

CALVIN COMMENTARY



JOHN CALVIN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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4201 TRANSCONTINENTAL DRIVE
METAIRIE, LA 70006
504.888.1375
www.johncalvinchurch.org



This Issue

- THE STUDY WINDOW
- MUSIC CORNER
- CHRISTIAN EDUCATION
- COMMITTEE NEWS
- BIRTHDAYS/EVENTS

*Faith is the bridge between
where I am and the place
God is taking me.*

Artist: **Robert Guthrie**
Illustrated Word and Art



From

The Study Window

Recently I read a thought provoking interview with the Rev. Tim Shapiro in an Alban Institute email about congregational learning. Tim has worked as a consultant with more than 1100 congregations and has written a book, *How Your Congregation Learns: The Learning Journey from Challenge to Achievement*. The interview is based on his learnings from those congregations. I share part of it with you to see what kind of thoughts it stimulates for you.

Q: What do you mean when you say that congregations learn?

For a congregation to achieve or accomplish something new, it's not just a matter of *doing* something. It's almost always a matter of *learning* to do something new. There are many things that happen in a faith community in which something new doesn't have to be learned. If it's summertime and the air conditioners need new filters, chances are somebody has done that before. You just have the volunteer do it or call the air conditioning company. The congregation has achieved an objective, as simple as it might be, but they haven't had to learn to do something new.

If it's a matter of consequence, congregations don't just do new things. They learn to do new things -- learning that is a durable change of behavior or attitudes or ways of thinking.

For instance, imagine a congregation is seeking to start a new Wednesday evening program. This new program is designed not only for the elementary school children in their congregation but the elementary school children who go to the school two blocks away. It's the first time the church has reached out to that school. So the congregation is going to need to learn durable new ways of behaving, thinking and feeling about such an endeavor.

Q: What would be an example of a helpful learning dynamic?

Congregations often had to explore the challenge for a good period of time before they were able to implement the idea. There was a period of slowing down between identifying the challenge and receiving an epiphany about how to move ahead. There was a period of exploring the landscape of possibilities. This not only included slowing down and discerning in God's time, but it also almost always included the engagement of an outside resource -- a helper, a support network -- to gain more education about the subject. Knowing that things naturally slow down as part of a learning process can help congregational leaders become less frustrated.

Q: Are all congregations naturally learning communities?

Almost all -- I would be hesitant to say "all" about almost anything -- are learning communities. Some of it goes back to the very nature of congregations. After all, the word "rabbi" means "teacher." Congregations, like most human communities, need to learn how to do new things, just as a family learns new things when an infant enters that system, and corporations that are trying to earn profits have to learn new things to keep up with the markets.

Most of us in community find ourselves facing challenges that are just beyond our grasp, our capacities. The book isn't proposing a new theory. What it is doing is unpacking the positive dynamics that are already present in congregations that effectively learn to do new things.

Q: Talk about the positive dynamics you've seen in congregations that do new things well.

There are three different ways to categorize the dynamics that are going on, creating a sort of three-dimensional picture. Becoming a bit more conscious of these dynamics that are probably already present creates the opportunity for the congregational leader to have more agency over the process.

First, there is a dynamic around congregational capacity. What is the congregation's capacity in relationship to the specific program or initiative that is being considered? By capacity I mean the congregation's ability, the strengths it brings to the new endeavor. If a congregation has never started a homeless ministry and that is its new challenge, then the congregational leaders are likely to need information and training before they can shape a program that works in their context.

I like to think about the capacity in terms of what level of learning is needed in a congregation in relationship to a specific issue. A congregation might simply need information. Or it might benefit from training, which is more sophisticated than receiving information. Some congregations have enough capacity to address issues through the lens of education and ultimately transformation, meaning that addressing this challenge will ultimately change something in the very form, culture, mission or worldview of the congregation itself.

Every congregation has multiple capacities, so the capacity should always be evaluated in terms of the specific initiative. For instance, a congregation may have high capacity when it comes to rich, deep, beautiful worship, and indeed, something about worship is continually transforming the congregation. But perhaps when it comes to older adult ministry that might be new to this congregation, this religious community may have low capacity. There's nothing right or wrong; just knowing that can help a congregation know the pace it needs to go and the resources that are most helpful.

