

Jeff's Jottings

Can you come? You're invited!

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By Jeff Japinga
Executive Presbyter

I get great feedback in my role as executive presbyter. (And yes, I understand that for as much as I hear, there is at least twice as much that gets said in the parking lot to each other, and not directly to me.)

One of the things I hear is this: I'd come to more Presbytery meetings if it was more worthwhile for me.

That's important to know. Figuring out what "worthwhile" looks like for a disparate group of individuals in a huge variety of ministry settings — congregational, institutional, and individual — is, of course, a complicated puzzle. There's not one size, one answer, that fits all.

That's why we're experimenting, in ways that we hope will help us gain insight into our practices. One of those experiments is a commitment by the Presbytery Leadership Team to add an intentional component of learning and inspiration to the worship, business, and fellowship of our meetings, without adding to the overall length. That's meant, for example, inviting two representatives of the Next Church organization to our September meeting to talk about the changing church landscape in North America, and offering a dedicated dinner-table conversation with Tyler Holm, mission co-worker from Malawi. It means inviting Jimmie Hawkins to our November meeting, to talk about the work of the Presbyterian Church's Office for Public Witness and how you and your congregation can be involved, and providing support for the Disability Concerns ministry in their effort to resource congregations.

Next Saturday, Jan. 26, Danielle Ayana James will join us, to invite us to think about the impact of our ministry beyond the usual measurements of members

and budgets. The key word here is impact — not simply listing what we do, but assessing the difference we are making, in the lives of our members and in our communities. How might we use some leading edge practices to better measure the real impact of our ministries, Danielle asks, and then develop strategies to accelerate both our near- and long-term impact? Danielle will introduce this issue to the whole Presbytery in the morning, and then hold an afternoon workshop for those of you who want to go deeper and walk away with some real, implementable guidance. (There's another EMerge article on this, and a video from Danielle.)

Also on Saturday, following the meeting of Presbytery, two members of the Committee on Congregational Vitality will hold a workshop for congregations who might envision an application for a 2019 Congregational Development grant. Here again, the outcome is awareness and new knowledge that you can use.

Are these the kinds of changes that will make a Presbytery gathering more “worthwhile” for you? Maybe they are, maybe not. We may hit a home run, and we may swing and miss. What is important is that we are experimenting with new possibilities and taking away new learnings each time. (That's why many of you got a survey following the November meeting.) In an era of deep change, this kind of experimentation is a way forward.

So I hope you'll come to Presbytery. I hope many of you will stay for an afternoon time of learning and growth. And maybe a few of you might share with me that parking lot conversation you've been having. All of that helps as we re-imagine Presbytery and connectionalism in our rapidly changing world.