

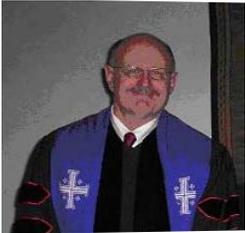


The Grapevine

CONNECTING THE CONGREGATIONS OF THE PRESBYTERY OF DETROIT

November 2012

A Sustainable Future



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

Louis Weeks has written another book about the future of the Presbyterian Church. In A Sustainable Presbyterian Future: What's Working and Why (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2012), Weeks builds on his comprehensive study of Presbyterian congregations, published in 1992. In that series, he noted that Reformed congregations embodied these characteristics:

- Presbyterians became Christians at home and in a congregation
- The PCUSA became what might be called, top down
- People "joined" congregations not the PCUSA (Chapter 1)

These characteristics join the other marks of the culture of the Presbyterian Church, which were stated by leaders that were interviewed for a recent study:

- We pay close attention to the Word of God
- We are wordy in our educated, literate discourse and writing
- We value order, and our orderly form of government
- We relate faith to ordinary life, balance personal and corporate faith
- We sit uneasily with ostentatious displays of wealth
- We bear elitist tendencies, if we are not downright participants in elitism

We seek to be inclusive in our worship and ministries
Our culture consists primarily in mission (19)

He calls these marks the traditional ecology of the Presbyterian Church. As he studied congregations in recent years he has noted that a new ecology is emerging. This ecology is the manner of life that sustains congregations in the culture of America today. Congregations that exhibit these marks are thriving and are vital.

What marks the new ecology of the PCUSA?

- It is ecumenical and even shares activities and ministry with people of other faiths
- It construes the Christian family inclusively, practicing radical hospitality
- It defines Presbyterian work and worship in fluid terms, that engages the congregation
- It employs digital technology and social media more than printed and published literature
- Institutions and practices bubble up from the interests and passions of members rather than being gained from external authentication form participating in successive parochial institutions, and thus the hierarchy is flattened, even up to the level of the General Assembly Mission Agency (26)

Weeks gives many examples of congregations that exhibit this new

ecology, emerging in a "whirl of activity," which bubbles up from members who join God at work. They find their faith strengthened as they reach out, as Weeks notes. Spiritual development in the new ecology is that "outreach feeds inreach" (42). He notes that's congregations that thrive are engaged in voicing their faith and inviting others to join them as they serve the community around them (88). Weeks' final case study is that of Calypso Presbyterian Church, a small church that is thriving and vital. When a church member experienced a crisis, the congregation rallied and showed their community what a church family can mean in one's life. That church has found a niche in their community, inviting people from adjacent communities to Vacation Bible School, fellowship events, worship, and engaging in care for the community. They are involved in local and world mission. They are proud of their impact on their members and community.

Louis Weeks has challenged us. He urges our congregations to find their niche in the community around them. A contributing part is worship that engages congregants, and brings them the hope of Jesus Christ. Vitality and sustainability comes from faithful witness and service in the world today. But his reminder hits home at the end. "In the final analysis the determination of a sustainable future is not ours to make. In every congregation, in every age, the future belongs to God. The Holy Spirit quickens faith in believers, a. Our best-laid plans are just a measure of our hope and prayer" (104).

Message from Elder Kennedy Kamau

By the Rev. Gretchen Denton

Elder Kennedy Kamau from Thika Presbytery in Kenya addressed the October Presbytery Meeting. Elder Kamau was the first visitor in many years to come to Detroit under the sponsorship of the Thika Partnership Workgroup. Kennedy is a member of the Makongeni congregation outside of Thika and has been supervising their extensive building plan including the construction of a large church building along with school buildings. Here are his remarks to the Presbytery of Detroit.

My name is Kennedy Kamau and I love Jesus Christ as my personal savior. My brothers and sisters in Christ, I bring you greetings from Thika Presbytery, near Nairobi Kenya, and in particular from Rev. Muthungu, the Presbytery Clerk and Rev. Wainaina, the Moderator. They wanted me to tell you how much we cherish the partnership with the Presbytery of Detroit and that our prayer is to grow this relationship to the glory of God. They also wanted me to convey their gratitude for a letter from your Stated Clerk, Mr. Ed Koster, expressing condolences for the 14 women from our presbytery that perished in a road accident on their way to Tanzania. Your prayers and encouragement were truly appreciated. Please allow me to make just four short points:

1. I do want to thank the Presbytery of Detroit for sponsoring my visit. I have learned a great deal to take back home. I have made many friends and I am truly grateful for the generosity of Fran, Tim and the entire Thika Workgroup. So far, I have been

warmly welcomed at First Birmingham, first Ann Arbor, University and Calvary Presbyterian Churches and now Allen Park I look forward to visiting Waterford Community and Sterling Heights Presbyterian Churches this weekend. 2. One of the most appreciated projects that Presbytery of Detroit has undertaken is providing clean water to dry/arid areas of Thika Presbytery. We are seeking your assistance through the Thika Work Group to drill two more boreholes, in Happy Valley, Yata or Garrisa. The women in these areas have to fetch water from rivers many miles away taking all day. They often keep school age children away from school to accompany them to the river, or to stay home to watch the younger siblings.

