



PEACE RIVER PRESBYTERY



Dear Colleagues and Friends,

Reflections IV:
How do we in the church know if we are doing well?
(A Continuing Conversation on the Church and Issues We Face Today)

If you are a student, how do you know if you are on track? If you are a parent, how do you measure how your child is doing in school?

One indicator is the marks one gets on papers or the grades on tests.

One of the guiding personnel principles in corporate America is setting benchmarks for employees so they know what is expected from them in doing their jobs. Benchmarks are one way a business can know and measure if a person has achieved their goals and done their job.

So how do we know if the church is being the church? How do we know if we are on track?

- Would we measure that in the same way corporate America defines success, which someone has in jest translated into what they call “The 3 B’s of church life:” **b**utts (in the pews), **b**uilding and **b**udgets?
- Or is it something more esoteric as in “we are being faithful, as we understand that?” Would faithfulness look different in a Greek Orthodox Church than it does in a Baptist Church?
- Or is it an adherence to a defined list of behaviors and beliefs? When it comes to discerning who has the right list, would we say it is to be found in the separatist Amish communities, or in the liturgies found in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions? Is it in some systemic theology whether that be of our reformed tradition or the “left behind” dispensationalist tradition, or was it in the [5 fundamentals of faith as adopted in the 1910 General Assembly or in the Swearington Commission in 1925](#) that redirected the [fundamental-modernist controversy](#) in our denomination?
- And if we say the evidences (i.e., benchmarks) are in our reformed tradition, is that best expressed in the confessions of the 15th century ([Heidelberg](#)), or 16th century ([Westminster](#)), or 20th ([Barmen or the Confession of ‘67](#))? Did the old Princeton School in the late 1800’s ([Benjamin B Warfield](#)) have it right, or do we have it right today? [Click here for the link to the Book of Confessions.](#)

In the early church, the marks or evidences that something good and of God was happening in their life together, as found in the book of Acts, were that... *“they devoted themselves to the*

[apostles](#)' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." ([Acts 2:42](#))

The early church fathers in the 2nd and 3rd centuries alluded to and expanded on what they understood to be the essential characteristics of the church. In the [Nicene Creed](#), established by the [First Council of Nicea](#), these evidences, or benchmarks, became known as the Four Marks of the Church:

We believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

Nothing more, nothing less. Those are the benchmarks.

- What do these marks mean for us?
- How are we doing?
- How should we measure ourselves against them?
- Have we focused on one mark, defining it as the most important in our mind, and neglected the others?
- What would it look like if in a church Sunday after Sunday we asked ourselves, for instance, how did we do being apostolic this week? (i.e., How did we reach out and share faith? When, how and where did we ask the question of what God is doing in our neighborhood? How did we help our members align ourselves with God's mission? How did we help them experience the joy and transforming power of Christ and give witness to that in word and deed?)

As always I would invite your thoughts and reflections.

Thanks be to God who continues to be the wind in our sails and helps us steer into the future!

Peace,

Graham

Graham Hart
General Presbyter
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Again, an issue of *The Parish Paper* is attached. This week we are sending the September issue.

Peace River Presbytery's purchase of a subscription to *The Parish Paper* INCLUDES

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Presbyterians respond



The long road to recovery

Christ is helping people affected by natural disasters in the United States through GAMC's long-term recovery efforts. Meet those who have benefitted from YOUR response in [Alabama](#) and [Missouri](#), and [donate](#) to disaster relief so the good work can continue.



Africa: situation report

As famine grips Somalia and the Horn of Africa, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance takes action by immediately sending funds to help the most vulnerable. [Learn more](#) about what's being done and [donate now](#) to the Church's efforts online or to donate \$10 simply text PDA or PDACares to 20222.



Guiding mission in Africa

Christi and Jeff Boyd are feeding the hungry in Africa and providing a way for mission groups to better serve those in need.

[Read their story](#) →



Pastoral leaders coming together

Learn about [Communities of Theological Friendship](#) in which God is both the object AND an expected participant in conversation and relationship. Encourage pastoral leaders to apply for a Communities of Theological Friendship mini-grant.



