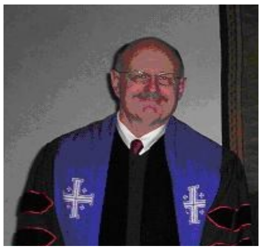
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA)

Presbytery of Detroit

The Grapevine

CONNECTING THE CONGREGATIONS OF THE PRESBYTERY OF DETROIT June 2019

"Piloting Church: Helping Your Congregation Take Flight"



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

In the book by this title, Cameron Trimble compares the flight of a plane to the journey of faithful ministry in a congregation. She compares every step of flight to congregational leadership. The author is a church consultant, ordained minister, and a pilot, so she is qualified to guide us through the steps of the flight of an airplane and of a congregation.

So what does a pilot do to prepare for flight? First, pilots decide to take a flight and then decide if they have the right equipment to fly. Leaders need to show up every day to prepare a congregation to serve and give it their all. Pilots need to have courage, authenticity, resilience, an activist spirit, connection, and a deep faith.

Next the pilot needs to understand the basic elements of flight: thrust, lift, drag, weight. The power that moves the plane is counterbalanced by drag. The lift produced by air going over the wings finds it balance in the weight of gravity. In a congregation, there are also forces which drive flight that balance each other: vision, mission, strategy, and culture.

The pilot needs a great flight crew. The crew needs to know the flight plan, and know how to contribute to its success. The crew must be recruited. Team building and training prepare the crew to fly. The pilot gives opportunities to succeed and fly. This step is important because the pilot can't fly all alone.

Each flight needs a chart and course. Trimble suggests that a team pray and discern where God is leading the church. She suggests that a team gather data about the members of the congregation and community, by interviewing members and community leaders. She suggests asking what has changed in the last five years, and what would make the community stronger. Using a tool like MissionInsite will help give the team a bigger picture of the demographics of the community. Two questions stand out: "What are the gifts, passions, and deepest longings of our members and our neighbors?" "What difference could we make in the quality of life in our community that would raise the quality of life for everyone?" This chapter provides an excellent tool for a session that is reviewing its vision and mission.

Before starting out, every pilot follows a pre-flight checklist. For the safety of the passengers, each pilot reviews the mechanical functions, the outside factors such as weather, and the internal matters such as projected fuel consumption and distribution of weight. The pre-flight checklist for a congregation includes: theology (what we believe about God's longings for the world), purpose (what is it we are called to change in community), programs (what we can offer to manifest our vision), and performance (what systems do we need to put in place to conduct the mission). The book includes a checklist for measuring the activities we do against the outcomes pictured in the vision and purpose.

We need to fund our flying habit. Flying is not inexpensive and we need to find ways to provide the resources for the vision. Trimble provides great insight in to stewardship. It begins with the pastor and one's own values around money. The pastor needs to talk about his or her own stewardship and be vulnerable with church members. Realistic planning and budgeting is important so that programs will have the resources they need. There are many resources available that can be tapped. The author raises new possibilities for venture capital to start new ministry such as accelerators and investments that can be repaid. She also provides new funding models: The affiliate model (satellite churches), the barter model (churches trading what they have), and the cross-supporting model (inviting community residents to join our projects). And don't forget about Go Fund Me projects or special offerings.

What would a flight be without communications? The pilot leaves a plan with the tower, talks about takeoff, and communicates with the crew and passengers. Delta's CEO comes on the video now, talking about the purpose of the airline, "to make the world smaller one flight at a time." How do we communicate with our members, one service at a time, one email blast at a time, or pictures of people's lives who have been touched by God through ministry. Communication requires a plan and subsequent actions that follow through. All communications need to be in alignment so that the flight takes off and flies to its destination.

Every flight needs a back-up plan for crises. Every church needs to be ready for crises. Sometimes there is a building problem or a loss of control by management when conflict arises. Or the community has changed. Maybe there is a cash flow problem. As a plane tries to run straight and level during a crisis,

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so must the congregation. Communication is central. Make sure the congregation knows what is going on. Key to handling crises is the acknowledgement that the crisis exists.

The final chapter discusses the plane's descent. When a church or a ministry has run its course, it needs to take landing seriously. Are we willing to end ministries that no longer reach the people we want to reach? Trimble hopes a congregation in serious decline can make a landing with courage and dignity. Instead of landing in defeat, the church can leave a legacy.

