



PEACE RIVER
PRESBYTERY



Dear Colleagues and Friends,

**Mom, Roots, Wings, and...
Presbyterian Fellowship Gathering Reflections**

On Monday I saw it as I was riding down the street - a bald eagle perched on top of one of those tall concrete electric poles. I stopped, and sat watching that majestic bird as it watched me. In that moment, for whatever reason, I remembered one of the last things my Mom said before she died.

The family was gathered around Mom in the home my Dad built for her when she was a bride. For a number of years she had lived with congestive heart failure, but now she was tired and her heart was tired. In that sacred moment, her spirit was as alive as it ever had been. My Dad, as he often did, joked, and at some point talked about them just being two old birds. Mom, always the serious one, smiled, then said, "Well, this old bird is limping and not doing so well." With conviction and a calm that came from a deep place within her she said, "Remember they that wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

And not too long after that she died, but she left me, all these years later, remembering that even in those hard places and times and even while dying, we can run and walk and even soar as an eagle... if we wait on the Lord.

But are we waiting on the Lord? Are we as a denomination always to be limping and not doing so well?

- Some say as a denomination we are living in a time of deconstruction, and everything seems to be coming apart.
- Others hold up statistics and point the finger of blame at a changing cast of characters identifying the other as the cause, the culprit.
- Some say, can't we just get along?
- Others say we are going through a once every 500 year ecclesiastical garage sale, the last one having been at the time of the reformation. They say our structures need changing, and organizational life needs reforming, and our beliefs need readjusting. It is indeed as if we are having a garage sale, but the problem is, some see my treasures as junk, and what others treasure I sometimes don't think is all that important.
- Some say God is doing a new thing.
- Others say God is wanting to do a new thing.
- Some folks on both the right and the left, whatever that means at any given moment, claim they know what needs to go in this garage sale and what doesn't so that God can finally do God's new thing.
- And we all limp.

This is what I know...what I believe...what I remember:

We need to walk ... we need to run... we can soar, and the world needs us to soar.

Last week I wrote on the importance of roots, of tradition, of living in and with the trust we have been given

and, in our ordination vows, promised to keep. Also I shared that one of our challenges when we are ordained is figuring out how to make meaningful our participation in the sacred community called a presbytery and the larger church. The idea of us being in a sacred community was one of Calvin's gifts to the church universal that we would do well to reclaim ([click here to see previous article on that](#)).

Lots of folks are curious about what I think about the Fellowship of Presbyterian Covenanting Conference (For more information, go to www.pres-outlook.org as well as to the attached insert).

My conviction and answer:

- God made us to soar.
- The church exists because of Easter..

So, whether it is

- Acts16:5 (the church growth project we were part of for 2 years),
- or the Fellowship of Presbyterians who met last week in Orlando,
- or the NEXT church meeting later this spring,
- or even a General Assembly (now that is a radical thought),

I believe God wants us to soar.

Ever since Jesus gathered the disciples, and as we read in the New Testament about the early church, the gift of the church and the problem of the church is that it is made up of folks just like us who stumble along. If you think what we are going through today is the first time the church has ever struggled, you have not read your Bible (e.g., see I and II Corinthians).

So when we honor the vows that we have made to this 'sacred community' ([click here for the link](#)) and to each other, I think the sky is the limit to our dreaming and experimenting and trying out new forms and structures and ways. Why? As that eagle reminded me, and as by example my Mom taught me, if we wait and wait and wait on the Lord we will walk... we will run... and we will mount up with wings like Eagles and we will soar.

I am not naïve... I am not making a political statement... I am not taking the party line of any party. But I am living in the tradition that is rooted in the messiness that we read about in Corinthians, where Paul, in spite of or because of the limping that was part of the church then, nevertheless was able to remind them, even as he reminds us, "So faith, hope love abide... these three. But the greatest of these is love." May we be great and may we soar!

For your information, I did go to Orlando last week. I was inspired by most of what I saw (the worship was especially good), troubled by some things, sad that a few people feel the only option is to leave the PCUSA and seek a divorce, if I may use that language. I was grateful to be able to talk along the way with many of our folks who were there. The Fellowship's first gathering in Minneapolis last August was criticized because it was predominately led by seven tall-steeple, white, male pastors. This time they reached into Peace River and asked Hope Lee, who does not have any official capacity or links to the organization, to preach at the opening worship service. She did well, and sounded a strong missional message. Hope is not going anywhere, and her message was one we all need to hear: **'If your church disappeared tomorrow, would it matter?'**

It is my sense that a majority of the folks who gathered last week are not leaving, but it is still troubling that some churches will likely start that process (i.e., going to ECO - a new reformed denomination). Many who are not leaving *may* link together under the umbrella of the Fellowship in some new and creative ways to strengthen the church. Some of the ideas they discussed we have been talking about as a Presbytery for the past 18 months through the work of the Mission/Vision/Standing Rules Guide team (e.g., creating an order like the company of pastors, creating more space for the development of meaningful relationships and

accountability at our Presbytery meetings, linking elders from local congregations together with other elders in nearby churches for the sharing of best practices and for support}. So just to be clear, I do not support the creation of a new reformed body (denomination), but many of the ideas shared are ones that may help us walk and run and soar.

