

**Jeff's Jottings**  
**January 31, 2020**

### **What I Didn't Say Last Week**

*On the agenda of last week's Presbytery business meeting, scheduled at 1:35pm, was the report from the executive presbyter. As always, there was a written report, printed in the Presbytery packet. And I was prepared to add some comments orally. Until we found ourselves behind schedule. Because of Jottings, I suggested we simply pass by both my written and oral reports, which we did. Here are both; I hope you find them helpful.*

You will find [the written report of the executive presbyter](#) beginning on page 24 of the green-covered packet #1. I needn't repeat it now; it's there for your reading. I want to add just a few words, especially about the work we're doing right now on structure; what it means to shape an institution like a presbytery. I am convinced that able leadership, good governance, and vital ministry can all emerge from this work—just not from the structure, per se, but rather out of the personal involvement and commitment of its members.

Messing with established structures can be a tricky proposition. We have seen again today the different (and sometimes conflicting) lenses through which many of us see the world and our work in it. The contrasting values and priorities we can bring; our preferences for means or ends, process or outcome. Our varied understandings of power and influence, and how we observe it being used by others. The stories we tell at Presbytery and about Presbytery, to ourselves and to others.

These are all real challenges in building community. One of the lectionary texts for tomorrow (January 26) is the passage from Corinthians where Paul addresses a church where their individual conversion stories are seemingly more important than their ongoing collective identity. The Corinthian church was far from whole, both as individuals and as a body of believers. I don't name this to imply comment on any of you. I name it rather to be clear to you about how I understand my own role—one that carries a responsibility both to the health and well-being of this presbytery, as institution, and to conversations that can create the kind of communal accountability and wholeness that helps us grow together. I hope our new structure can foster all of that.

But in the end, what this new structure yields is not mine to decide, but yours. Pulled in a thousand different directions, our answer isn't a better structure, but the fundamental wholeness and unity of the Spirit within each of us, waiting to burst forth. Which prompts in my mind a few questions, not for response but for reflection (although I'd be pleased to hear your responses):

- What is the commitment that brought you here today?

- What is the price you or others paid for being here today? And why were you willing to pay that?
- How valuable an experience do you want this Presbytery to be?
- What is the story you keep telling yourself about the problems of this community? And what is your contribution to the very thing you complain about?

I believe the most important word to describe the new structure is *ownership*: the decision each one of us makes to decide what value and meaning will occur when we show up. It's why I've invested my time and energy in these gatherings, in our work around structure, and in the continuing effort to build community in the PTCA. I believe in you, and I believe in us—in our ability to find ways to do that work together, in community.

So thank you. To each of you, for your commitment to Christ. For your investment in ministry. For your fiery passion. And to all of you, for being a people who belong, to God and to each other.