

Jeff's Jottings

Summer wisdom ...

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It's been a while since I "jotted" — late May, to be specific. I'm guessing this reality has not kept you up at night.

In May, at our Presbytery meeting, a meeting of all of our committee chairs/leaders, and in Jottings, I noted some of the big-picture opportunities we have on our plate right now as a Presbytery. Re-imagining parts of our structure and practice so that we're better stewarding our human and financial resources. Putting parameters and access ramps in place for our Presbytery Strategic Ministry Fund (what you may know as Bucket #2), so we can use it, and use it well, to support congregations and equip leaders. Planning for an assessment of our Presbytery around issues of equality and inclusivity, as a way for us to live out what we say we believe. Improving communication practices. Making a 2020 budget. We're doing all this, through working groups gathering as well and as often as we possibly can amidst the challenge of Minnesota summer schedules.

(An aside if I may, and I guess I may since I write Jottings. My wife Jen and I spent 11 days in Europe in June, a deep and welcome confluence of rest, inspiration, and enjoyment. I didn't read any of your email during that time—and yes, I admit, that was lovely. But in churches in Basel and Zweisimmen, Switzerland; and in Varenna, Bellagio, Florence, Vernazza, Siena, and San Gimignano, Italy, I took time to pray for this presbytery, its churches and its people, and the opportunities for ministry we have before us. It was a wonderful way for me to be both away and connected at the same time. Thank you for the gift and privilege of vacation.)

As we do this long-range heavy lifting, I've periodically found myself wishing for the ability to, in my phrase, see around the corner. To have a better sense of what the future will hold, and how we might best respond to it. In that, I've been pondering a quick read from Pascal-Emmanuel Gobry, who writes for the Ethics and Public Policy Center. Here's what he says (briefly summarized) about looking, and working, into the future:

- **Know All The Facts.** Analysis starts with data. It's more than data, but it starts with data. You need to be rooted in the real world, and you need to be rigorous.
- **Live And Breathe Your Space.** The other key tool is the understanding of your market, which by and large means talking to people. You need to be embedded in your space's social and intellectual networks, and you need to talk to the people who are smarter than you and learn from them. This creates a virtuous circle: talking to smart people makes you smarter, which makes smart people want to talk with you.
- **Forget What I've Just Said.** Data is fine, even necessary. Primary research is fine, even necessary. But there's another element which is just as necessary (and most often lacking). It's often dubbed insight. It's seeing the trend that nobody else is seeing. This is a question that has obsessed me. I don't know that I've cracked it, but I think I've found a method that works for me, and that is: every once in a while, forget everything you know. Every once in a while, you have to look at what you're obsessed about like you don't know anything about it. Clear your mind. Think about other stuff. It sounds silly, but what matters is putting yourself in a frame of mind where you're looking at the situation from a new angle, and realizing that by only focusing yourself on your area of expertise you will miss things.

Maybe that's part of the genius of summer. When I think things aren't moving quite quickly enough, it may be less a signal to pick up the pace — to work harder and faster — and more a signal to use the time to re-think, to re-imagine. To clear the mind and think about other stuff.

We have work to do, to be sure. Important work. Seeing-around-the-corner work. It's not easy, and summer schedules don't help. Well, certainly not with setting meeting dates. But for those of us (okay, me) with work-load anxiety, maybe summer has a hidden gift. As a good friend reminded me, "Some of our best insights are made in flip flops."

Hope your summer is a good one.