



The Grapevine

CONNECTING THE CONGREGATIONS OF THE PRESBYTERY OF DETROIT

October 2012

An Invitation to Holy Conversations



by the Rev. Dr.
Allen D. Timm,
Executive
Presbyter

During my sabbatical study, I had the opportunity to delve into the works of Gil Rendle. He and Alice Mann wrote a book, [Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations](#). I invite sessions to engage in holy conversations as a way through the wilderness of American life.

Why the metaphor of wilderness? Some of our congregations have lost our way. We are losing members and worship attendance continues to decline. Neighbors do not seek churches to sustain their daily lives. With declining revenue, churches cut back missions and outreach.

Rendle and Mann offer guidance for the journey through the wilderness. They suggest having holy conversations that invite the Holy Spirit to guide the future of the church. There needs to be a Moses, Aaron, and

Miriam. Moses casts the vision; Aaron guides the plans; Miriam sings for joy over what God has done.

What guides the conversation is the starting place. Where is God leading the congregation? What is the purpose of the congregation? To know our purpose, we must also ask, what is unique about our congregation, its location, its resources and its membership? The last question is essential. Who is our neighbor? Who is God calling us to serve?

Ever since I heard about Darrell Guder and the Gospel and Our Culture Network, I have been called to lift the vision that the purpose of every church is to serve Jesus Christ in the world. The Network has focused on identifying where God is at work and where God invites us to join Christ in serving our brothers and sisters. How do we find out? We need to ask our neighbors and community leaders about what concerns exist in the community that they wish they could impact. Praying about those concerns leads us to hear God's call to service.

So I invite you to have holy conversations. As a session

read the book, [Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations](#) and Rendle's [Journey in the Wilderness](#). Ask the Rev. Estelle Aaron or me, or one of the Holy Conversation Project Facilitators to come to your session to talk about this study. You could read these books for a session retreat. Six congregations have embarked on the journey of Holy Conversations. There will be more openings in the Spring to engage in a formal six month process. Your session can start now to have holy conversations that seek to ask the Holy Spirit to lead your congregation into serving your neighborhood, and reaching out in word and deed in the name of Jesus Christ.

I want to share a final word with you. Thank you for giving me a sabbatical period and the opportunity to explore how I can better serve the congregations of the Presbytery of Detroit. It was a privilege to have Gil Rendle guide my study, along with a colleague of his Richard Burnham, who is guiding our project facilitators.

Sharing brings joy. To Others, to God, and to Us.

Dear members and friends,

On behalf of the many thousands of God's people who have been rescued from nature's fury, enabled to feed their children, or given the chance to change their lives by addressing the barriers to their own development this past year, I want to say thank you. Your gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing have made a profound difference.

Without your gifts, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance would not have been present to meet immediate needs for warmth and shelter in ravaged communities or to help them rebuild their homes and lives. The Presbyterian Hunger Fund would not have fed hungry people and advocated for changes that address the causes of hunger. Self-Development of People would not have been able to fund initiatives

designed and carried out directly by people in need.

On behalf of the members and staff of Self-Development of People, thank you for gifts that have enabled us to meet people like Ruth, director of Daughters of Sarah, which for more than 20 years has united and strengthened isolated rural women; Mae and Joel, high-school leaders of the Youth Economic Group, who are building a cooperative business in a very economically depressed region of my presbytery; and Rebecca, a key member of No Boundaries, which is building solid relationships between neighboring factions in central Baltimore. These individuals strengthen my faith. They prove to me that groups of people of all economic and educational levels, all ethnic and cultural backgrounds, can come together, plan, and work to build better lives and communities.

Jesus taught us that. Jesus demonstrated how to do it. These individuals and their groups bring it to life here and now.

To see this for yourselves, [go to our website](#). Then know that you have empowered the PC(USA) to do Christ's work. Together we have brought good news to the poor. We have fed the hungry and provided the means for the oppressed to unshackle themselves from chains of fear or despair. We are Christ's hands and feet and voice, servants of the master of love.