From the Study Window (con't)

If you discern you have low capacity regarding a challenge, don't jump in and hire a consultant or a coach. You will lose agency. You will give up your initiative to the consultant or coach. If your team is starting something brand-new with little knowledge, start by discussing a book chapter or a blog.

Q: What else do congregations do well as they try something new?

The second dimension has to do with the journey a congregation takes when it is learning to do a new thing. The journey includes the elements I mentioned earlier: defining the challenge, exploration, disappointment and so forth. If the first dimension is about capacity, this second dimension is a learning journey. It is the passageway the learning takes.

Say a congregation is trying to initiate a new adult ministry, for both its members and the larger community. One of the things that happens in a congregation that effectively pulls off a ministry like this is they clearly define the challenge. Then they go on an exploration, like a survey of the landscape. This often involves engaging an outside resource -- a book, talking to another congregation.

Often along the way, the congregation will experience disappointment. They may find out, for instance, that they don't have enough volunteers to do the initiative like they want to do it. They might find that they had hoped to partner with some nursing facilities but they haven't been able to find the right one. Even in the most successful congregational achievement, there is the presence of disappointment. But there is a moment of discovery -- a revelation, an epiphany -- that helps solidify the idea and make apparent the way in which implementation should go.

When it comes to implementation, there is both a taking on and almost always a letting go of something else in a congregation. So this congregation pursuing the older adult ministry may find they are going to reduce the number of Advent activities for one season while they ramp up the older adult programming. Along this journey, there are experiences of affirmation that this is the right thing to do. Some of these moments of validation happen naturally, like receiving a thank-you note. Or some of it is planned, like a celebration. And then inevitably, there is always going to be a next challenge.

This is the journey congregations go on, whether they are aware of it or not. It shows up in so many narratives, with almost every imaginable issue. All of these things are happening, because congregations are learning how to define their questions, explore, bear disappointment, let go, and validate what they are learning.

Q: What is the final dynamic you observed?

The third dynamic involves the behaviors that move a congregation along in the learning journey. Some of the behaviors include getting the timing right -- moving slowly at the right time, and then, once the way clears, being prepared to move more quickly.

Another behavior has to do with the relationship between clergy and laity. The more there is mutual learning between the clergy and laity, the odds are the more effective the outcome is going to be. The energy in the mutual learning builds mutual affection. Or maybe it is the other way around. The apostle Paul identifies this in Romans 12:10: "Love one another with mutual affection." This is very powerful, not unlike the way a high school student may fall in love with chemistry because he or she has a fantastic teacher, and there is a strong relationship between the student and the teacher.

So there are certain behaviors that enhance a congregation's ability to do new things. The behaviors include getting the timing right, strengthening the quality of relationships, attending to rites of passage and theological clarity, and using an outside resource that extends the congregation's capacity in relationship to the challenge.

Q: Do you think today's world puts a particular demand on a congregation understanding itself as a learning community?

I don't know if contemporary life puts more demand on a congregation compared with another era, but I think the particular demands of today do make it necessary for a congregation to be a place of learning regarding life practice, religious life and organizational life. The primary factor in the decline of a congregation that is occurring in some, but not all, settings is best viewed through the frame of capacity in relationship to demands, not other various sociological reasons. In other words, there is nothing inherently wrong with your congregation. The current demands are an opportunity for learning.

Q: What is one thing that congregations typically don't do well when taking on a new project?

Congregations that are effective in a new initiative are very careful and clear about what they are trying to do. Their description of a challenge simplifies the complex. When a congregation is not as effective, you can almost always see that the description is too nebulous or too general.

Q: What other resources do you recommend for congregations beginning something new?

One resource that is really helpful is a book called *Projects That Matter* (link is external), by Kathleen Cahalan. The book is clear, helpful and full of well-thought-out ideas. It helps a congregation think more strategically about evaluating results and impact.

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By: William R. Memmott, Organist/Choir



FROM THE MUSIC CORNER

What a wonderful Sunday? The choir sang well. I'm pleased. Only two on vacation. Keep it up!

This Sunday is the last choir for the summer. Let's do it big! Then it's solos, including the men's chorus on August 6 with another solo. We can keep up the doubling if you'd like. August 13, 20, 27 and Sep 3 (two openings) have a second slot for a solo or other. Let me know. I'll be on vacation both August 13 and 20. Julie will be at the keyboards (contact her if you want to sing).