Pastors, this is a flight manual for your session and for you. I kept thinking, "this chapter is worth the price of the book," but the next chapter would make as big of an impact. Each chapter presents questions for the leader, and a discussion guide for the session or long range planning team. There are proposed spreadsheets to use. I hope you and your leaders will carve out time to reach this book. Safe travels!

The Presbytery of Detroit is saddened by the passing of the Rev. Dr. Lawrence T. Glenn Sr. Rev. Glenn was ordained 4/29/1954 by the Presbytery of Fairfield and transferred to Detroit in 1957. Rev. Glenn served as Pastor of Broadstreet Presbyterian Church for 34 years, 6/1/1961 - 6/30/1995. Over the years he served the Presbytery of Detroit in many ways, one was as a staff member for Research 1959-1961, and on many committees from 1958 - 1998. He was a Synod Commissioner 1958-1973 and a GA Commissioner in 1965, 1970, 1976, 1984, and 1986. Lawrence served as Moderator of Detroit Presbytery in 1986.

If you would like to pay tribute the family suggests that donations be made to The Michigan Black Presbyterian Caucus "Adrienne Adams Scholarship Fund". Make checks payable to MBPC (in the memo write "A. A. Scholarship Fund").

We Celebrate these Clergy Ordination Anniversaries

JUNE

LOIS COLON	35
ROBERT CRILLEY	60
WILLIAM DUNIFON	50
JOHN JEFFREY	55
J. SCOTT MILLER	35
GUS NUSSDORFER	50
DAVID OWEN	60
PAUL THWAITE	35

JULY

ROBERT AGNEW	50
IVAN BENEDICT	55
DOUG CARTER	55
SHARON MOOK	40
MARK PHILLIPS	25
JASON PITTMAN	15
ALLEN D TIMM	45
HAK SUK YOON	25
WILLIAM ZAMBON	40

AUGUST

KEVIN JOHNSON	35
MATTHEW NICKEL	10

We welcome Unah Matu-Ngare to the staff of the Presbytery as our new Hunger Action Coordinator. Unah's contact information is Unah@detroitpresbytery.org,
313 345 6550 ext.207
248 921 6166 Cell

We thank Diane Agnew for her service to the Presbytery of Detroit as the Hunger Action Coordinator as she retired from active service on June 3.

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THE PARISH PAPER
IDEAS AND INSIGHTS FOR ACTIVE CONGREGATIONS
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Team Talk Can Strengthen Volunteer Ministry

Team talk can build a strong ministry team. Of course, some may not think of conversation as an important task, viewing it as getting in the way of work and slowing it down. On the contrary, conversation plays an important role in the life of a team, builds group durability, and sustains effort. Talking about the work helps to reinforce the reasons for doing what we are doing.

"Plug-in" Volunteering

Make no mistake: the American volunteer experience is decidedly task-oriented and talk-averse. Sociologist Paul Lichterman observes that a "task-oriented, short-term, plug-in style of volunteering . . . has become nearly synonymous with volunteering in the United States."[1] Churches, like many other nonprofit organizations, typically assign volunteers to fill short-term tasks, not long-term assignments. In some ways, the arrangement works out well. Volunteers appreciate that, with only a few hours commitment, they can experience the satisfaction of having "helped out." It's also easier for staff, who create slots for volunteers to fill and tasks to complete, which can then be quantified and reported to funders. Yet "plug-in" volunteering hampers dialogue.

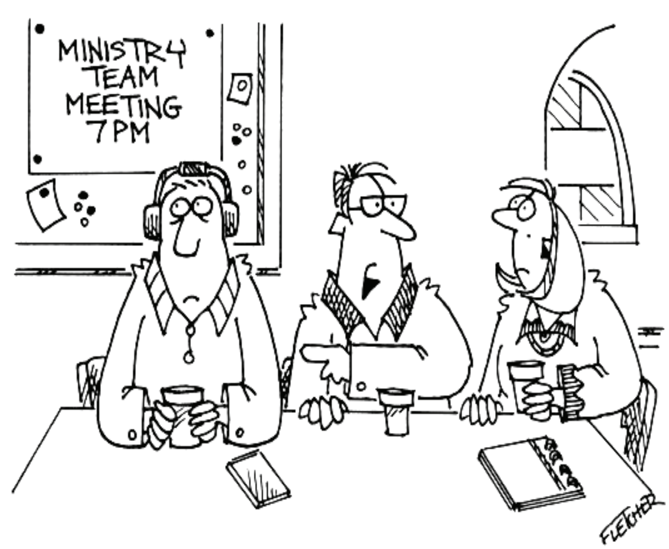
"Fun Evenings"

