

PROGRESS REPORT ON GETTING PEVA UNSTUCK

1. We had two visioning processes, but still cannot agree on how to adjust our budgets, staff, and structure to reflect the new vision and goal.
2. I presented three unpopular options at the presbytery meeting on Saturday, April 25: a. No change, b. cut presbytery ministries, c. Reduce the number of churches.
3. Presbytery responded with lots of feedback to these three options, which you received on April 29.
4. I sent my revised remarks on April 27, with a fourth option, which we call the “Healthy Growing Congregations Initiative.” I would have said something about it on Saturday but I did not have the time. Plus, I did not want us to too quickly go to the option that I think has the best chance of success, even though it itself is no panacea. I wanted us to come to terms with the fact that any option we have is a painful option. The fourth option, the “Healthy Growing Congregations Initiative,” is likewise a painful option. It is not a cure-all and does not come with a 100% guarantee.

Perhaps I should have added that the group primarily responsible for turning a plateaued or declining church around is not the Presbytery, but the local pastor and the local session. All the presbytery can do is to provide resources, leadership training, inspiration, and motivation to equip the present church leaders to attempt one of the hardest things to do in Christianity, which is to turnaround a plateaued or declining congregation.

There are hundreds of books out there that purport to tell you how to do exactly that. If reading the right books were the answer, we along with most of the other Christian bodies in the country wouldn't be declining.

What the 16 pastors in this initial group have discovered is that by sitting down together monthly over 13 months and wrestling with how hard it is, and praying for each other, and staying in touch with each other, and having their sessions read some of the same books that they have wrestled with, have given them a new hope that their congregations will be able to do a better job of making and growing disciples than they had done before.

I have gotten some feedback that the perception my Short Subjects on April 27 was that if you don't buy into this program, the Presbytery has nothing to offer you.

I apologize if my choice of words left that impression. This Presbytery is still offering avenues of service through our Hunger Action Enabler and our Congo Partnership. We are still offering spiritual growth opportunities through our camp, conference, and retreat center at Makemie Woods. We are still offering our Campus Ministries at ODU, NSU, and CNU, and through the Williamsburg Church, at William and Mary. We are still offering services to vacant churches as well as conflict resolution services. We are still keeping track of the status of our clergy. We are about to restart the Equipping the Saints workshops. We still offer a Resource Center, last year used by 85% of our churches and almost 1000 individuals. We still offer an annual Clergy retreat. Our General Assembly still sends our missionaries in our name, and publishes educational materials and curriculum, and study guides for pressing issues facing the church and our society today. We are still providing opportunities for clergy and educator networking and similar opportunities for youth directors soon.

So, no, we are not saying that if you do not get on board with this Initiative, that the Presbytery does not care for you and has nothing to offer you.

What we are saying is that this has the best track record that has been modified for use in over 30 different denominations. We are also saying that the 16 pastors who have lived with this material for over a year now will be offering a unique PEVA version of the process, hopefully next week, which will be accessible to each and every one of our churches and clergy, IF THEY CHOOSE TO PARTICIPATE.

Now, back to the progress report.

5. The 16 pastors took a straw vote on the value of the books that they read, as well as other books which they themselves have read that have been helpful to them. I compiled a list of over 70 books, and sent the results to them in time for them to digest and come prepared to decide among them on April 22. At that meeting, 6 small groups worked on a curriculum that has been sent back out to them. Next Wednesday morning, on May 5, five of them will meet to look at the six proposals, plus my proposal. I hope by 11:30 AM on Wednesday, I can go to my computer and send out the proposed curriculum.

On April 22, we did agree on the Covenant, which I am attaching to this e-mail. It was posted on the website on Friday, but this is the first notice that for you that it is there. Please print this out and take it to your session. Please call one of the 16 pastors if you want to ask them about their experience in this course. Each of them has agreed to talk with several pastors who have expressed a degree of interest, as well as meet with your session to tell them what they gained from being in this course.

You will note that the sessions have to agree to let their pastor enroll. You will also note that we will not be requiring the church to have a consultation to enroll in the course. You will also note that we are opening this up to stated supply, interim pastors, CLP's, tent-making pastors, as well as installed pastors. Associate pastors are also welcome if their Head of Staff has previously taken the class. We also hope to begin in September, and need clergy and sessions to agree in writing by August 13. This will be a fee based program, so that the sessions and pastors have to pay for the books and lunches, and consultations if they choose to have consultations.

I look forward to sharing with you the curriculum next week.

Again the 16 pastors who have been a part of this first year are:

Gary Bagley, Jeff Bell, Al Butzer, Michael Condrey, Deborah Dail, Ralph Herbert, Cindy Higgins, Bill Lamont, Bob Melone, Doug Nagel, Addie Peterson, Jenny Russell, Frank Webster, Lawrence Willis, Jim Wood, Jim Young

Grace and peace,
Richard