

Graham Hart - General Presbyter's Half-time Reflections and Peace River Presbytery's Annual Report

February 22, 2018

Annual Reports, using a sports analogy, can be understood as a half-time exercise. In the locker-room during half-time a team quickly looks back at the first half, talks about what went well, and what needs to change. Sometime the coaching staff calls for radical adjustments. Half-time is not long, but long enough for a team to re-calibrate the game plan, to finish the game strong and well.

An annual report provides that same opportunity for a church or presbytery. It is a time to collectively look back, do some reflection, and look ahead with anticipation and hope. My friends, the game Peace River Presbytery and each congregation is called to live and play, if I could be so simplistic, is "loving the world that God so loves in Christ." That game is far from over. There is much work to do. This Presbytery and each member, pastor, elder and congregation has a small, never the less important, role to play. So welcome to the locker room, and some half-time talk and reflections.

But first - We are thrilled that Debbie Rundlett, pastor, author, presbytery leader, entrepreneur, and coach will be leading a workshop at our Presbytery meeting on: *Incarnational Leadership and Emotional Intelligence*, and that Ary Fernandez Alban, pastor, professor, Stated Clerk of Matanzas Presbytery and Moderator of the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Cuba (i.e. that is their GA) will be preaching and bringing us greetings from our sisters and brothers in Cuba. So back to half-time....

The 2017 Game Plan – The 2017 Steering Committee Work Plan

As part of its responsibility, the Steering Committee adopted a Work Plan that focused its efforts in 2017 in 3 overarching goals: Relational/Missional, Congregational/Transformational, and Organizational Structure. Then they developed specific objectives in each area. At the first meeting of the year they listed ways in which we were already accomplishing these goals, and then began dreaming of new possibilities by establishing new objectives, which they have called "Aspirational Objectives". Through the committees and teams of PRP new programs and initiative were begun in each of the following areas; and in some areas we did not make much progress. (Note: I would be glad to send you a spread sheet that has the Steering Committee evaluation and work accomplished in each area to date).

a. RELATIONAL/MISSIONAL

- i. Increase sense of collegiality among pastors and congregations; focus on areas which bring us together, help us stay together, and launch us out in mission together.
- ii. Support the development of the partnership with the IPCR in Cuba (Presbytery of Matanzas).
- iii. Improve communication tools.

b. CONGREGATIONAL/TRANSFORMATIONAL

- i. Increase age (younger) and racial-ethnic diversity.
- ii. Develop overall strategy related to church re-development, congregational transformation and new church development.

c. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

- i. Re-evaluate responsibilities of Missional and Vision Teams.
- ii. Develop a matrix that measures the overall progress in being missional, relational, and a learning community.
- iii. Initiate a process in 2018 to review our reorganization design; ask the question, "How does it continue to guide the PRP in mission, ministry and work?"

Some of the 2017 Specific Plays and Successes –

1. **Blessing Grants Endowment Fund** – 2 years ago the Steering Committee formed a task force that asked: How can the Presbytery spark the imagination of God's people? How can the Presbytery encourage congregations and sessions to dream new dreams? What if Peace River had a fund set aside for that purpose?

In 2017 the Presbytery approved the Blessing Grants Initiative. *The overall goal of the Blessing Grants is to establish a permanent invested corpus, the earnings from which will be given as grants to congregations and presbytery entities who propose to support church development, redevelopment, and/or transformation:*

- *By initiating, altering or expanding outreach ministries in their local communities*
- *or by creating new church developments or worshipping communities.*

A “shout out” to the Presbytery’s Board of Trustees for careful management of funds, and some diligent work that will result in reaching our \$1,000,000 goal in 2018, which will allow approximately \$50,000 to be made available in Grants. In 2017 \$25,000 in grants were awarded.

2. **Stewardship** - For reasons of clarity, transparency, and simplicity, five years ago, the Presbytery voted to adopt what we have called the “Three Streams Funding Model.” Sessions were asked to support each stream per suggested percentages (see below) of a congregation’s contributions for the prior year. In the case of Synod and General Assembly Per Capita, the amount is determined (required) and reported to us by each of those bodies. What is given to each stream cannot, per action of the Presbytery, be used in other areas.

The Three Streams and what you gave to each stream in 2017 are:

- a. Synod and General Assembly per Capita. Total given \$ 85,946.42.
- b. Presbytery Missions (1.5 percent of the church’s congregational contributions). Total given \$ 271,785.97.
- c. Presbytery Ministry Operations (2.5 percent of the church’s congregational contributions), which is for the cost of being a Presbytery. Total given \$ 352,730.72.

