

Report of the Executive Presbyter

Malinda and I married while I was at Otterville, Knob Noster and Tipton churches. The Otterville congregation was concerned that I was too frugal with the propane and that Malinda wouldn't stay in the manse through winter. They may have misjudged which of us was more frugal with the propane. Their solution was to install a wood stove in the basement of the manse and assign to the men's fellowship assisting me in the cutting and splitting of wood. One of the stalwarts of the men's fellowship was Wherley Cline. He always came with two chain saws, "one for a man and one for a boy", and what he declared was his grandfather's axe. Eventually someone would comment on what remarkable shape the axe was in for having been in the family so long. Wherley would assert that maintenance was the key, four new handles and two new heads had kept it solid through the generations. It was an interesting sense of history for an object that has undergone such complete transformation of its components. I have likely shared this story with you before, but I think it is timely.

The church has many more components and working parts than does an axe. The handle and the head pretty well exhaust the changeable components of the axe. The church has members, pastors, music, liturgy, governing documents, archeological discovery, theological study and countless other aspects that move and change. With each new member a congregation changes a bit, with the new ideas, new energy, new faith story and new God gifted skills, talents and resources. Still as members come and go a congregation remains the church of someone's great grandparents with the ways it has always done things and the "old old story" to tell.

Heartland Presbytery is being invited by the Associate Executive Presbyter Nominating Committee to make a change in our part of the church family. Heartland Presbytery has had a lot of change in staffing through the years. In the last 15 years Heartland has had five executive or interim executive presbyters. If a majority of you vote in the affirmative and she discerns in that vote the clear call of God, Leigh will become the third person to serve in the associate executive position in that time. In each of those transitions the presbytery has been changed sometimes by design and more often I suspect by accident. A new axe handle has the same function, but often a different feel from the one that it replaced.

You have made some changes in the associate executive's job description. David has begun this year to make modest transition toward those changes. Leigh, if we call and she accepts, will begin her work under the job description that you approved about a year ago. So, she won't do it exactly like David or Ellen. Some of that is on purpose as the position continues to transition from associate executive presbyter for congregational nurture to associate executive presbyter for congregational vitality. Some of the differences will be more the result of how God has uniquely gifted Leigh for her ministry with us.

The work and purpose of the presbytery "responsible for the mission and government of the church throughout its geographical district" (G-11.0103) is unchanged. Still with each new pastor, congregation, elder commissioner, committee member or staff member God gives opportunity for transformation and strengthening of our piece of Christ's church. New handles and heads keep us strong and sharp for the work we are given.

Charles Spencer