

In the Loop

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Stewardship & Presbytery

At first, it may not sound like they go together—stewardship and presbytery. Stewardship is something congregations worry about. Each fall, the church's session is trying to figure out how to encourage the congregation to pledge toward the support of the church for the following year so that the church can develop a realistic budget that is faithful to the church's sense of mission.

But the presbytery is also concerned about stewardship and is responsible for a budget. The presbytery is charged to be a good steward of the mission and per capita dollars you provide to the larger church. Per capita dollars are a combination of figures provided to us (G.A. and Synod per capita) and a figure determined by us

(Presbytery). The per capita figure for 2011 will be presented to the presbytery for approval at our November 9 meeting. Mission dollars are divided according to a formula approved by the presbytery. Currently it is 68% to Presbytery, 7% to Synod, and 25% to General Assembly.

The challenge for the Committee on Mission each year is to determine how unified mission dollars intended for presbytery mission causes should be allocated. While unified mission giving is the primary way in which congregations support mission causes within Eastminster Presbytery, we recognize that it is not the only way. Many Eastminster congregations make direct contributions throughout the year to local

mission causes. If the Mission Committee knew how congregations are directly supporting local mission causes, it would inform the Committee of the level of support these causes are receiving not only through the presbytery budget but from direct support of congregations. Mission dollars are precious and the Committee wishes to allocate them in the most faithful way possible.

So...please let us have a copy of your 2009 Annual Report to the Congregation. Look for the box at the September Presbytery meeting. Thank you in advance for your assistance!



In Christ's service together,
Dan Schomer
General Presbyter

Questions to Ponder Before the September Presbytery Meeting

As you will discover when you explore your September Presbytery packet, we are going to spend some time around tables following dinner talking about the future of J.B.M.

Here are the questions

we will be discussing:

- Has your church used JBM? If so, how and why? If not, why not?
- What should JBM's mission be as we look to the future?
- What might the future summer camping program for children and youth look like?
- What groups in your church could use JBM?

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Prayer Concerns

- Marian Bauer—Rockynol
- Comfort for Rev. Bruce Ballantine and family upon the death of his mother
- Dick Ramsey, father of Rev. Christy Ramsey, in Akron City Hospital



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Quote of the Week

To join God's new creation means that we must leave the cave. Inside, the vision is narrow; it's all about "me". We need to look for the door marked "A New Heaven and a New Earth." It has been set open, for the new creation is God's yes to the world. The old-time religion—gospel as commodity, gospel as a private affair, gospel not as good news but as good therapy—is a half gospel. To be part of the new creation is not to be sure that the reservation on the eternity list for our soul alone has not expired or been lost. The kingdom of God is not the same as the triumph of the therapeutic. To be part of the new creation is to be part of the Big Surprise—a whole new earth. No one who buys into the me-and-Jesus concept will ever ask, "Have you taken Jesus as your hope for the resurrection and the transformation of the world?"

Peter Steinke. A Door Set Open. Printed by Alban



Reflections on “A Door Set Open”, Part 1

Peter Steinke, a “student” of Edwin Friedman, has become a primary voice for applying systems thinking to church settings. His writing and teaching have greatly helped many church leaders better understand the church as a system. So, when I read that Steinke had written a new book—A Door Set Open published by Alban—I ordered it and immediately read it. In this issue of “In the Loop” I will reflect on what Steinke has to say about the church in its current context. In the next issue, I will share my reflections on what Steinke suggests about church leadership.

Steinke begins with a favorite formula of Edwin Friedman: *HE=RO*. *The hostility (H) of the environment (E) is proportionate to the responses (R) of the organism*. Or to state it in ecclesiastical terms, the degree to which change will disrupt a congregation is in direct proportion to how anxious and reactive it becomes in the face of change.

Like numerous contemporary au-

thors, Steinke acknowledges that the changes in our culture are both extreme and rapid. As a result, anxiety levels are pervasive in the culture and the church. But Steinke suggests that the church has available to it a powerful response in the face of anxiety—hope. Quoting theologian N.T. Wright (as he does often), Steinke declares that, for the church, change provides opportunity. Wright declares, “*That, quite simply, is what it means to be Christian: to follow Jesus Christ into the new world. God's new world, which he has thrown open for us.*”

Throughout his book, Steinke grounds his thoughts in a sound eschatology. Quoting numerous biblical theologians, he reminds us that our understanding of the future is defined by the Kingdom of God. As such, we cannot be content with the status quo, or in systems terms, *homoeostasis*.

Steinke warns that creative responses to change are often met with resistance. Steinke identifies three

temptations that frequently arise in the face of uncertainty—denial (refusing to accept the reality of change), despair (giving up hope in the face of change), and magic (believing that there exists a quick and simple remedy to change).

One of the most helpful concept described by Steinke is *mission drift*. Mission drift is a loss of focus that results in a loss of identity. Mission is defined by Steinke as both what the church is and what the church does. Ironically, as churches fixate on survival, they often lose their sense of mission and thus abandon their very reason for being. Steinke stresses that focusing on survival may actually be good as long as it challenges the church to examine its self-understanding as people of God, asking, “Who are we? What is God calling us to be and do?” Nonetheless, Steinke warns that clarity about mission will not guarantee numerical growth. What it will provide the church is integrity!