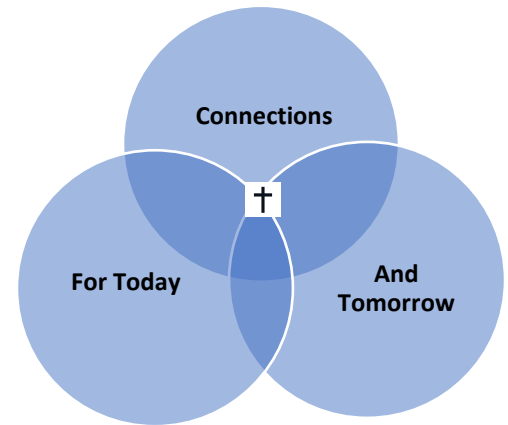


JCP Connection Activity:

The Great Ends of the (Small) Church

Blackburn, P. (February 2024). The great ends of the (small) church. *The Presbyterian Outlook*. Pres-outlook.org.

In January 2024, Catherine Neelly Burton published an article in the Outlook titled “The Future of the PC(USA) is Pastor-Less, and That’s OK.” Several responses quickly followed with the same forecast. Across denominations, congregations are growing smaller, and pastors are retiring faster than seminary students are graduating. Brekke (2024) asks, “What are small churches to do?”



Phillip Blackburn, our guest speaker today, answered by saying that certainly things have changed in the last hundred years. And while size may affect the model of the small church, it isn’t what defines our divine purpose. Large or small, things like budgets, buildings, and worship numbers must certainly be considered. But, more importantly, churches must maintain a focus on at least two issues.

The first is “Where is Jesus?” (p. 2). He references Mathew 18:20: ²⁰ For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them. Blackburn says, “That may be a small number, but with Jesus it is enough.”

The second describes how we are made one through Christ and are called to carry out the great ends of the church. Large or small, yesterday or tomorrow, the church is still the divine purpose that connects us. The six great ends of the church (Book of Order G 1.02):

1. The proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind.
2. The shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God.
3. The maintenance of divine (of, from or like God) worship.
4. The preservation of the truth (of the gospel as truth).
5. The promotion of social righteousness (the promotion of what is right, good, just and fair for all).
6. Exhibition (a display or demonstration) of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world. (The fulfillment on Earth of God’s will.)

Blackburn finishes with a challenge to start by growing our connections. “My thought is that we sit down as congregations, all across the denomination, and think about how we might live into the description of the job our churches have held for almost 115 years.” (p. 2)

Today we will discuss these issues described in Blackburn’s article. And not, he says “in the hope that your answers will attract new people. Ask these questions and others like them because we are followers of Jesus. Ask them because we are the church. Ask them because the Holy Spirit called us in this time and in this place to be disciples. Ask them because you were baptized. Ask them because right now, you and your congregation are alive.” (p 3.)

Thinking of your own community, how would you describe how your church carries out the great ends?

1. How are we proclaiming the gospel? Individually? Through the pastor? And if we are proclaiming it, what does it look like?
2. In what specific ways are we nurturing one another? In what ways is our fellowship spiritual?
3. We are maintaining worship, but is it divine (of, from, or like God)? Can we viably maintain spiritual worship if we don’t have a pastor? In the absence of a pastor, can an elder lead worship?
4. How do you define “truth” in your congregation?

5. What is the most profound social issue in your community? How can your church help?
6. If the Kingdom of Heaven was defined by your life together as a congregation, what would it look like?

Burton, C. N. (January 2024). The future of the pc(usa) is pastor-less, and that's ok. *The Presbyterian Outlook*. Pres-outlook.org.
Brekke, G. (February, 2024). Doing more with less: Smaller pc(usa) congregations face new leadership realities. *The Presbyterian Outlook*. Pres-outlook.org.

Wrap-Up Topic: Doing Church Differently

Catherine Neelly Burton, a Presbytery Mission/Ministry connector, reminds us that “a church doesn't have to have a pastor to be a viable church.” On that positive note, she and others describe new leadership models that are working:

1. One model is to empower church members to lead congregations. Commissioned ruling elders (CREs) or CREs-in-training can pastor the congregation with a visiting pastor officiating communion, baptisms, and ordinations.
 2. CREs, pastors, or a combination of the two can yoke with two or more churches within an area.
 3. Blackburn, Neelly, and others also encourage connecting congregations with one another to share their experiences with new church models as a powerful approach for empowering lay members to “be” the church.
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Let's Make Connections

Before you leave this session, respond below. We will tally, send you a copy, and use the information to help each other and to plan for future Presbytery Education Times.

1. What challenges are most pressing for your congregation?
____ What will we do without a pastor? ____ How can we provide music if we don't have an accompanist?
____ How can we share our worship electronically without breaking copyright?
2. Would you like more information about Commissioned Ruling Elders (CREs)? Yes ____
3. I would like more information about the three church leadership model(s) mentioned above. Yes
4. I would share information on one or more of the following challenges: ____ how to deliver electronic sermons, ____ using electronic worship music without breaking copyright, ____ using Zoom for Bible Studies, ____ how to develop CREs, ____ Other ____ (Describe, please):
5. ____ Place me on a connections list to receive a summary of the ideas and/or challenges shared today.

Name:

The name of your church:

Email Address: