

**Dear Members of Peace River ...**

**Gratitude and Hope** are the feelings and the message that fills my heart, as I get ready to retire and you prepare to welcome a new General Presbyter. The following is just a small sampling of what is in my gratitude journal:

- the people I have worked, prayed, dreamed and cried with these past 17 years, especially the staff who have supported you and me in a steady way;
- the volunteers, both teaching and ruling elders, who are committed to a larger vision of the church (beyond the local level) which has enabled this presbytery to do its work;
- the new initiatives we have launched such as the Blessing Grants, Cuba Partnership, the Immokalee Fair Housing Alliance through Mision Peniel, as well as the continuing and amazing work of Beth-El and Cedarkirk, and the overseas mission co-workers we support;
- each of the congregations which are at the heart of our work as a presbytery;
- some good friends who have walked this road with me;
- and a family and Linda who have been supportive of my work throughout the years.

**Hope** is one of those words that draws us forward. At the heart of our Christian hope is our conviction that God is not finished with us nor the world God so loves. The Strategic Planning Team has done some very good work, and I believe the path they are suggesting can help us better fulfill your work and mission as a presbytery. My hope is tempered with some sadness that for me this part of my journey will be coming to an end; but I am convinced it is the right time for new leadership to come and help you dream new dreams and continue to be the great presbytery you are.

So, in this final few months as your General Presbyter, as we use an adaptive model for this transition, as I have shared before, a helpful metaphor at least for me to understand this model, is to think of Peace River as a plane. My role, as one of the crew, is to keep flying the plane. At the same time, I am doing my part to land the plane, anticipating a quick turnaround, so that you (i.e. the presbytery) can continue on your way with a new leader. Additionally, during this time I am also preparing to get out of this plane and step into another one. Someone suggested that a glider - that will soar with the winds of the Spirit - would be an appropriate metaphor for me to use as I personally look toward the future.



So, in these days I find myself excited, sad, hopeful, and grateful all at the same time.

The Adaptive Model requires a higher level of investment from all parties. Specifically, with this model, the work that an interim typically focuses on is to be addressed while the retiring person is still in place. In a church, if this model is used, often the session will appoint a transition team who, along with the retiring pastor, is invited to pay attention to the kind of issues and dynamics that an interim pastor would. In the case of the Presbytery, the Steering Committee is functioning in that role.

The Strategic Planning Task Force report today reflects not only the good work, and careful thinking that has been going on in the Presbytery, but evidences how the five themes of congregational/presbytery transitions are being covered in the Presbytery, even though we will not have an interim.

Also, to make sure we are asking the right questions and paying attention to critical transitional issues, I interviewed every member of the Steering Committee in September and asked: What are the most "important and vital" issues to address

in this transition time, and what are the essential values that we want to maintain and keep during and after this transition related to our Presbytery culture? The following is an abridged summary of those interview.

#### On Change

- a. Keep momentum going but be very careful on what changes we make (don't make changes in areas that we will want to incorporate the new General Presbyter's perspective — areas that have long term strategic significance).
- b. The General Presbyter can continue to be a calming influence in a system that is wondering how it will turn out, who the new person will be, how will we do.
- c. How are we preparing the Presbytery for change?
- d. In this transitional time - deal with issues as they come up rather than waiting.
- e. We are a healthy presbytery, don't go into too much change now.
- f. Everything we do needs to be mindful and focused on the health and vitality of congregations.

#### On Staff

- a. Be concerned for the health of our office staff.
- b. The General Presbyter is to stay in the primary leadership role until he leaves.
- c. Make sure the staff is supported, roles and responsibilities are clear, and know that transitions will bring change.
- d. Review all job descriptions to make sure they are in alignment with what we are expecting.
- e. Be clear on the roles and responsibilities of the Stated Clerk, General Presbyter, and Treasurer.
- f. Who is helping Graham land the plane? Exit interview? Support? Significant role change? Who has that conversation?

#### Maintaining our Culture

- a. Keep the ship running on course. Focus to make sure day to day operation are running smoothly.
- b. Lot of good folks are doing their best and Peace River Presbytery is the beneficiary of the efforts of a lot of volunteers.
- c. As a presbytery we are known to have differences of opinion, yet we have been able to reach out across the aisle and want to continue living out that value.
- d. Innovation is a good thing, and we have encouraged that as a presbytery and want to continue with that.
- e. We affirm that process is important, but not more important than ministry. We need to do our best to uphold process but not let it dictate and control us.
- f. Continue to promote a culture in which we honor and respect each other.
- g. Encourage direct, clear, and positive communications.

#### Transition Issues to Address

- a. Pay attention to leadership transition roles - clarity.
- b. How will the corporate memory that Graham has be passed on and shared (i.e. the things that Graham has been carrying, or areas in which people look to Graham for guidance)?
- c. Some things may fall by the way-side. What are they? Is that OK?
- d. What does Graham usually initiate and is responsible for that we may not know? In those areas assign responsibility to someone for the next General Presbyter.
- e. Make sure essential changes in The Standing Rules are completed.
- f. Leave space for next person to be able to start well.
- g. Who is paying attention to pastors who are also beginning their transitions?
- h. Anything the Presbytery can do to drive the networking among and between churches and the Presbytery will produce huge benefits, but there are challenges in carrying that out.

**On a final note**, as a way to both land the plane and figure out what might be next for me, over the summer I read the book Theory U: Learning from the Emerging Future, and in late October, I was able to attend a workshop which taught Theory U as a framework, as well as a methodology, to move into the future. The essence of Theory U says we live at a time where the ecological divide, the spiritual divide, and social divide are getting wider and deeper, and we find ourselves living into a future that no one wants. In a time of discontinuous change, the questions are how we can best imagine, plan and know what to do next. In summary, the future cannot be found by just repeating the past. I found the time

extremely helpful and hopeful, very applicable to the church, and hope to share some learnings and observations with you before I leave.

**Over the next several months** I look forward to visiting as many congregations as possible. If you want to get together for coffee and some conversation let me know.

With Gratitude and Hope,  
Graham