Sometimes the water is not clean and has to be boiled using firewood that is costly and in short supply. These water trips may be hazardous in some areas due to infestation of crocodiles and hippos. We realize that boreholes are expensive, costing up to \$30,000, depending on depth and rock formation. But to a community in an arid area, such investment is a lifesaver and pays longterm dividends in the development of the families.

I will admit I was envious when I saw all that fresh water flowing in the Detroit River, and when I visited Fran and noticed two fresh water lakes on

either side of her subdivision....I wish I could take one of the lakes back to Thika. How blessed you are!

3. It is not clear why, but there has been a significant increase in the number of special needs children, particularly those who have cerebral palsy. These children remain hidden from view and their parents are without help. The priority for NGOs and the government of Kenya is HIV/AIDS related cases and not the special needs. Therefore, the church is establishing a school to house and educate 50 boys and 50 girls with special needs. And so we are seeking partnerships with health groups, churches and well-wishers to help build the school that will cater for these vulnerable children. I urge you to read Matthew 25: 31-40 that ends as follows: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me"

4. Finally, we are excited to learn that in February 2014, the Presbytery of Detroit will send a delegation to come visit and pray with us. **Karibuni Nyote** is Swahili for you are all welcome. We look forward to reciprocating your hospitality.

If you are interested in learning how to connect with a Thika congregation or how you can contribute to making water a reality contact with Elder Tim Ngare who leads the Thika Partnership Work Group.

Clergy Ordination Anniversaries

November

Puntigam, Joel	10
Tomberlin, Drew	25
Hartley, Thomas	35

December

Provost, Keith	5
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The Parish Paper

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IDEAS AND INSIGHTS FOR ACTIVE CONGREGATIONS

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How to Use Our Five Senses to Experience the Wonder of Advent

Advent is a season of the senses. Scents of pine, bayberry, and Christmas cookies ready to taste fill the air. Everywhere you go, carols waft to your ears. The feel of wrapping paper and sticky tape touch our fingers. We “ooh” at the sight of outdoor lighting displays or behold the beauty of a simply decorated tree. This is also true in our church buildings and services—though many times we don’t recognize the senses for the spiritually teachable moments that they hold. Advent can be a time to help worshipers be present to life and to God in new ways. We all desire authentic spiritual experiences with God, but the trouble is that most of our teaching comes by way of sermons, books, Bible studies, and other spiritual resources. These all instruct our *thinking* but often miss our *souls*, the prime place of divine encounter.

Using the Whole Brain to Experience God

Advent gives us an opportunity to engage both sides of our brain, with all five senses and our bodies, to more fully experience God. When we’re fully present—body, mind, and soul—we learn how to cultivate an experiential faith that is attentive to a self-disclosing God.

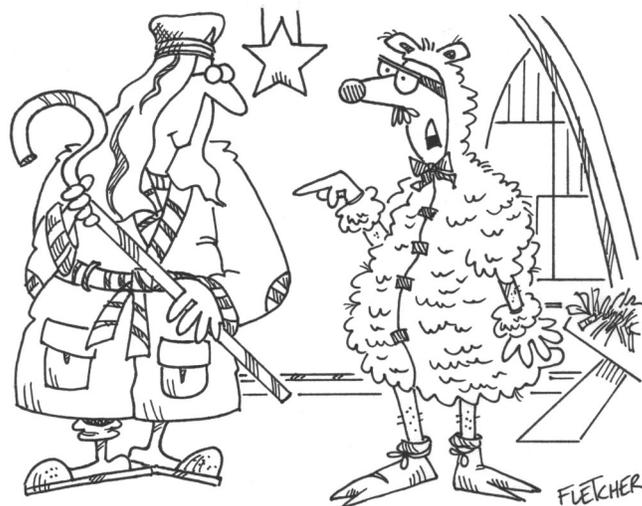
The role of the left brain. Words are the primary form of communication that we use to nurture our spiritual lives. Words are the language of the left brain, which is the logical and concrete center of our thinking that uses words to understand and interpret experiences. However, the left brain cannot experience God or anything else. The right brain does the *experiencing*. The left brain then takes *meaning* from the experiences processed by our right brain. Planning Advent worship experiences that involve the whole brain helps make faith more than an intellectual exercise for your congregants.

The role of the right brain. This creative and intuitive center of our brain communicates through images, not words. Images are anything that you en-

vision through one or more of your senses. For instance, when you *smell* the scent of pine and think “Hanging of the Greens,” you have just utilized your right brain through your sense of smell. When you listen to “Hark! the Herald Angels Sing” and it brings to mind the image of heavenly choirs, you have *heard* the sound and processed it using the right side of your brain.

