

Jeff's Jottings

Congratulations ... I wish I had known

March 23, 2018

By Jeff Japinga
Executive Presbyter

Most of what I write in Jottings has to do either with Presbytery mission and structure, or is a theological reflection on what we as Presbyterians understand about the world around us. As it should be, I believe, based on the very clear mandate I was given when called into this position:

To provide strategic executive and entrepreneurial leadership, oversight, and communication for the mission of the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area, in order to sustain and build up the health of its individual congregations, the effectiveness of its leadership, and the overall vitality of the Presbytery in mutual ministry; and

To exemplify a commitment to Jesus Christ that honors and promotes the healthy relationships upon which the mission of the Presbytery and its congregations will move forward.

Two weeks ago, during a lunchtime conversation at the Presbytery meeting about our common mission and work, I off-handedly mentioned something that I'd done personally over the Christmas holidays. The person to whom I was speaking got a little wide-eyed and said, "Wow. Congratulations. I wish I had known." And then she added, "You know, I think we would all benefit from knowing there is a real person behind our executive presbyter."

I admit to sharing the inherent reserve often observed in Minnesota Scandinavians and in west Michigan Dutch, where I grew up. I like to listen to you, and learn about you, and find that desire and ability enormously valuable for the work I do with you. I'd rather be a giver than a taker.

But I have also said that I believe the work of the Presbytery will be enhanced and deepened as our connections continue to move out of regulation toward relationship. And relationships can never be a one-way street. In that spirit, then, and with the encouragement of my colleague at Presbytery, this word (acknowledging this may be more widely known than I think it is): on December 29, 2017, in the Elizabeth Chapel of the House of Hope Presbyterian Church in Saint Paul, I married Jennifer Erickson in a small wedding attended by our families. We are both delighted. You didn't ask, but here's a picture.



Jennifer is an early childhood speech and language therapist with the Minnetonka Public Schools, working primarily with later-developing 3-to-5 year olds. She has two wonderful, funny, smart children, just as I do; fabulous, warm, generous parents and two great sibs, just as I do; and a deep and abiding faith, just as I do. I've been invited into a remarkable new collection of Jen's longtime friends, and I've invited Jen into the faith communities of the Presbytery.

[That she is a graduate of the Universities of Iowa and Wisconsin does make certain Saturday afternoons in the fall a little uncomfortable for this Northwestern graduate. Sorry, Gopher fans — makes for a lot of weeks when you're not our team.]

Most of you probably didn't know about my marital status when I came to work with you nearly three years ago. (The search committee certainly did!) Pondering this Jottings, I wondered if it was important that you know now. Not because Jen and I don't want you to know how happy we are together. I wondered if you *needed* to know.

I decided you did. For this reason. We enter this coming week, Holy Week, mindful not simply of Christ's divinity, but of his humanity too — a Jesus "who looks familiar," in the words of the theologian (and singer, too) Bono. Jesus' humanity is on display this coming week perhaps more than any other, from the adulation of Palm Sunday to the servanthood of washing the disciples' feet to the angst of the Garden to the horror of the cross.

We live our faith best in the practice of wearing skin, when we allow our full humanity to be present to God and, if we dare, to each other. For in inviting God in our own humanity, and in looking for God in the person next to me, neither of us will ever quite be the same again.

May you each have a blessed Holy Week.