I have attached a copy of a bulletin Insert from the Presbyterian Outlook about the Fellowship gathering. It is also printed farther along in this Pastoral Letter. Peace River Presbytery has purchased a license that permits any of our churches to reproduce the insert for distribution to Peace River congregations.

Over the next year I am sure we will have lively and interesting, deep but respectful, honest and honoring conversations with one another as we wait on the Lord and as we dream again... and soar.

Changing metaphors, I end as I have for the past year with this closing and benediction:

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
graham@peaceriverpresbytery.org

[Churches in the News – please send a link if your church is in the news.](#)

Please add these concerns to your personal prayer list.

Please continue to pray for:

Rev. Karl and Susan Kling on the recent loss of Karl's mother
Susan Knowles, wife of Rev. Mark Knowles, as she recovers from surgery
Rev. Dr. David Uhl, HR, as he continues to battle health issues
Rev. Rosemary Gremban
Rev. Dr. Ted Land
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

PLEASE PRAY FOR THE CONGREGATION OF THE WEEK – January 29

Bee Ridge Presbyterian Church, Sarasota, is celebrating during 2012 its 95 years of ministry on the corner of Proctor and South McIntosh in Sarasota. Its 200 members worship each Sunday in the historic Little White Church at 8:30am and Main Sanctuary at 11am. Joyful worship, music, and community involvement are at the center of Bee Ridge's rich heritage. Presbyterian Women provide strong leadership through Circle meetings, General Gatherings, and sharing activities with other PW groups in the presbytery.

Bee Ridge small groups encourage growth in evangelism and discipleship with material from the Alpha Course, "Unbinding Your Soul," the Nooma video series, and other Christian Education resources. Dawnmarie Daniels-Carsky serves as the Clerk of Session. The Rev. Dr. Karl Kling was installed as Bee Ridge's pastor in 2003 and currently serves as Chair of presbytery's Theology and Worship Committee. "Know Jesus, Make Jesus Known" is Bee Ridge Presbyterian's mission statement as the congregation looks forward with joy and anticipation to celebrating 100 years of ministry in 2017!

Karl Kling, Pastor karlkingdmin@aol.com
www.beeridgechurch.com

LIST FOR THE MONTH OF JANUARY:

January 1	First Presbyterian Church, Port Charlotte
January 8	Wintergarden Presbyterian Church, Port Charlotte Ruth Schaaff, Temporary Supply pastor@wintergardenchurch.org

January 15	Burnt Store Presbyterian Church, Punta Gorda Tim Stewart, Pastor sunburn1320@mac.com Valerie Bell, Associate Pastor pastorval@embarqmail.com
January 22	First Presbyterian Church, Punta Gorda Steve Mock, Pastor revmock@fpcpunta.org
January 29	Bee Ridge Presbyterian Church, Sarasota Karl Kling, Pastor karlklingdmin@aol.com



1,001 in 10

Presbyterians rally around the call to grow the church deep and wide.

See how the numbers reflect our bold new vision.

The outward-facing church

Demographics and other tools can help congregations rediscover their call to care for those around them. Learn more.

[Read more articles and subscribe to *Presbyterians Today*.](#)





Haiti: the Presbyterian effect

January 12 was the [two year anniversary of the earthquake in Haiti](#). Learn how [your donations](#) are used and why Presbyterian relief efforts are having a greater impact.



Theological Education Fund tops \$50 million mark

[One church's](#) gift puts [TEF](#) at more than \$50 million raised since 1989! [Read why](#) the congregation believes it's important to invest in PC(USA) seminaries each year.



New Theology, Worship and Education director named

[Meet the Rev. Charles "Chip" Hardwick](#) the new director of Theology, Worship and Education for the GAMC.



JANUARY 31 DEADLINE: Seeking partner presbyteries

Applications are available to presbyteries seeking to be partners in [For Such a Time as This](#), a small church pastoral residency program. For more information, [visit us online](#) or [email](#) us your questions.

(See the attached insert for a copy to reproduce and distribute - printed by permission.)

A new denomination, continuing ties to PC(USA)

A report from the Fellowship of Presbyterians conference

By Leslie Scanlon, Outlook national reporter

ORLANDO, Fla. - Most of the 2,100 people who came to the Fellowship of Presbyterians' Covenanting Conference, held Jan. 18-20 in Orlando, are not yet ready to leave the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Instead, they're still trying to discern what to do next.