The Treasurer and Finance Team/Trustees of the Presbytery do a great job giving oversight to our finances. In 2017, as we have done for the past several years, the Presbytery Ministry Operations Stream ended the year in the black by an amazing \$199.00. Thanks to your support of our work together.

3. **Cuba Partnership** – In 2015 Peace River was invited, with three other presbyteries in Florida, to meet with the Presbyterian Church leadership in Cuba. In 2016, two exploratory trips occurred. In May 2017, members of our Cuba Task Force were invited to attend the Matanzas Presbytery’s pastoral family retreat. In September, 18 pastors and spouses from PRP joined 16 pastors (and their families) of Matanzas, for a retreat at Varadero, then over the weekend, they stayed with the Cuban pastors, preaching in their churches on Sunday.

Today, the Steering Committee is bringing forward, for the Presbytery’s consideration, a Partnership Agreement with Matanzas Presbytery. The hope is later this year we will formally begin some sister congregation relationships, as well as have a trip for members of PRP congregations to spend time with members of the congregations in Matanzas Presbytery. As has been said before, we have much to learn from the experience and the faith walk of our brothers and sisters in Cuba.

4. **Congregational Vitality** - In 2017 the Presbytery began a 2-year focus on “congregational vitality.” Our new Congregational Vitality team has this working definition of a “Vital and Growing Church”: *A vital and growing church is one that celebrates the Great Commandment through inspiring and life-transforming worship, nurturing discipleship, compassionate and inclusive outreach, and radical, grace-filled generosity.*”

At each of our meetings in 2017/2018, we committed to focus on one aspect of a vital and growing congregation. Themes and dates of coming Presbytery Meetings are:

- a. February 22, 2018 (First Presbyterian, Sarasota) - Theme: Strengthening the Emotional IQ of Leaders and Sessions and the Organizational Health of Congregation – Debbie Rundlett
- b. May 17, 2018 (St. Paul’s Presbyterian, North Port) - Theme: Compassionate and Inclusive Outreach
- c. September Regional Meetings – Best Practices, new programs, and learnings related to congregational vitality.
- d. November 15, 2018 (Covenant Presbyterian, Fort Myers)– Theme TBD

5. **Helping Mision Peniel up (increase) their ministry reach** – In 2017, Mision Peniel moved to a new location, hired Ruth DeYoe as Mission Coordinator, increased the number of members on this ministry team of the Presbytery, worked closely with Coalition of Immokalee Workers in their on-going work with the migrant community and Fair Food Campaign, received a \$100,000 grant to be used to help migrant workers and families in their recovery from Hurricane Irma. On February 11 of this year, Mision Peniel hosted an Open House in their new location.

Each of our Covenant Partnership ministries is compelling and demands our support. Based on our Three Streams approach to stewardship, each covenant partnership receives 100% of what designated to them. What is unique about Mision Peniel is that Peace River is the only supporting presbytery. Mision Peniel is us, and functions as one of the ministry teams of this Presbytery. So, thank you Peace River for your support, which translated into having over 1200 volunteers and serving between 450-575 farmworkers weekly.

6. **Irma Update** - On behalf of the Presbytery and the congregations impacted by Hurricane Irma, we thank Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) for showing up multiple times with support and grants to help in their ministry and recovery efforts. Their involvement continues as they are working in the Lee and Collier County long term recovery organizations, as well as looking to set up work groups from all over the United States to help with the recovery and rebuilding efforts in Immokalee. One possibility is to use Buckingham Church as the site that will host work groups who will be coming to deal with on-going, unmet needs and rebuilding efforts.

What wins Games? It's the Front Line.

To win games week after week, it is not the spectacular trick play that in the end creates success but having a solid and steady front line that does its job. No one from the stands might notice, but without a strong offensive or defensive front line a football team will not win games. So, in the life of Peace River, nothing would get done without the steady and on-going work of Congregational Vitality, the Trustees, COM, CPM, the PJC, Personnel, the Steering Committee and several special Task Forces, Nominations, and the Mission Peniel Ministry team. Thanks to all the teams and task forces, and their leadership, that gives countless hours to do the work of ministry here.