Blessings on your ministry,

Rev. Cathryn T. Surgenor
Chair, Churchwide Relations
Self-Development of People
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Clergy Ordination Anniversaries

Ferguson, Guy Thomas	10
Rice, Elizabeth	20
Anderson, James	60
Cross, Paul D.	60

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THE PARISH PAPER

IDEAS AND INSIGHTS FOR ACTIVE CONGREGATIONS

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How to Maintain Church Health in a Declining Population County

World War II's financial transfusion healed the Great Depression of the 1930s. But World War II also ended rural America's Norman Rockwell era.

When 15 million people took off military uniforms in 1945, many of them put on wedding rings and began revising America's population distribution. Halos of suburbs filled with young families and small children began ringing U.S. cities. Simultaneously, during the next three decades, more than 75 percent of America's agricultural population began "moving to town."

School districts in the newborn suburbs grew rapidly. Small businesses grew. Churches grew. Thousands of new congregations scrambled to build Sunday school space for history's largest crop of children, soon called the baby boomers.

The financial income of those thousands of suburban congregations also grew. Multiple staffs became more common. And those multiple staffs grew larger as some suburban congregations—born at exactly the right time and place—moved toward mega-church status.

Meanwhile, the rural and small-town churches in population-vacated counties changed radically. The median age of their members rose as their attendance declined. They grew older and smaller.

Today's Picture of Small-Town and Open-Country Churches

1. Countless Sunday school classrooms for children now stand empty—silent, musty tombstones of a noisier time.
2. Diminished financial resources make the heating/air-conditioning bills increasingly difficult to pay.
3. Shrinking offerings amputate many of the community-service and missions ministries.
4. Many elementary Sunday school classes are consolidated—grouping together eight grades into three classes that had once been eight individual classes. Joining junior and senior high youth groups leads to mostly negative results, according to the kids.

5. Elementary Sunday school teachers are harder to recruit. "I've already done my part—when *my* kids were young!" people say.

6. Many of the committee chairpersons hold office for several consecutive years. They defend this practice by saying, "Nobody else will take it."

7. Creative programing has decreased. "We've always done it this way" becomes the sound of inflexible concrete.

8. The church treasurer has served for twenty consecutive years. The governing board increasingly bows to his wishes regarding "how we should spend the church's money."

9. The median age of governing board members is in the stratosphere; the youngest one is now age 65. New ways of thinking regarding challenges are less and less respected.

10. Saving money has become the church's highest goal, leaving mission and ministry opportunities blowing in the wind. Restroom signs say, "Please turn out the lights," while governing board meetings discuss at length how to better achieve this goal. Important ministry issues are seldom discussed.



"ACCORDING TO OUR RECORDS, YOU'VE CHAIRED THE COMMITTEE TO REINVIGORATE THE SUNDAY SCHOOL CURRICULUM FOR 37 YEARS."

11. As the staff size shrinks the former professionals are replaced by volunteers who lack experience and training.

12. A long-term church secretary now makes many decisions that were previously handled by the pastor and the program staff.

Counteracting This Fading-Effectiveness Pattern

1. Find a genuine human need in the community and develop ways to address that need. Example: One small-town congregation filled a large, unused classroom with exercise equipment and opened it for use by citizens of the community.

2. Work with other community churches to meet human needs. Examples: (a) Organize an annual fund-raising event that addresses a particular human hurt. (b) In one small town, several churches work together to provide volunteer staff for a used clothing store in an empty building on Main Street. Members of all the churches contribute the used clothing, which the store sells at extremely low prices.

3. Keep the church governing board small—five to seven people—and restrict board-member tenure to three consecutive years. This prevents a short list of people from running everything and reduces the tendency of a few individuals to exert more and more control over the church's future.