But Fellowship organizers say about 100 congregations are ready to withdraw from the PC(USA) and step into something that's new and still taking shape. The Fellowship has made that possible by formally creating a new denomination, the Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians (ECO for short), which will begin accepting member congregations April 1.

Throughout this conference, Fellowship leaders cast a vision of a bold new church unafraid to take risks in mission; of like-minded evangelicals committed to mutual accountability; of taking the best of Presbyterian history and tradition and pointing it in new directions.

"I'm not really sure we have really dreamed for a long time," said John Ortberg, an author and pastor of Menlo Park Church in California. "I think God is calling us to dream."

Along with the dreams came a bucket of nuts and bolts (pensions, health plans, per capita and more). The Fellowship's board of directors approved revised theology and polity documents that form the new denomination's constitution. They announced plans for another national gathering, to be held Aug. 23-24 in a place yet to be determined. It will be partly a gathering for mutual support and worship, partly a formal business meeting.

It's also clear that most evangelicals aren't leaving the PC(USA). Some aren't ready to make the switch yet, some don't want to go at all (although that could change if the PC(USA) decides to allow its ministers to perform same-gender marriages). A relatively small group are pursuing the idea of achieving union status with both the ECO and the PC(USA).

Evangelical congregations may have several reasons for staying in the PC(USA), said Jim Singleton, a Colorado pastor and president of the Fellowship. Some may feel it's too costly to go to the ECO; some may not want to risk rupturing a divided congregation; some feel they already do effective ministry and have solid relationships within

PC(USA).

Some evangelicals staying in the PC(USA) also will join the Fellowship as a way of differentiating themselves - to align with other evangelicals in networks of mutual accountability, and to stand in opposition to the PC(USA)'s controversial decision last year to allow the ordination of sexually active gays and lesbians.

Here are more details regarding the Fellowship and the new denomination.

Essential tenets. Included in the ECO's theology document is a section on essential tenets, with which those being ordained in the new denomination or having leadership roles in its congregations are expected to agree. That section, however, is apparently still under revision. Laura Smit, a theology professor and its primary author, described it as a "paper-cup document" (to be used for a while, then replaced with something better), rather than a cherished crystal goblet handed down through the generations.

The essential tenets are "not a subscriptionist bullet-point list of eight essential things you have to believe to get in the door" of the ECO, said John Crosby, a Minnesota pastor and president of the ECO. Crosby said in an interview that the essential tenets are bedrock theological teachings listed in boldface in the document, and that the Fellowship's board of directors retains the authority to make changes in the constitutional documents for the next 18 months, while the ECO is taking shape.

"Everything we do around here is a draft," Singleton said.

Finances. The Fellowship has begun raising money. It ended the gathering with a Covenanting Service where pledge cards were passed out and people were asked to sign a covenant of support with the broader Fellowship umbrella group, not specifically with the ECO. The Fellowship has set what its leaders call a "bare-bones" budget of \$500,000 for 2012. For congregations entering the ECO, the per capita would be 1 percent of the congregation's budget. Joining the Fellowship will cost \$250 a year for congregations and \$125 for individuals.

New ecosystem. Leaders spoke of having in the ECO a solid theological center; mutual accountability through peer evaluations of ministry; and an ethos that allows for flexibility, risk-taking and trust.

"This is not a safe harbor" but a vessel for those "who want to be in ships that sail out into the storm," said Joe Farrell, a Colorado minister who worked on the polity document.

"We've had this deep longing for belonging," said Marnie Crumpler, a minister with Peachtree Church in Atlanta. "This is our tribe. These are our people."

When asked why evangelicals should choose the ECO rather than the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Singleton said there's one clear distinction: The EPC has an "ambivalent" position on the ordination of women, while the ECO celebrates the gifts of women in ministry.

For further reports, go to www.pres-outlook.org

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.*

['Faith of our fathers' endures](#)

The Irish Times: The truth of the Christian message will always find a way through to humanity.

[Will immigration slowdown prompt a bilingual ministry bust?](#)

Christianity Today: Churches retool Hispanic outreach after recession impact.

[Faith undercover](#)

America: A Catholic CEO promotes good values and good business -- with a little help from reality television.

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

JANUARY, 2012

25th

Retired Clergy brown bag lunch

26th
Council

31st
Theology and Worship Conference Call Meeting

FEBRUARY, 2012

2nd
Records and Overtures

4th
Presbyterian Women Annual Gathering at Church of the Palms

7th
Mission, Vision, Standing Rules Guide Team

8th
Committee on Preparation for Ministry

9th
Board of Trustees
Leadership and Congregational Development
Personnel
Nominations via conference call

14th
Committee on Ministry

16th
Mission and Justice
Theology and Worship

21st
Evangelism and Church Development

23rd
Stated Meeting at Palma Sola, Bradenton