1. Specifically, the **Committee on Ministry** is on the front line. Every liaison, working on your behalf, usually gives 2-3 hours a week working with the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC). Thanks be to God, we have had great liaisons. In 2017, there were 13 PNCs at work and 4 other congregations with whom COM supported and worked. We rejoice that their work has led to the calling of new pastoral leadership for those congregations. Also, the COM was deeply involved with several congregations going through some internal challenges, as well as supporting several others in their re-development/revitalization efforts.
2. The **Committee on Preparation for Ministry** is another front-line group. The committee has been working with 8 individuals, each a member of one of our 37 congregations, and who is in various stages of their preparation process. Today we celebrate one of our own coming full circle to be examined for ordination and to receive a call.
3. **Other front-line ministries we support include:**
 - supporting the work of Beth-El Farmworker Ministry, as a ministry of Peace River, Tampa Bay Presbytery and The Cumberland Presbyterians. Rev. Kathy Dain, originally a Teaching Elder from Peace River Presbytery, is the Executive Director and Rev. Tamara Leonard-Lara is Pastor of the worshipping community in Wimauma;
 - supporting Cedarkirk, so the ministry that is transformative in the lives of so many young people can continue. Currently the Camp is beginning a capital campaign for some much-needed improvements to the facility. Rev. John Reiter is their Executive Director.
 - supporting Doctors Les and Cindy Morgan, who are back in Bangladesh as medical missionaries, working with some of the most destitute people of the world;
 - supporting Dan and Elizabeth Turk, Mission Co-Workers in Madagascar, working to improve the agricultural techniques, as well as teaching Presbyterian pastors how to help their members grow better gardens and crops, which will reduce the levels of hunger in that part of God's world;
 - supporting the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Matanzas, Cuba;
 - giving \$ 121,525.19 for support of One Great Hour of Sharing, Presbyterian Hunger Fund, Racial-Ethic Colleges, Ministries of Peace and Justice, assisting retired ministers in special need, Medical Benevolence Foundation, Thornwell Home for Children, Cents-Ability, and a variety of other Presbyterian-related causes.
4. **Staff** – We continue to live into our new staff design. The challenge continues to be moving out of the old organizational paradigm of the Presbytery being a mission and program agency with significant regulatory functions and into a new paradigm reflected in our Mission/Vision Statement. I offer my deepest appreciation to Alesia, Lori, Randy (PT), and Alan (volunteer) for the work they do on our behalf!
5. **The Pastoral Care Network** continues reaching out to the pastors of the Presbytery when they have special needs, as well as to be of support to all pastors by just checking in or going out for coffee and prayer. I am grateful and thank Kathleen Weller, Coordinator, Grant Lowe, Taylor Hill, Lou Thomson, Bill Clough, Ron Miller and Cynthia Brasher for being part of this team. Their goal is to make Peace River a place where all our teaching elders are cared for and practice good self-care, whether active in ministry or retired.

2018 Playbook – Some New Initiatives

1. **Exploring a new church development in Babcock Ranch** - In 2017, under the guidance of Congregational Vitality and the Steering Committee, 2 conversations took place at Babcock Ranch, the new 50,000 population community being planned on 90,000 acres east of Punta Gorda and Fort Myers and north of the river. On February 8, 2018, a delegation from the Lutheran Church and Peace River met with staff from Babcock Ranch to explore if we might do a joint new church development. More to come, and it is an exciting prospect!
2. **Strategic Review/Panning Task Force** - In 2013, when we launched our new organizational design, we established some benchmarks and said we would review our new design in 5 years. A 5-member Strategic Review and Planning Task Force has been at work evaluating if we accomplished what we hoped, and where do we go now. Thanks to Lil Rea, Craig Goodrich, Doug Pratt, Charmaine Ponkratz and Kelly Fitzgerald for the intelligence, energy, imagination, and love they are putting into this effort.
3. **Leadership Protocol Guide** – a what, when, why and how manual for every team, committee and position in the Presbytery. The hope is that as new members and leaders come on each committee, there will be clear understanding of what is expected, as well as a calendar and summary map of the work required.
4. **The Immokalee Fair Housing Conversation/Initiative** - One of the many tragedies of Hurricane Irma is those most vulnerable are now even more vulnerable. The gift of Hurricane Irma is that “we” have an opportunity in our recovery efforts to do something new and impactful related to housing conditions in Immokalee. This conversation for Peace River and Mision Peniel includes several other stake-holders such as the Coalition of Immokalee Workers. The dream is to develop a sustainable, alternative, housing strategy and model for the migrant farm worker in Immokalee that provides decent, affordable, and appropriate housing (i.e. based on their unique work patterns).

On a personal note: For all your support and prayer for our son, Nathan, as he dealt with an aggressive Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma – thank you! The good news is that the chemotherapy and prayer were effective and, in June, and most recently in December, there is no sign of the tumor! We are so grateful, as are he and his family. Also, our youngest daughter, Katie, and her husband, Matt, moved back to the Sarasota area in January because of his job. We are thrilled and even more so since Katie is pregnant and due on February 27th. So, if I make a quick exit, you will know why!

So, as we look back and look ahead as a presbytery, I am...

Grateful to our God... Who is the Wind in our Sails... and the Rudder to Guide us along the Way!

Graham Hart

General Presbyter

Peace River Presbytery