

A Few Possibilities for the Next Season of the Church

Led by Forrest Claassen, September 30, 2023

Possibility #1: Engaging with those outside our walls and ways (both old and new)

What did you hear?

What did it make you think of? How did it make you feel?

Who are the strangers around you to whom you might extend philo-xenia?

We raised the thought that many churches often turn from anything that requires them to change their focus. Especially after COVID, we are focused on what we can do to "survive," rather than imagining a different future.

Aging congregations came up as a deterrent to reaching out into our community in new ways. We suggested the importance of listening to someone's story and learning to share our own story with someone outside the church walls.

Several of us talked about the energy required by us to move a congregation to new initiatives post-covid.

Need to be more curious. Ask more questions

Strangers include homeless people, those who lack of education, those with less, those with food insecurity. We can wash feet

Cultural change this has taken place. Divorce. Lost children

Consider how critical we can be without realizing cultural differences.

Road Rage!

Don't judge – don't know their situation, only seeing tip of the iceberg

Our decision to think charitably is Key.

We are a product of our circumstances. Our backgrounds shape us.

Strangers are those who are different or unknown, on the fringes, minority

What's new – fleshing out hospitality details

Be willing to adapt to others. Think charitably different values like beta or both of Robes

Need to be more open – recognize and accept differences

It can be uncomfortable interacting with others in our ignorance

Strangers can be our neighbors

In State College we encounter the stranger every day.

Hollidaysburg – strangers don't look like "strangers" * definition of stranger can be different

Lewistown – white – culture shock of working in State College. Can feel like a stranger in your own hometown.

Strangers can look similar to us, but not be like us at all.

Stranger – poverty is a bias that makes us see someone as a stranger

Disabilities make people strangers

Possibility #2: Exploring less traditional models of church leadership

What did you hear?

What did it make you think of? How did it make you feel?

If the traditional “one church, one pastor” model isn’t working, what might you try?

Like other small groups, we affirmed that our presbytery is already doing much of what Rev. Claassen was encouraging -- making great use of CLP's (as you know, traveling near and far), multiple churches sharing pastoral leadership, etc. I think there was a general acknowledgement that we could do more, using technology for example, but there are some challenges to that. Some concern was raised that just like our clergy who are on the Pulpit supply list, the CLP's are also aging (not all, but some of them) and folks also mentioned that the regular use of CLP's and their willingness to go where called (great as that is!) may keep some churches from having to answer the hard questions of where they are in their life-span.

There was support for exploring additional ways of doing ministry beyond or in addition to the full-time called and installed pastor. And a recognition that tent-making may be the way of the future, meaning that even clergy may need and want to have other work while doing ministry part-time. We also discussed the importance of compensating folks fairly for the work they do.

It is a very odd thing that CLP's can do everything but baptize and marry people—and anyone can, according to the state, perform a marriage ceremony. We seem to need to keep some things "restricted".

No connectivity in central PA rural areas. Elderly congregations don't want to do -- just want to attend. Need more Multi-generational – find something that inspires community. Regular people can do extraordinary things. Build community – create sense of connection among people

Congregations have to be willing to step up and believe they can do most things without a pastor. Need to rethink possibilities!

Problem – a church who once they get a pastor expects him/her to take over the things they are doing. They do not say that is the plan, but they pull back. Circuit Riders – should be tried. Perhaps a Zoom option to share a worship service. Some congregations do step up.

Last option – no pastor. Church as center of community too. If we close tomorrow, will anyone care? (not because of building)

Problems with all options— Ordained teaching elders will be burned out moderating too many sessions. Church models will change so lay leaders training will need to change. Can the presbytery help? People will have to get out of their ruts and accept change.

Circuit – already happening

How do we bring people along in the changes? Start planning now, not at a crisis point

We have CLP, Commissioned also. Shared ministry, Seminary student, Our presbyter certifies lay pastors, CLP – day 2.