



# The Presbytery of Tampa Bay

455 Scotland Street, Suite 1, Dunedin, FL 34698

May 13, 2020

Dear Church,

In my role as stated clerk, I get a lot of questions about “how” to do things. Several of you have heard me respond with “why” questions digging a little into what’s behind the question. In this confusing and wearying time of challenge and uncertainty about what to do, questions about “why” we do what we do as a church become even more important—and we have some other questions to ask ourselves as Presbyterian Christians that go beyond checking off compliance with federal, state, and local public health guidelines and orders.

In her letter included in the last issue of the eNews, Presbytery Coach & Coordinator Patrice Hatley called attention to these words from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian church: *“I have the right to do anything, you say—but not everything is beneficial. I have the right to do anything—but not everything is constructive. No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.”* (1 Cor. 10:23-24, NIV) Those words suggest that our questions also need to include:

***Will this action be beneficial?***

***Will this action be constructive?***

***Will this action be for the good of others beyond ourselves?***

In my quiet time this morning, I found myself drawn to another verse as a reminder of how both the faithful and the church are called to respond when the world around us pushes in ways that may well be lawful but which may not be beneficial or constructive—especially to “the least of these” as described in Matthew 25. That verse was Romans 12:2, in a translation by British Bible scholar and pastor J.B. Phillips: *“Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.”*

Finally, the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity in the Book of Order, part of the Constitution of the PC(USA), includes a powerful charge to our pastors/moderators and ruling elders when they serve on any council of the church: *“Presbyters are not simply to reflect the will of the people, but rather to seek together to find and represent the will of Christ.”* (F-3.0204). That leads to one more question to consider in decision-making:

***In reaching this decision, do we truly believe that we have found and represented the will of Christ more than simply reflecting the will of the people?***

There are lots of checklists out there. But, as people of faith guided by scripture, our confessions, and our polity, please keep these questions in mind before, during, and after too quickly checking items off on other lists.

Blessings,

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