

## **A Word from our General Presbyter**

### **Ed Thompson**

What are the advantages of being a Presbyterian church? Or maybe another way to put it is how does it help a church to be a part of the Presbytery of West Virginia?

One way is that we have a system/process for helping churches find a pastor. You don't have to put an ad in the newspaper or ask your friends who they know or who they might recommend. The Church Leadership Connection provides a nationwide database of pastors who are looking for or are at least open to a new call. It gives you a form that provides basic information on those pastors: their education, experience, present call and accomplishments, the type of church they'd like to serve, leadership style, and what they see as the key theological issues facing the church and how that shapes their ministry. Sometimes search committees get frustrated by the process, but the search for a new pastor would be a lot more difficult without it.

Some of our smaller churches aren't able to take advantage of this system because it doesn't really work for part-time positions. Even then, there's an advantage to being a Presbyterian and part of this presbytery because we provide training for Commissioned Ruling Elders, most of whom are open to serving smaller churches. Right now, we have 17 Commissioned Ruling Elders who are working with 20 of our churches. So about 15% of the churches in this presbytery are served by pastors that we have trained ourselves.

A year from now, we will be starting another class to train a new group of Commissioned Ruling Elders. I would encourage you to look around your church – regardless of the size of your congregation – to see if there's someone you think might have the skills to be a pastor. If you see someone, encourage them to take this training and encourage your session to provide the financial support that they'll need. Or if you have ever felt that God was calling you to be a pastor, I encourage you to take this training.

Not everyone who takes this course serves as a pastor. Some feel called to preach on an occasional basis. That's really another advantage of being a Presbyterian Church. We provide you with a list of people who are willing and able to preach when your pastor's on vacation or study leave, when they're sick, or when your church is without a pastor.

We also have a form of government that sets up rules and guidelines so that we know ahead of time how we'll make decisions and how we'll resolve our differences. No, you don't get to do whatever you want, but then you're not just on your own either. You don't have to be held hostage by the biggest giver, the person with the loudest voice, or the largest family in the church. We have rules, and when we don't agree on how to interpret those rules or we don't understand how those rules work, we can call on other members of our presbytery to help us out. We are connected, and we are committed to help each other out.

We are also connected to people who are doing mission work around the world. We are connected to people who are responding to disasters in this country and around the world. Presbyterian Disaster Assistance sticks around when most other organizations have gone home. We're still there working with people impacted by Hurricane Katrina and Superstorm Sandy. We're going in and helping folks affected by Hurricane Harvey in Texas and Louisiana and Hurricane Irma in Florida.

Our Presbytery also has WVMAW (West Virginia Ministry of Advocacy and Workcamps), our own long-term recovery arm. They work with people that have been affected by flooding, as well as those who live in substandard housing.

We also have people on our staff who will work with you on your Christian Education and youth ministry, who will help you with your mission work, who can answer questions you might have about our polity or about your giving.

I am convinced that being a Presbyterian Church and being part of the Presbytery of West Virginia adds value to your ministry. I am convinced that your church is better off being Presbyterian and being part of the Presbytery of West Virginia. We are in this together. We support and encourage one another. We're better together. If you need help, just ask.