"The Christmas Suite," my new Christmas Cantata, is finished (including the orchestrations). We'll begin rehearsing it in September (first rehearsal September 6).

And remember our motto:

SOLI DEO GLORIA

("alone to God be glory" from J.S.Bach).

Bill M.



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

By: Julie R. Hebert/Christian Education Leader



THE YOUTH CORNER

July 9th-13th the church sent 3 youth and 2 adults to Mo-Ranch Junior High Jubilee. The Presbytery of South LA sent 13 youth and 4 adults. The picture below is of our group. This was a wonderful youth conference that taught the children about the importance of faith in our life and relationships. My personal favorite part was an activity they called Vespers. During Vespers we laid in the dark on the warm tennis courts around 9:30pm each evening. There were no lights and we all had to remove our shoes. While lying flat on the ground we listened to an acoustic guitar and one leader reading scripture. While the children and sponsors looked at the stars we were able to reflect on our faith in God, our experiences of the day, and our friendships we had made.

Thank you for helping send our youth to MO-RANCH!!!



UPCOMING YOUTH CORNER EVENTS

SEPTEMBER
10TH





CHRISTIAN EDUCATION



July 24th-28th we had our annual vacation bible school. Our theme this year was Hero Central, Discover your strength in God. This has been a fun week of crafts, music, bible time, and snack time. Thank you to all the volunteers that have helped support this event. It takes a team to help this week come together and I have been blessed with many helpful and talented volunteers to assist me with this great week.



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Christmas in July

Sunday, July 30, 2017

Was a both an enriching and a great way of giving for JCPC's youth and adults alike!



Bridge House

Each Year **Bridge House / Grace House** hosts three dinners. These three events provide a traditional holiday meal, toiletries, clothing from the Bridge House / Grace House Thrift Stores and fellowship to the homeless and indigent population of the Greater New Orleans Area. The dinners also help to raise awareness—within the homeless and indigent population—of the substance abuse treatment services provided by Bridge House / Grace House.



Snippets

From Presbyterian



Chrismons in August!!

***We've been having so much fun in July,
that we're continuing thru August!!!***

Every Tuesday morning in the Library, from 9:30a-noon,
we will continue to work on the Chrismons
that we started in the spring.

Chrismons are the Christian Christmas symbol ornaments
that we use to decorate the tree in the sanctuary
each Christmas.

Ours have seen many years of wear and the Presbyterian
Women, under the direction of Sandy Cranfill, began the
fun task of making new ones and fixing some of the older
ones. We are continuing the fun thru summer to see how
much we can get completed!

"COME JOIN US"

August 1st, 8th, 15th, 22nd & 29th



We are invited!!...
 ...to participate in a
 Habitat for Humanity project!

The New Orleans Area Habitat for Humanity (NOAHH) has been building homes in the New Orleans area for 34 years! In that time they have built over 580 homes, completed 180 repair projects, gutted over 2400 homes, and led over 160,000 volunteers to complete these projects. Now it's our turn.

NOAHH likes to name their projects and ours is called "Unity Build". We have been asked to be a part of a group of faith organizations coming together to build a home for a hard working New Orleans family. A congregation the size of ours can't begin to build a home all by ourselves, but by working with other like-minded congregations, together we can build a home – each contributing time, talent, and treasure, as we are able.

When?

- Thursday, October 5 thru Sunday, October 8
- Thursday, October 12 thru Saturday, October 14
- Thursday, October 19 thru Saturday, October 21
- Thursday, October 26 thru Saturday, October 28

What?

Can't wield a hammer or paintbrush for 8 hours? Can you help in the Hospitality Tent? Can you check people in? Can you help make lunches and/or deliver them? There are many jobs where we hope you will want to help out. We will begin a sign up list in late August.

And yes, we will need your cash donation if at all possible. We will begin a collection in September, and hope you will be eager to help us participate in this wonderful, faith-based project.

What is the New Orleans Area Habitat for Humanity (NOAHH)?

NOAHH's primary work is in the construction of new homes with the help of volunteers and of the people who have qualified to become the new homeowners.