Training Center for Innovative Church Leadership

NEW monthly training events geared toward strengthening new church development as well as community outreach and discipleship begin in September. [Register now](#) →

Please add these concerns to your personal prayer list.

Please pray for:

Alesia Sharpe (Presbytery's Office Manager) and her family on the loss of her father on September 21

Please continue to pray for:

Rev. Dr. David Uhl, HR, as he deals with health problems

Rev. Dr. Bob Rea

Pastors and Educators in transition

Those affected by natural disasters in the United States

Nations in crisis

Please also keep in your prayers:

Beth-El Farmworker Ministry

Misión Peniel

Cedarkirk Camp and Conference Center

CONGREGATION OF THE WEEK:

October 2	First Presbyterian Church, Fort Myers Paul deJong, Pastor pastor_paul@rocketmail.com
October 9	Hope United Church (PCUSA), Fort Myers Jim Berger, Pastor dowberger@comcast.net
October 16	Chapel by the Sea, Fort Myers Beach Maynard Pittendreigh, Pastor maynard@chapelbts.org
October 23	Holy Trinity Presbyterian Church, North Fort Myers Russ Hickman, Temporary Supply Pastor hickman77@embarqmail.com
October 30	Peace Presbyterian Church, Lakewood Ranch

The articles below may interest you. I have found some of them in my reading, and others have been passed on to me. *Just click on the underlined phrases.*

Multimedia: Vocation

Matt Bloom: Flourishing in ministry

Pastoral ministry is hard and challenging, but God wants clergy -- and everyone -- to experience meaning in work, says a management professor who studies wellbeing and work. Read more and watch video »

Reflection: Leadership Philosophy

L. Gregory Jones: Christian institutions as cities

Cities have a vibrant core, permeable boundaries and strong networks. But many of today's Christian institutions are more like corporations, tightly bounded and working alone. Read more »

Article: Stories of Hope

David Briggs: The effect on faith of being smarter than a fifth-grader

Does higher education lead to a loss of faith? The answer is as complex as the American religious landscape. [Read more »](#)



[Philly group to try to change circumstances through listening](#)

Philadelphia Inquirer: What keeps you awake at night? Where is the pain in your life? In Philadelphia, clergy and laity pose those questions to others in one-on-one conversations and listen intently.

[NJ church reverses money flow, collection plate holds cash for congregants](#)

CNN Belief blog: New Jersey church put a new spin on the collection plate by having congregants take cash-filled envelopes in hopes that the money will be put to charitable use.

[Once prosperous New Yorkers forced to live under canvas in New Jersey woods](#)

The (London) Telegraph: The white picket fence and manicured flowerbeds outside 1 Paradise Lane are straight from a picture postcard of idyllic suburban American life in the 1950s.

[Believing in Johnny Cash: An open letter to atheists](#)

Religion Dispatches: It wasn't Johnny Cash's skill as a musician, his music industry savvy or even his

voice that was behind his success. It was the stories he told.

[A rough decade for American congregations](#)

CNN Belief Blog: New survey of American congregations shows religious health and vitality are weaker than they were 10 years ago.

[Where have all the leaders gone?](#)

Harvard Business Review blog: After two decades of leadership development, why aren't we turning out better leaders across the board?

[Are they running for president or pastor?](#)

Baltimore Sun: Candidates' wearing their religion on their sleeves is a recipe for heightened political tension.

PRESBYTERY CALENDAR (for more details, go to www.peaceriverpresbytery.org)

SEPTEMBER, 2011

29th

Sexual Misconduct Prevention Workshop at Pine Shores, Sarasota

OCTOBER, 2011

3rd

Theology and Worship

6th

Records and Overtures

8th

Reading of the Minutes at Vanderbilt, Naples

10th

Mission/Vision Guide Team

Standing Rules Task Force

11th

Committee on Ministry

13th

Board of Trustees

15th

Reading of the Minutes at Kirkwood, Bradenton and Covenant, Fort Myers

18th

Evangelism and Church Development (at Presbytery office)

20th

Mission and Justice

Nominations (at Presbytery office)

Theology and Worship

22nd

Reading of the Minutes at First, Port Charlotte and Northminster, Sarasota

25th

Leadership and Congregational Development

27th

Council