we must gather data regularly and fearlessly. Numbers need to be accurate and consistently gathered. A negative number isn't to be avoided for fear of offending someone or admitting failure.

Equally important is a clear understanding that the church welcomes new ideas and will give them support. But the church is also committed to allocating resources wisely and won't hesitate to let some ideas drop so that others can be tried.

What I tell church leaders is this: try ten new things, drop the eight that don't succeed, nurture the two that show promise, and try ten more. As long as everyone understands that the church is a test-bed, then dropping the eight won't be seen as punishment or capricious.

This principle of “test and measure” applies to veteran programs and ideas, as well. Most congregations perpetuate some unsuccessful activities simply because no one had the heart to call a halt. That can't continue. Resources are too limited. No matter how insistent or powerful a failed ministry's constituents are, outcomes must guide decisions.

*(The above article was written by the Rev. Tom Ehrlich, founder of the Church Wellness Project. For more information about the Project, go to churchwellness.com.)*



### Tips on Metrics:

**Make their existence widely known**, both before the measuring and after results are in, and draw a clear connection between outcomes and decisions. The more transparent you are, the more likely people will be to accept outcome-based decisions.

**Insist on accuracy.** No fudging the numbers. You need to count correctly so that emerging trends can lead to effective response.

**Be consistent**, year in and year out. To see trends, you

## What's Happening in The Presbytery of Elizabeth

### 640th Stated Presbytery Meeting Tuesday, May 25, 2010 – 5:30 PM

First Presbyterian Church  
45 Market St., Perth Amboy, NJ 08860

#### Highlights:

**Worship** which offers a time for prayers of thanksgiving to God in the Sanctuary begins at 7:30 PM – Rev. Greg Albert (IEP), preaching

#### Committee on Ministry:

- Examination of Rev. Nancy Asbury (Hudson River) for membership; validate ministry
- Minister Transitions / Dissolution of Calls
- Memorial Moment for Rev. Henry Heaps, Pastor Emeritus, Dunellen

#### Committee on Preparation for Ministry:

- Examination of Edwin Estevez (Watchung Ave) for Candidate

#### Global Mission / Peacemaking Committee

- Preview of issues coming to General Assembly; Report from Peacemaking Conference.

#### Evangelism & Church Vitality Unit:

- Video Presentation “Deep and Wide”

#### Presentation on Alcoholics Anonymous

### Poverty on Film: Slumdog Millionaire Sunday, May 23 \* 5:30—7:30 pm

Crescent Ave. Presbyterian Church  
716 Watchung Ave., Plainfield, NJ 07060  
(908) 756-24-68

#### Session Minute Review III

### Tuesday, May 25 \* 12:30 PM - 3:00 PM

First Presbyterian Church  
45 Market St., Perth Amboy, NJ  
RSVP: [paulrack@optonline.net](mailto:paulrack@optonline.net)

#### Blood Drive

### Friday, May 28 \* 10 AM— 4PM

First Presbyterian Church  
83 Carteret Ave Carteret, NJ 07008  
Tel. (732) 541-4469

### Health Fair & Flea Market Extravaganza Saturday, June 5 \* 10AM - 3 PM

United Presbyterian Church  
525 East Front St., Plainfield, NJ  
(908) 756-2666

### American Red Cross Blood Drive Sunday, June 6 \* 9 AM—12 Noon

The Presbyterian Church in Westfield  
Assembly Hall  
140 Mountain Ave., Westfield, NJ

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