

# Jeff's Jottings

## *Structure is not the most important*

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Transitional Executive Presbyter

At Presbytery meeting this past Tuesday, I offered two reports. The first was written and included in the Presbytery Packet; you can find it beginning on page 14. It reviewed the work we've done on systems, structures, and staffing over my 18 months with you, a key part of what you've asked me to do.

But too often, this structure stuff grabs our attention and pretends to be most important. And that's not right. This week's Jottings is my second, oral report to Presbytery. I hope you'll read it; I think it's a key reminder of who we are as the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area.

Oh, and as we approach Thanksgiving, please know of my thanks for all of you, and for the witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ you give through your congregations and in your lives. I am deeply privileged to join you in that, and this week especially, I name that with much gratitude.

Here's my oral report to Presbytery from Tuesday.

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Thank you, Moderator.

You will find my written report beginning on page 14 of your Presbytery packet. You receive from me at each meeting a report, in writing, as a way to honor the work you have asked me to do and to hold me accountable to that work.

That usually means a report focused on "exploring alternative models for structure, operating style and staffing," the first specific bullet point of my job description. The report in your packet again does that. I can write, and you can

read, and I hope you will do so, and through PLT's invitation be engaged in this work and in our future together.

This issue of "structure, style, and staffing," however, can get both consuming and insular. That's why, last Friday, the congregational ministers of this Presbytery got an email from my colleague Risa with the subject line, The EP Needs Your Help ... and the question, *what's one ministry initiative / program / effort of your congregation since the last presbytery meeting that you're proud of and excited about?*

Do you all have any idea what you all are doing ... what we are doing ... the hope we are bringing ... the difference we are making ... the good news we're offering, as the churches of our Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area? Our Book of Order calls on us to "share with others both within and beyond the congregation the task of bearing witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. All the councils of the church are united (in this) by the nature of the church ... " That's what I want you to hear from me tonight ... using your own words as much as possible. Listen, then, for the work of God ...

*We came together for a post-election gathering, a safe space for those who may have felt unsafe in the wake of the election results. We welcomed a number of folks from the community, some of whom had not been in church in a long time. [That, times at least three that I know of, and perhaps many, many more of you.]*

*We are establishing a partnership with St. David's Center for Child and Family Development, who will work with families and very young children who have been traumatized as well as offer support for Somali families with children living with autism.*

*We are hosting a Cameroon worship and expecting over 300 worshipers. Afterwards, we will enjoy lunch with a Latino family of faith. Our building will be overflowing with worshippers from an array of cultures.*

*We have lots of babies these days, reminding us what it means to trust and be free.*

*We are in the midst of working through the Intercultural Development Inquiry, to help us do a better job of working with other cultures.*

*We have started providing three hours of respite care for caregivers with spouses challenged by memory loss.*

*We are accompanying a refugee family of seven who arrived from the Congo in June. Thirty people from the congregation have stepped up to support the family.*

*We are initiating a training process, through focused conversations, leading to understanding and action around race.*

*We have increased our active participation in local mission projects.*

*We are excited that we have been reading chapter by chapter through the Old and New Testaments in Sunday worship for ten years!*

*We had nine youth go through our confirmation program this past summer. Their expressions of faith were inspiring reaffirmations of the love and power of God in their lives and in our congregation.*

*In November we host Project Home, the rotating shelter for homeless children and their parents. It takes 120 volunteer shifts to offer hospitality, and this congregation of 230 or so adult members has the shifts covered.*

*We started a weekly "Noisy Offering" aimed primarily at children — spare change offered in a metal or plastic bucket, noise expected. [Times two, and three, and maybe more of you.] In one church, the children designated the money to provide supplemental food for two families for a year. In another, it will support mission co-workers in South Sudan.*

*We hosted a screening and discussion of the documentary "How Love Won" about the effort to defeat the marriage amendment to limit the right to marry in Minnesota.*

*We had the privilege of hosting the Lutheran Volunteer Corps, the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, the St. Joseph Workers, and the Circle of the Beloved ... distinct groups of young people all working in service and living in community.*

*We have a new partnerships with Learning to Grow Academy, the first Marcy Holmes neighborhood infant care center since the collapse of the 35W bridge in 2007. It is growing and will be at full capacity by early next year.*

*Two churches: We are deeply committed to homeless families through Families Moving Forward. Said one, our Boy Scouts are going to cook them a meal, our art gallery is going to do arts activities with them. Said the other, it is a wonderful chance for us to put our faith into direct service with the families living in the church for a week. Said both, the community comes together through this.*

*I was heartened to hear yesterday of a regular visitor inquiring about what she needs to do to become a member. And there was a couple in attendance I met for the first time and I have heard that they may want to join as well. [This, from one of our smaller congregations.]*

These are specific anecdotes from a relatively small number of you. They don't even include most of our congregations, and the food shelves and care visits and Bible studies and all other manner of community outreach you all are doing, let alone the ways you all are being, nurturing the spiritual side of life. Yes, we talk a lot here at presbytery about structure, and vote on budgets, and evaluate reports. This is part of our work, and it is important. But let us never, ever forget, that the work we do in this meeting is to support the core ministry of the gospel to which we are called and the nature of that calling.

Moderator, this ends the report of your transitional executive presbyter. Thank you for the opportunity.