

**The Presbytery of Elizabeth  
I Refuse to Lead A Dying Church  
Presbytery Learning Experience – March 25, 2014  
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**Choosing Frontier Over Fortress**

1. Opening Remarks:

In God's grand scheme of creation and redemption, it was necessary that Jesus would die, right? It was necessary. In God's grand scheme of creation and redemption, there was new life on the other side of the cross. There was revived hope on the other side of the grave. In the same way, might it be necessary for Christ's body in the world to die? What if church, as we have always known it, is dying? What if, in every church of the presbytery, there is some dying going on that is part of God's grand scheme of creation and redemption? What if the institutional forms on which we have depended are crumbling? What if our condition of our structures is terminal?

What if some churches look like life and some churches look like death, but it's truly impossible to know which is which?

How do we know where to place our time, our attention, our resources? This is what this learning time is about. Not that we can avoid death, but that we may choose the new life that God is calling forth on the other side of our dying. That we may fortify our courage and mobilize our congregations, one step at a time into an uncertain future. That we may focus our gifts, our passion, and the best of our theological resources and take them beyond what we have known to the unfamiliar, unknown territory we might call the frontier.

Today, we will consider what it means to choose frontier over fortress.

2. Launched to the frontier

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."  
– Acts 1:8

Apollo 13: Setting the stage for blast-off clip. Imagine yourself in the capsule and the capsule as your church, when it was launched.....

View clip of the launching of Apollo 13; Share responses

### 3. The church's fortress mentality:

"The more building-oriented any church becomes, the more it will be tempted to take on the settled attitudes and habits of an institution, and to leave the free-spirited, frontier-oriented attitudes and practices that grew it to start with."

What about us? Do we have a frontier or fortress mentality? To find out, Paul Nixon offers "The Fortress Test." Copies are found on each table; take a few minutes to complete the test, from the perspective of your church.

Most mainline churches will answer true to more than half of these questions

#### Discussion in table groups:

What is your emotional response to the fortress test?

What keeps you/your church in a fortress mentality?

#### Setting the frame for the next clip from Apollo 13:

Now, still in our space capsule that represents our church, we are in outer space, in the cold and in the dark. Things have happened that we did not expect. The outcome of our mission seems very uncertain. As you watch this clip, look and listen for the images and dialogue that reflect our situation, as churches today. You might want to jot notes to help you remember. After we've watched, we'll share what we saw and heard.

View 'World in the window' clip. Share responses.

#### Quote on the screen:

"The world's getting awfully big in the window."

Discuss: How might this a metaphor for the church today?

Turn to one or two other people seated around you, and share your insights about this question.

Checking in with ourselves: What have you noticed about your emotional response to clip and the discussion that has followed?

#### Setting the frame for the splash-down clip from Apollo 13

Distribute the index cards found in the center of their tables.

Notice the question printed on the card: What is the world waiting for, from you?

As we watch this scene that captures the end of the Apollo 13 mission, continue imagining the space capsule as your church, but this time shift your perspective away from the astronauts inside the capsule.....to the world, waiting and watching to see what happens.

View splash-down clip.

What if the world is waiting for the church to break-through, to splash-down, to arrive?!

Take a moment to write your answer to the question printed on the card.

Now, stand up, take your card with you and go to a different part of the room to talk with a person (not from your own church) about your response to this question.

When you hear the music, start singing: Halle, halle, Halle, lu ja

Bring your index card, along with your church's mission pledge form forward and place it on the table at the center of the room. Return to your table and keep singing, until the music stops.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”