Because the right brain does our experiencing, sensory spiritual practices that involve the right brain open us to a heightened perception and experience of God. Such exercises position our heart for divine encounter. However, we need both sides of our brain in order to live and grow as a person of faith. In fact, neither side can do its job well without the other.

The role of all five senses. Since our lives are led mostly through the act of thinking, we often become divorced from our souls and bodies. Using our senses helps us to live in the present. This is important because the present is the only place that we can fully experience God. Advent is a wonderful time to



FOR THE LAST TIME, HAROLD...
ENGAGING MY PHYSICAL SENSES IN WORSHIP
DURING ADVENT DOES NOT INCLUDE
BEING POKED BY A SHEPHERD'S STAFF!

practice using our senses so that we can experience God in the reality of the present moment.

Scripture is filled with dozens of references to the physical senses. Many are familiar, such as Psalm 34:8: “O *taste* and *see* that the Lord is good” (KJV). And there is Matthew 5:8, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall *see* God” (KJV). These passages provide reminders about the importance of the often-forgotten art of linking senses to spirituality.

It is not difficult for us to recognize the pure, God-given sensory experiences of seeing a dramatic waterfall or smelling the delicate scent of a newborn child for the gifts that they are. Yet, we rarely think about our sensory experiences as windows into the life of the Spirit that can lead us to opportunities of experiencing God in fresh ways.

The body. Some faith traditions model how to involve the body in worship and prayer as a way to express one’s heart. And undeniably, when we involve our bodies in kinesthetic response, we reinforce what we are feeling, thinking, and doing. The actions involved in kneeling for prayer, lighting the Advent candle, singing carols, or walking to the altar for Christmas Eve communion strengthen our internal attitudes through outward expression.

Too often, however, we live mostly in our thoughts—making lists and checking them twice—and spend too little time listening to what our bodies are saying. Yet Christians throughout history have known that our bodies have much to teach us. During Advent, worshipers utilize not only their senses, but also their *bodies* to form a closer relationship with God.

Enhancing Worship through the Senses

Below are just a few ways that you can use sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touch to help your congregation go deeper into their lives with God.

- Give every worshiper a piece of swaddling cloth. During the service, read the passage containing Luke 2:7 and encourage them to feel, smell, and listen to the cloth as they fold and unfold it.
- If you offer communion during Advent, before inviting congregants to participate ask them to prepare their bodies as well as their souls for the experience. Encourage them to take time to no-

tice the tastes, textures, and scents involved in the experience of receiving communion.

- Set up a crèche at the entrance to your sanctuary. Place sticky-pads and pencils there. Invite congregants to pause there before entering for worship and imagine themselves in that scene. What do they smell? Taste? Feel? See? Hear? Have them take a sticky-note, write a word or two about it, and stick it on the wall around the crèche.

Beyond these options, take some time to think of the ways that your church traditionally celebrates Advent: lighting an Advent candle, hanging an Advent wreath, performing a Christmas cantata, presenting a Christmas play, or having a candlelight worship service. Which of them could you use to involve the physical senses and help link the right and left brain? Are there fresh ways to utilize your congregation’s Advent celebration to engage your members’ senses, bodies, and (entire) brains?

The Bottom Line

When we combine our whole brains and bodies in attention and love, we move to a new level of noticing. We get a deep, clear look at God everywhere around us. Encourage your congregation to slow their breathing, quiet their minds, and calm their hearts during this busy season. Then invite them to take a fresh look with attention *and* love.

Ask them to involve themselves in self-reflection as they consider:

- What do I see?
- What do I smell?
- What do I hear?
- What do I taste?
- What do I feel?
- When did I catch a glimpse, whiff, touch, taste, or sound of the Divine?

By inviting them to engage their senses in ways like this, you will help awaken them to the wonder of God all around them—a joyous, sensuous, spiritual awakening at Advent!

This article was adapted from *Awaken Your Senses: Exercises for Exploring the Wonder of God* (IVP, 2012) by J. Brent Bill and Beth A. Booram.

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Presbytery of Detroit Calendar of Events

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

December 2012	
1	ETS presents Story Tyme: Recreating the Magic Click here for flyer
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.
24-26	Calvin Symposium on Worship, Grand Rapids, MI "Sermon in the Mount" endorsed by and scholarships available through the Congregational Life Ministry Team. For more information contact Bob Szwed, Chair of Congregational Life at bszwed@yahoo.com .
26	Clerk Training 9:00am-11:00am at Detroit Westminster. We will discuss Session responsibilities under the Directory of Worship
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	
1-3	Alma Youth Mix. For more information or to volunteer to help with the Mix, please contact Cher Childs, the chair of the Youth Mix Design team at cchilds302@aol.com
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
30-July 5	Covenant Gathering 2013 "Seasons of Faith" at Michindoh Conference Center, Hillsdale, MI. More information on the Covenant Gathering web site http://www.covenantgathering.com

	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. Registration information and forms at www.presbyterianyouthtriennium.org If you have questions please contact Matt Nickel at mnickel@fpcro.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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