- In lieu of a traditional down payment, Habitat homeowners contribute 350 hours of “sweat equity” in to the building of their homes and the homes of others. The woman who will receive our home has already contributed 400 hours to building the house that will be next door to her own!
- While earning sweat equity hours, future homeowners must also save \$2700 in escrow for their first year insurance, as well as complete classes in financial fitness and home maintenance.
- Once construction is complete, NOAHH sells them the home, and the cost of the home is paid back through a 20-30 year interest-free mortgage. Monthly payments average around \$750 and include homeowners insurance, taxes, annual termite contract, and the mortgage note.
- Mortgage payments serve to fund the cost of future new construction.

Impact of NOAHH

“Being a homeowner makes you feel like you’re an important part of the community and you want to help find ways to make it better. Without partnering with Habitat I wouldn’t know what being a true citizen feels like.”

Antoinetta Brown, local Habitat homeowner

When NOAHH sells a home to a first-time homebuyer, they gain all of the stability that comes with homeownership – a predictable and steady mortgage payment amount, no worries about not having a lease renewed, no fighting with a landlord over deferred maintenance and repairs...the list goes on. But they also gain something equally important: a vehicle for building wealth. Increased home value has a real impact on a homeowner family’s net worth. Families who become homeowners rewrite the narrative not only for themselves, but for many generations to follow.

“Being a Habitat partner family has impacted my life tremendously. I can save for rainy days. I can afford to send my children to better schools. And it gives me something to leave behind for my kids when I pass away.”

Local Habitat homeowner Delicia Freeman

September Birthdays



Kristin Guidry
08/02

Vanessa Nelson
08/02

Randall Antill
08/02

Dana Perret
08/08

Mia Lauand
08/06

Helen Fish
08/02

Marilyn Brown
08/23

Bella Magri
08/08

Bill Bottomley
08/21

Janis Britson
08/16

Matthew Freudenthal
08/16

Jananne Lankard
08/25

Ron Palmisano
08/23

Sarah Smith
08/24

Bob Fuller
08/25

Joe Miller
08/26

Ashlezy Wade
08/30z

EVENTS

Mark Your Calendar



August

* **Aug Tuesdays:** Project of Hope (POH) @ FH/Sandwiches

* **Aug Wednesdays:** POH @ First Presbyterian

1st: PW's Making of Chrismons—**All Welcome!**

Aug. Tues': 1,8,15,22 & 29 @ 9:30a (Lbry)



13th: C/E CM after Worship

14th: P/S CM @ noon

>Outreach CM @ 7:00p (Lbry)

15th: Resource Mtg @ 7:00p (CR)

21st: Session Mtg @ 7:00p (Lbry)

22nd-24th: P/S Teacher's Con't Ed

27th: Last Day of Casual Sunday

Note: * Committee Mtg. time changes may not be reflected, above times are based on a reoccurring schedule only.

* *The following practices/meetings are on Summer Break, and will resume in September:*

- Choir—Wednesday Night Practices
- Grace Circle
- Lydia Circle
- PW Council Mtg
- PW Fun & Games
- Worship CM

September

4th: Labor Day—Church Office Closed

LABOR DAY

6th: Wed Night Choir Prac Resumes @ 7:15p



6th-7th: P/S Back-to-School Coffee @ 9:30-11:30 (FH)

7th: PW **FUN & GAMES** @ 10:00a (Lbry)

10th: Sunday School Kick-Off



11th: P/S CM @ noon

>Worship CM @ 5:30p (CR)

>Outreach CM @ 6:30p (Lbry)

12th: PW Council Mtg @ 10a (Lbry)

> Lydia Circle @ 7:00p (Lbry)

> Resource Mtg @ 7:00p (CR)

17th: C/E CM after Worship

18th: P/S 3's Bible-Time Starts

>Session Mtg @ 7:00p (Lbry)

19th: Grace Circle @ 9:30a (Lbry)

20th: P/S 4's Bible-Time Starts

21st: PW **FUN & GAMES** @ 10:00a (Lbry)

>P/S Fmly Fun Night Set-Up (FH))

22nd: **WELCOME Fall!**

>P/S Fmly Fun Night (FH))



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John Calvin Presbyterian Church



“Freed by the Fire, Renewed by the Flood, and Empowered by the Spirit”