

“Calling Plan”

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First Presbyterian Church
August 14, 2016**

Old Testament Lesson: Jeremiah 18:1-6
New Testament Lesson: Luke 14:25-33

Last Sunday, we had our All-Church LOGOS Gathering, where upwards of 60 of us were informed, inspired, and engaged with this ministry program.

LOGOS is a Wednesday evening intergenerational ministry designed to nurture and equip our young people to claim and uphold their place in the church alongside us as a family of faith.

Now when I say we were informed, inspired, and engaged, another way of saying that is we were equipped, called, and challenged to embrace the LOGOS ministry as our offering to God in response to Jesus, when he said in Luke just two chapters earlier, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” And again, “I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” (Luke 18:15-17)

That is a two-fold calling – one to ensure that children meet Jesus at this church, and two, that we also meet Jesus, and with our own child-like abandon and excitement. As an intergenerational ministry, LOGOS provides just that, for those who would hear and answer the call.

Hearing and answering the call of Jesus is the focus of our reading from Luke today. And what does Jesus call us to do? He says “... None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions” – all of your time, talents, and treasures.

That’s a pretty serious call. But then we have to remember all that Jesus promises us, namely peace, hope, love and joy. The promises of Jesus do not come to us in a vacuum. We actually have to first and foremost be engaged with Jesus and with other followers of Christ, with one another, in ministry.

For instance, Jesus says, “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.” Now isn’t that hard to wrap our brains around? Of course it is – giving up father, mother, wife, and children if need be, all for the sake of Jesus. Hard to imagine, until we consider what Jesus promises to those who truly are his disciples, his faithful followers, first and foremost.

As one writer and theologian puts it, “When Jesus is No. 1 in your life, your family actually benefits. A husband who has strong principles is going to be faithful to his wife.

A mother who focuses on Jesus isn't going to live through her children in an unhealthy way. A teen who knows that Jesus loves him isn't going to search for approval by following a dangerous crowd. A child who is taken to church instead of the mall isn't going to get sucked so quickly and completely into the world of conspicuous consumption."

His point is that the commitments we make as faithful, trusting followers of Jesus are the building blocks of the generations that follow, and our tribute to the generations that have gone before.¹

First Presbyterian Church is committed to the generations that follow, as well as thankful for and attentive to the generations that have gone before, paving our way forward. We see this in the results of our New Beginnings process, which is making progress. Those of you not on the Leadership Team or attending the research and planning meetings need to know that, New Beginnings is making good progress.

You can go to the church website or pickup a flier from the Credenza in the Parlour for an overview of the Five Areas of Focus that came out of our New Beginnings small groups. As you look at that later today, you will see that we are still early in the process.

New Beginnings will be a multi-year, ongoing initiative to ensure we are always positioned as well as possible for continued vitality and growth. The good news is, we have the time. This church is blessed with resources, both financial and time-and-talents, both spiritual and material.

This church has enough financial capital for the foreseeable future – and make no mistake that is in part because of your pledges, your bequeaths and estate planning, and your additional financial contributions. Without those, we can't make it another day, at least spiritually if not also materially.

So the only question is, what are we going to do in the days and months and years that follow? The answer is New Beginnings. First Presbyterian Church is going to develop and follow a process for planned and continued growth, both spiritual and, God willing, numerical growth.

Our role – our calling – is to embrace and undertake the spiritual and organizational growth that God has placed before us. When we do that, we can count on God to provide the numeric growth, growth that comes from people wanting to be involved in something bigger than themselves, wanting to give of themselves on behalf of Jesus Christ, in service to God, on the strength of the Holy Spirit.

There are lots of ideas out there about just how to get all this done. All good ideas. But if we don't develop and maintain a clear and faithful process, we'll end up right back where we started – lot's to do and little certainty of the outcome.

¹ Bob Kaylor, <http://www.homileticsonline.com>

It's just like Jesus says, "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'" This is why we trust the process. This is why we earmark certain initiatives to address in their own time. This is why we don't bite off more than we can handle.

The first step in the New Beginnings Process is to identify an All-Church Mission Outreach ministry. The idea is to be so focused on a single area of ministry and outreach that it actually becomes the hallmark of who we are as a church, as followers of Jesus.

The Leadership Team and those attending the research and planning meetings have identified Partnering with Proctor Elementary School as a strong possibility, one that we are moving forward with one step at a time, beginning with some initial exploratory meetings.

Will this ministry to under-served students and their families prove to be who we are as a church, our identity in the community? Time will tell. But it does fit well with our LOGOS ministry too, doesn't it?

Another idea is serving our aged neighbors and helping to meet their needs. Both are great ideas. And of course, we can do a little of both. But the challenge is focusing on one.

Discerning which one will become our identifying ministry is the job of our New Beginnings Leadership and anyone else from the six-week, small-group process who wants to contribute ideas and discernment.

And then ultimately, it will be the decision of Session – your elected representatives, your fellow-church members charged with making decisions on behalf of this congregation.

That's part of being a follower of Jesus, of answering the call. We are called to trust the process and follow the lead of our chosen representatives. Don't get me wrong; we still voice our ideas; we need to; that's part of the process. But then we follow the lead of those we've elected to discern the will of God on our behalf, for the benefit of our church and the community we serve.

And of course, we can always rethink things or try a new direction. It's just that doing that is so much easier when we follow the process and measure our progress. I know that's a lot to digest. I know you didn't come here to necessarily learn about New Beginnings. And yet, you did come to focus on the word of God, to follow Jesus more closely, to take greater joy in the Spirit of the Lord.

Well, doing that all has to do with how we respond to Jesus' call to be faithful disciples, faithful followers of Christ. No one person has all the answers. But as we come together as the body of Christ, which is the church, we trust in God to show us the way.

So really, our challenge – and opportunity – is not about coming up with more to do as a church, but rather taking a step back and trusting the process. As Jesus says, we are to (quote) “estimate the cost” – the needed resources – as we go about faithfully fulfilling God’s vision and mission for our church, as well as for our families, our nation, and ourselves.

When we pause to plan and prepare, we tap into untold resources, unimaginable insights, and unweaving conviction – all of it focused on God’s plan and purpose.

So the next time you feel overwhelmed, or conversely, the next time you feel inspired to jump in and do something, take a moment to plan and prepare, take a moment to ensure that it is God’s will that we are serving. When we do that, our success is ensured, to the glory of God. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Holy God, we are awed and humbled by your gracious presence among us.

Who are we in light of your all-powerful greatness? You who formed us, you who know the numbers of hairs on our heads, you open to us the riches of your kingdom.

Your love and mercy, forgiveness and peace, comfort and protection are not withheld from us, but are poured out in abundance.

Thank you. Thank you for loving us with an everlasting love.

Renew us and heal us by that love that we might live as your daughters and sons, your people of faith.

For the sake of Christ, we pray, as he taught us:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we
forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,
For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever. Amen.**