Working side by side on tasks does not necessarily build a team. Lichterman's research bears this out. The researcher volunteered for Fun Evenings, a project offering a drug-free, violence-free evening for disadvantaged youth, anticipating many opportunities for conversation. After all, the event had been billed as a "fun evening" at the Downtown Community Center, and included ping pong, dancing, and youth leadership training for the mostly Black, Latino, and Laotian teenagers, as well as a few white teenagers. The volunteers, all white and a generation or two older, would provide supervision.

From the outset, Lichterman found the situation confusing for himself as a volunteer. What exactly was he supposed to be doing? No one else seemed to know either. Polly, the coordinator, instructed them to monitor the youth and make sure no drugs got in. They were also told that any youth who leave should not be allowed back in, though he observed that the volunteers were lax with this requirement. Notably lacking was any process for building the team itself. Volunteers exchanged pleasantries and nothing more, failing to go deeper into conversation that might have strengthened their bond as friends. It even occurred to Lichterman that he did not especially care how he came across to others, knowing that he would not see these people again. An opportunity had been missed. Volunteers had been "plugged into" their tasks but not each other. Volunteers had "helped out" but not formed a team. More and deeper talk would have built a stronger team.[2]

Four Ways to Build Team Talk

Team dialogue can be strengthened in four ways. First, seek to move the team from shallow conversation to a deeper dialogue that airs genuine feelings and brings differences to the surface. Most small groups have plenty of



"I TEND TO BE A TALKER... JUST ASK DOUG."

conversation, yet plentiful talk without real communication can signal trouble. Practicing honesty and expecting it from others can strengthen the team and bring to the surface real issues that may need to be dealt with.

One technique for practicing honest conversation is called the EIAG (pronounced eye-ag) process. EIAG is an acronym that stands for Experience, Identify, Analyze, and Generalize.

- *Experience*. The process allows group members to understand one moment in the flow of events taking place in the group and how it affected every group member.
- *Identify*. First, identify when someone says or does something that could have a big impact on other members, positively or negatively, asking that person, "Would you be willing to explore the effect this had on the others?" If so, ask that person to withhold comments until everyone has finished.
- *Analyze*. Then analyze what happened by asking everyone present to talk about their own reactions. For example, "When [name] said (or did) this, I felt (thought, observed) or I did (or said) this." Or, "When it happened, I assumed this, which led me to react the way I did." After this, you can ask the person whose action you are analyzing, "What was your intention?"
- *Generalize*. Finally, the group can take a moment to generalize or think more broadly about how to act in other situations. Ask the person, "What have you learned?" and ask others the same question. This can deepen the trust required to form a genuine team.[3]

Second, strive for informal, relaxed meetings. The Fun Evenings volunteers never held meetings, but simply showed up for their assigned time slots. Regular meetings empower volunteers to make decisions for themselves, which builds teamwork. However, try to avoid "business-like" meetings that can be deadening. For instance, holding every meeting in "the boardroom" (the designated room where meetings are to take place), can be like always eating in the formal dining room. Look for an informal setting, perhaps somewhere offsite, and share a meal whenever possible to warm up the conversation.

Third, find ways to equalize the conversation so that the same people do not always dominate the conversation. Letting the big talkers have more airtime can be a conversation killer. Granted, some persons are more temperamentally suited to talking and others to listening. Yet the team nearly always gains more from sharing its wisdom than from listening to long-winded monologues. Ask the group to police itself. "If you tend to be a talker, pay attention to how much you talk, and try to talk less. If you tend to be a listener, try to talk more." Or if someone has been quiet, ask, "We have not heard from you yet. What do you think?"[4]

Fourth, draft a team covenant: a written or verbal agreement that describes and defines members' relationship as a team. Lack of trust is a key source of trouble in failing teams. Unless members feel safe and secure with the group, they will not contribute to their full potential. Some groups allow sarcasm to predominate, which stifles those who have sincere contributions to make. Or the problem may be more general, such as not knowing what sort of behavior to expect from other team members. A team covenant can correct this situation. George Cladis describes the covenant he developed with his church staff in Darien, Connecticut. It included these promises: (1) intentionally encourage and bless one another; (2) disagree openly, avoiding triangulation and speaking unkindly of others; and (3) like the potter and the clay, be willing to be molded and changed.[5]

Changed by Others' Testimony

Talking while we work not only sustains the team, but helps its members grow in faith. Ann Morisy, who works with British churches seeking to expand their outreach, sees dialogue as central to the church's work in the community. She writes, "The essence of dialogue is that each person who is party to the communication is open to the possibility of being changed by the testimony of the other."[6] Talk does more work than we give it credit for.