4. Don't allow committee chairpersons to hold office for more than two consecutive years. Staying too long in a chairperson role (a) feeds the desire for power and control in some personalities, and (b) reduces the committee's creative thinking ability regarding activities that best serve people in the congregation and the community. Develop a rule by which the vice-chairperson of each committee serves for two years and becomes the chairperson of that committee for the subsequent two years.

5. To address the building's janitorial needs, develop a rotating team system in which a different family unit handles the vacuuming, dusting, and cleaning each week.

6. Schedule an annual breakfast on a Saturday for volunteers, followed by an all-church cleaning day. Tip: In order to increase attendance, assign specific aspects of the building to specific committees, organizations, and adult classes. Avoid saying, "everyone should come and help out." That type of invitation reduces the number of people who show up and builds resentment among those dedicated people who begin to feel like, "We do all the work around here!"

7. What if your congregation is a childless church in which no regularly attending families have children in

elementary or high school? Develop an education task force of two or three regular attendees who stand ready to teach an impromptu class or classes in case worship visitors with children unexpectedly appear.

8. If your congregation has only one or two high school students and only a handful of elementary students, don't ask the high school students to serve as teachers or nursery attendants. Teenagers are in a time of life when Bible study with kids their age facilitates character development. Don't steal that opportunity from them!

9. Long-term members who love their congregation may have willed endowment monies to ensure that their church continues its ministry with future generations. You may be tempted to use some of that permanent endowment to balance the annual operating budget each year. Don't do it! Diverting that money to the operating budgets strangles the golden goose and discourages generous financial stewardship among members. Use the endowment accounts only as directed in the endowment.

10. Create a separate endowment board or committee. Do not make the church's regular governing board responsible for both its endowment monies and its operating budgets. Otherwise, bad judgment often drowns the appropriate use of endowment funds.

11. Limit the terms of church treasurers to three consecutive years. The church's treasurer should present written reports at each meeting. Without this kind of official oversight it is easy to slip into a situation where the treasurer neglects to bring the report and financial meetings become more like conversations among friends.

12. Always require an annual audit of the church's finances. Inappropriate use of church funds can happen if the governing board fails in its due diligence responsibilities. Contact the appropriate denominational office for a set of instructions regarding how to conduct an annual audit.

The Bottom Line

Declining county population leads to declining membership in its religious congregations—which lead to rising median age levels in those counties and congregations. That rising median age of a church's members often leads to bad habits, ill health, and the congregation's eventual death. To build better congregational health, begin by building better habits.

Presbytery of Detroit Calendar of Events

To have your Churches event posted please send the information to sandy@detroitpresbytery.org.

