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# IN THE LOOP



Personal Reflection by General Presbyter Dan Schomer



## REACHING & KEEPING

**Just a thought...**  
 Busyness can be an excuse for not tackling the really tough issues related to being the church. Thinking creatively, taking risks, and learning by doing takes time. To take on the greatest challenges, the church must reserve time to pray, to listen to God and one another, and to reflect. That means one of the questions we must ask ourselves as we seek to do what God wants us to do is to ask God what we need to quit doing!



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Edward Hammett has written a helpful book with a title that is bound to attract pastors and church leaders: *Reaching People under 40 while Keeping People over 60* (Chalice Press, 2007). Even though the title made me want to sing “The Impossible Dream” from *Man of La Mancha*, I bought it and read it anyway. I was pleased to discover that Hammett has some reasoned and thoughtful contribution to make.

For example, consider this wise concept: **“The key to change is to change values and beliefs before changing behavior.”** Hammett uses the example of Jesus to encourage churches to (1) meet people where they are, (2) develop relationships with people who are not just like us, (3) invite people on the journey to discipleship, (4) develop and multiply lead-

ers, and (5) be willing to mentor new disciples on their faith journey.

So how do we develop churches that are receptive to the values and beliefs of those under 40? Hammett responds, **“We can build bridges rather than barriers between generations.”** Before you say, “Easier said than done,” consider Hammett’s proposal. Hammett suggests that churches create dialogues between parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren, for the purpose of interviewing one another. The purpose of the interviews is to develop a deeper understanding of one another’s beliefs and values. The key is to learn to value the uniqueness of each person’s/generation’s faith journey.

Hammett believes that two radical shifts have

opened the door to conflict between the generations. First, the mission of the church has shifted from a business model (a focus on membership growth and increasing income) to a more mission model (focused on impacting the community around it). Second, a shift from a modern to a post-modern culture has impacted how different generation prefer to worship, learn, and create community. As a congregation is able to share a vision for its future and develop mutual respect across generational lines, it is more likely to reach those under 40 while keeping those over 60.

I’ve written a three-page summary of key concepts in this book. If you would like a copy, send me an email at [danschomer@faithfulness.com](mailto:danschomer@faithfulness.com).

## PARISH PAPER 2012

The January Issue of *The Parish Paper* invites pastors and church leaders to improve their “Leadership Triangle.” Leadership is envisioned as an equilateral triangle with the three sides comprised of Relational, Organizational, and Spiritual Leadership. The article defines

what comprises each type of leadership and suggests how pastors and church leaders might use the January issue as a means for effective evaluation of their own leadership skills. For more information, see the January, 2012 issue of the *Parish Paper*.

Did you know that East-

minster Presbytery has purchased the Parish Paper to make it available to all Eastminster Churches? To access this resource, go to [www.faithfulness.com](http://www.faithfulness.com), click on the “Member Area” tab, and type in the password. Don’t know the password? Call the Presbytery Office at 330-505-2167, ext. 101.

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## Church for a New Generation

The cover of the December *Presbyterians Today* caught my eye with these words—"Church for a new generation." It's the most often repeated goal of church sessions—"We want to attract younger members." If this is really what we want, why are we so bad at it?

One article provides some clues as to how we can do it better. If we want to attract younger adults, we must care about the things they care about. **They care about relationships/community.** When friends huddle together at coffee hour and ignore strangers, they say, in effect, we're not interested in you as a person. **They care about making a difference, striving for justice, helping neighbors in need.** We assume that, if you put together a praise team complete with guitars and drums and start a "contemporary service," young people will flock to church. Guess what? Younger adults are not so shallow. They want to be engaged in activities that impact the lives of others. **They learn from experience/story more readily than listening/reason.** Young adults are searching for the same spiritual depth in their lives as older generations. But they are less likely to encounter that spiritual depth in a church sanctuary than in a conversation at a Starbucks or on a mission trip or exploring ancient spiritual disciplines. Author Phyllis Tickle tells us that in past generations the pattern was first you believe, then you do. For the younger generation they do first and live into the believing.

Want to attract younger adults? Find out what young adults care about and explore how you might care together.

## Church Camps and Creation

That same December issue of *Presbyterians Today* had another article that is certainly relevant to Eastminster Presbytery. "Learning from the Land" tells how Presbyterian Church camps in several locations around the country are becoming centers for young people to learn about the care of God's good creation. Much of the learning focuses on organic farming, community gardening, and food justice. It's a great article and I commend it to you to read.

Here's why I call the article timely. Like the camps de-

scribed in the article, Joseph Badger Meadows Camp & Conference Center has had difficulty attracting the younger generations to the camp. But with the guidance of the Rev. Steve Fortenberry (Common Ground Church/Goodness Grows), JBM is actively exploring how this holy ground might germinate with new ministries by focusing on education relating to local agriculture, urban gardening, and food justice. It takes more than camp fires and camp songs to attract young people today. They want to be engaged in activities that connect them to God and God's

creation. What possibilities might this new venture open for JBM's youth camping ministry?

But the JBM Committee is also exploring mission as it considers how we might work cooperatively with other non-profit organizations to help turn around lives and bring new life to people who aren't just like us.

Please pray for JBM, and for the Committee. Ask that God will show us what new thing God is asking us to do with 235 acres of holy ground called JBM.

"While Thomas Edison said...*Genius is 10 percent inspiration and 90 percent perspiration...* too many enterprises seem self-destructively locked into a debilitating reality of 100 percent perspiration and zero percent inspiration. A healthier alternative is the Orbit of trust that allows time—without immediate, concrete evidence of productivity—for the miracle of creativity to occur." From

*Orbiting the Giant Hairball*  
by Gordon MacKenzie.