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1. Paul Lichterman, *Elusive Togetherness: Church Groups Trying to Bridge America's Divisions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 66.

2. Ibid., 88–89.

3. Jackie Bahn-Henkelman, "Reflection: The Role of the EIAG," *Emotional Intelligence and Human Relations Skills Workshop Student Participant Guide*, EQ-HR: The Center for Emotional Intelligence and Human Relations Skills, 25–27, www.eqhr.org.

4. Marlene Wilson, *Creating a Volunteer-Friendly Church Culture* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2004), 47–53.

5. George Cladis, *Leading the Team-Based Church*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1999),160–61.

6. Ann Morisy, *Beyond the Good Samaritan: Community Ministry and Mission* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 65.

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Learn More about Your Congregation through Focus Groups

For church leaders seeking to better understand their congregation, it pays to listen. Everyone knows the value of one-on-one conversations, yet it might not always be the most efficient use of time for a busy leader. In these situations a focus group can help. Simple in design, it honors the experience of congregants in the stories they tell, the questions they ask, and the concerns they express.

What Is It?

A focus group typically consists of eight to ten participants who meet for ninety minutes to two hours of discussion led by a trained moderator. Typically, a narrow range of persons is invited to contribute, such as those who share a common demographic (such as age, race, or income) or similar interests or a similar relationship to the topic at hand. For instance, to learn more about a congregation's music programs, do not include both music leaders and musicians in the same focus group.[1]

The Moderator's Role

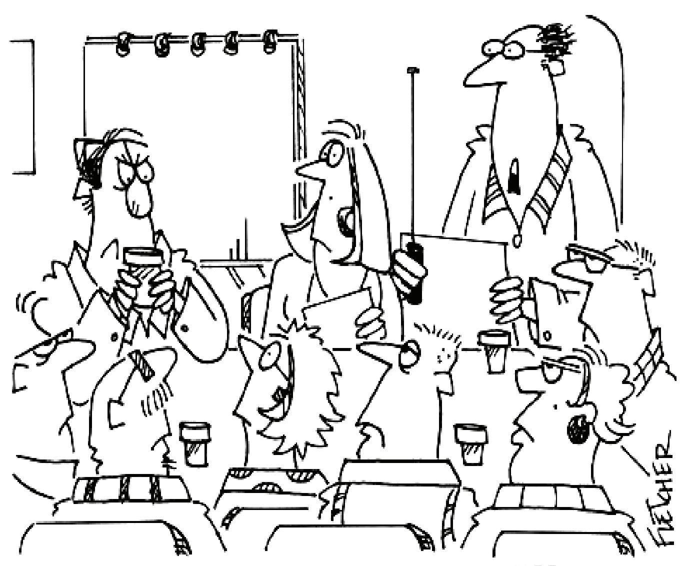
A good moderator is key to success. Should this person be an insider or outsider? Well-resourced churches might have no problem hiring a trained professional from outside to do the job. However, if cost is an issue, the pastor or another church leader could play this role as long as the moderator prepares well, knows the basics of group dynamics, and is committed to fairness. While an outside moderator can be expected to have no particular investment in the outcome of the discussion, a self-aware insider who is committed to neutrality could get the job done for a fraction of the cost of hiring a professional.[2]

Whether insider or outsider, a good moderator must be able to listen well, paying attention to what is said and paraphrasing or restating the participant's comments when necessary to reflect that he or she has been heard. It helps to have an excellent short-term auditory memory, remembering comments made early in the group and correlating them later with comments made by the same participants. Finally, the best moderators know how to establish a rapport with group members in a short time and think on their feet, using the information the group generates to determine the best line of questioning later.[3]

Typically the moderator prepares a discussion guide ahead of time. Questions are mapped out in advance yet kept open-ended so that the conversation can go in any number of directions. Move from the general to the specific in asking questions, and record answers on a flip chart or have someone take notes.

Getting Started

To organize a focus group, first define the problem or research question, and then write a statement of the group's purpose. For example, "This focus group will explore ways to shape our music ministry by understanding the experience of those who take part in it." Second, identify a sampling frame (who are the participants?) and identify a moderator. Next, invite your participants. It doesn't hurt to overbook your ideal number of participants by at least 10 percent.



FOR THOSE WHO MIGHT NOT HAVE HEARD MARVIN'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE DISCUSSION, LET ME RESTATE... "WHY DON'T THESE DANGED FOCUS GROUPS EVER HAVE GOOD COFFEE?"

Once you have gathered the focus group, welcome the participants, briefly state the purpose of the group, and break the ice by having people introduce themselves and their experience with the issue. One idea would be to have each person tell a story related to the question under discussion. Next, let people know what questions will be asked and what you will do with the data. At this point, introduce a few ground rules for discussion. Lisa Hinz, extension professor at the University of Minnesota Extension, provides a sample list of ground rules for group discussion that can be utilized in focus groups.[4]

Next, begin asking your questions using a discussion guide. For example, in the case of a youth music program, plan to start out with simple questions such as: (1) How long have you been involved in this program? (2) What kind of music do you like? (3) How do you get to the program? (4) What, if any, challenges do you run into with participating every time? (5) What would you like to learn? The purpose is to get people talking about things that will give clues that can shape the ministry approach.

If unclear about how to start, try asking a fairly general question that anyone can respond to, and ask each person to share. As moderator, make sure everyone participates. This can be accomplished by having group members reply either in random or specific order. It is ideal if everyone responds to each question, but let the group know it is acceptable to pass. One trick to ensure that people are selected randomly is to use a pack of three-by-five cards with names on them, pull a name of two or three persons and ask them to respond.

Evaluating the Data

When it comes time to analyze the data, the amount of data collected can seem overwhelming. To make the job easier, look back to the original purpose of the meeting and the questions asked. There are four ways of analyzing the data. For best results, choose the method before conducting the group. The data can be analyzed based on:

1. Transcription: Write down everything that was said and analyze the transcript.
2. Recording: Make an audio or video recording of the meeting and create an abridged transcript for analysis.
3. Notes: Take notes on flip charts or ask some to serve as a recorder, using audio or video recordings only to double-check accuracy.
4. Memory: Present the results of the group to church leaders immediately after the session is over, relying primarily on personal recall.

The first step in analyzing involves looking for themes in the material, sometimes called "coding." A simple way to code data is to review everything said during the session to determine if it constitutes an answer to any question the moderator asked. This "cut and paste" exercise may unearth hidden themes in the material.

The next step is content analysis. There are seven general guidelines for analyzing the content: 1) consider the actual words used; 2) consider the context for the response; 3) consider the consistency of the responses over the course of the interview, whether answers stayed the same or shifted over time; 4) consider the frequency of comments, 5) their intensity, 6) or how vague or specific they were; and finally 7) find the big ideas or larger patterns that may have emerged. This analysis can form the basis for a written report. [5]

A Powerful Tool

Focus groups can be a powerful tool for understanding the congregation. Yet every technique has its limitations. Unlike surveys, which rely on a random sample of the population studied, a focus group cannot reveal exactly how many people in the community feel a certain way about the subject, though it can go a long way toward painting a picture of the population studied. To check and substantiate what was heard in a focus group, try holding multiple interviews with diverse groups in the congregation.[6] The power of the focus group lies in its ability to use the safety and protection of the group to bring private thoughts into the open. Listening to others can be a vital first step toward understanding.

1. Thomas L. Greenbaum, *The Handbook for Focus Group Research*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998), 2.
2. Ibid., 68–69.
3. Ibid., 77–79.
4. Lisa Hinz, "Setting Ground Rules for Productive Discussions," University of Minnesota Extension, https://extension.umn.edu/public-engagement-strategies/setting-ground-rules-productive-discussions.
5. Thomas Justice and David Jamieson, *The Facilitator's Fieldbook* (New York: American Management Association, 1999), 201–10.
6. Scott Thumma, "Methods for Congregational Study," in *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, ed. Nancy Ammerman et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 208.