October 2012	
27	Month of Mission Breakfast will be held at Plymouth, First 701 Church St., Plymouth, MI 48170 from 9:00 am - Noon. Click here for flyer
November 2012	
2	PVM 9th Annual "It's a Wonderful Life Gala" at The Henry Hotel, Town Center Drive, Dearborn, MI 48126 Click here for more information
2-3	Synod Assembly at the Synod of the Covenant offices 1911 Indian Wood Circle, Suite B, Maumee, OH 43537. Click here for registration forms and agenda
3	Disaster Preparedness Training for all Congregations in the Presbytery of Detroit. East Side at Grosse Pointe Memorial, 16 Lakeshore Drive, Grosse Pointe Farms, MI 48236 in Barbour Chapel 9:00am – 11:00am. Click here for more information
4	Daylight Savings Time Ends - set clocks back one hour
6	Taizé Worship 7:00 pm at Dearborn, Littlefield
9-10	Warren First is holding a Hidden Treasure Sale at the Church 3000 E. Twelve Mile Rd., Warren, MI 48092
13	Disaster Preparedness Training for all Congregations in the Presbytery of Detroit. West Side at First PC, 701 Church St., Plymouth MI 48170 in Fellowship Hall 9:00am – 11:00am. Click here for more information
15	Deadline extended for the submissions of nominations for the George Irwin Award. Click here for form .
18	Disaster Preparedness Training for all Congregations in the Presbytery of Detroit. Central Area at University PC, 1385 S. Adams Road, Rochester Hills, MI 48309 in Lawnridge House 3:00pm – 5:00pm. Click here for more information
22	Presbytery Office closed for Thanksgiving Day
22	Detroit, Westminster 30th Annual Thanksgiving Dinner 11:00 am - 4:00 pm
27	Presbytery Meeting at Detroit, Westminster, 17567 Hubbell, Detroit, MI 482235; 313-341-2697. Pre-Presbytery Disaster Preparedness Training for all Congregations in the Presbytery of Detroit 2:30pm
December 2012	
4	Taizé Worship 7:00 pm at Dearborn, Littlefield
15	Men's Advent Communion Breakfast Keynote speaker is Chuck Gaidica, Local 4, WDIV TV, Director of Meteorology. Grosse Pointe Memorial, 16 Lakeshore Dr., Grosse Pointe Farms, MI 48236. Click here for flyer
21-Jan 1	Presbytery Office Closed for Christmas and New Year Holiday
January 2013	
1	Taizé Worship 7:00 pm at Dearborn, Littlefield
11	Presbytery's books close at 5:00 pm please make sure the 2012 Per Capita and Shared Mission are submitted
21	Presbytery Office closed in observance of Martin Luther King Jr's Birthday
22	Presbytery Meeting at Ann Arbor, First, 1432 Washtenaw Ave., Ann Arbor, MI 48104 734-662-4466. Installation of Moderator and Vice Moderator.
February 2013	
2	Leadership Training Day at Dearborn, The First, 600 N. Brady, Dearborn, MI 48124. Brochure and Registration information coming soon. Click here for flyer
5	Taizé Worship 7:00 pm at Dearborn, Littlefield
9-10	Shane Claiborne to speak at Royal Oak, First 529 Hendrie Blvd., Royal Oak, MI 48067. Click here for information
10-12	Pastors in Transition meeting at DeWitt.
26	Presbytery Meeting at TBD
March 2013	
5	Taizé Worship 7:00 pm at Dearborn, Littlefield

10	Daylight Savings Time Begins - set clocks ahead one hour
April 2013	
2	Taizé Worship 7:00 pm at Dearborn, Littlefield
23	Presbytery Meeting at TBD
May 2013	
7	Taizé Worship 7:00 pm at Dearborn, Littlefield
27	Presbytery Office Closed in observance of Memorial Day
June 2013	
4	Taizé Worship 7:00 pm at Dearborn, Littlefield
25	Presbytery Meeting at TBD
July 2013	
2	Taizé Worship 7:00 pm at Dearborn, Littlefield
4	Presbytery Office closed in observance of Independence Day
16-20	Presbyterian Youth Triennium 2013 at Purdue University, Indiana more information at www.presbyterianyouthtriennium.org
August 2013	
6	Taizé Worship 7:00 pm at Dearborn, Littlefield
27	Presbytery Meeting at TBD
September 2013	
2	Presbytery Office closed in observance of Labor day
3	Taizé Worship 7:00 pm at Dearborn, Littlefield
October 2013	
1	Taizé Worship 7:00 pm at Dearborn, Littlefield
22	Presbytery Meeting at TBD
26	Month of Mission Breakfast
November 2013	
3	Daylight Savings Time Ends - set clocks back one hour
5	Taizé Worship 7:00 pm at Dearborn, Littlefield
26	Presbytery Meeting at TBD
28	Presbytery Office closed for Thanksgiving Day
December 2013	
3	Taizé Worship 7:00 pm at Dearborn, Littlefield
14	Men's Advent Communion Breakfast
24-25	Presbytery Office Closed for Christmas Holiday
31-Jan 1	Presbytery Office Closed for New Year Holiday
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