

One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. Psalm 145: 4 & 13

To Those with “A Certain Level of Experience and Wisdom,”

On behalf of those who have recently entered this peculiar and glorious calling of pastor, I write with humility, gratitude, and respect for the tenacity with which you have served and cultivated our good churches of the PCUSA.

Mine is a deep conviction and desire born from the early years of ministry. There have been holes of loneliness created by the weight of this vocation, which threatened to swallow my soul. It took both personal mentors and trustworthy peers to pull me from the depths with nets so strong that with them, I know I will not fall again.

Mentors have the power to equip new pastors with a sense of security and patience otherwise unknown. Mentors have the wisdom to guide and encourage pastors toward authentic and responsible ministry. Mentors have the unique opportunity to bolster a new generation of clergy who will be strong and bold enough to lead our Church through the transformation we are all experiencing yet unsure how to navigate.

Mine is a deep longing. A hope. A request. A plea for you to cast the net.

We have inherited a church that looks very different than the one you inherited. New clergy are okay with that. This wonky, unpredictable Church is all we have ever known. Spotty attendance, shaky budgets, and bare pews sadden us, but we aren't afraid. If we were foolish enough to enter seminary at *this* point, than you can assume our optimism, foolish as it may seem, is of the Jesus sort.

We acknowledge the realities, but we don't believe placing our old institutional model on life support^[1] is what Jesus had in mind when he proclaimed, 'new life.' We are called to thrive together.

Our lives are not ordered the same way yours were early in ministries. Out of the 12,807 active pastors of the PCUSA, about 20% are in our first 7 years of ministry. 70% of our full-time pastors will retire in the next 10 years or so.^[2] That means, for now at least, many newly ordained carry creative titles such as: *bi-vocational*, *temporary supply*, and *'outside the bounds.'* Oh, and well over half of the candidates for ministry are now women. ^[3] It's just different.

Money is an issue. Jesus doesn't pay a whole lot these days. A majority of us serve congregations smaller than 300 members. So if we are married, our partners usually

have careers too. Our families reflect the realities of *making ends meet* both financially and as parents (if we have kids). Like other professionals we will change jobs about 7 times in our lifetime, and 50-80% of us will 'hang up the robe' within 5 years.^[4]

This means it is more difficult to pursue and maintain the long-term peer relationships imperative to the longevity of a healthy pastorate. We know we need them, but we struggle to find them and commit.

Yes, we love our phones.

We are connecting in broad ways.

No, it doesn't replace the real stuff.

We know we need to work on it.

It's just a lot to juggle.

The call remains. We love to preach, and teach, and care.

Because of these rapid shifts, cultivating, planting, and renewing communities to engage those sacred privileges will require *all* of us. At the core of our identities as pastors is passion for the Reformed tradition, and love for the Gospel as it has been and always will be. We rely on them to root and guide us from *generation to generation*.

Problem is, we feel a gap.

Traditional pathways to trustworthy and organic cross-generational relationships have eroded alongside the cohesive and purposeful nature of the local presbytery. The fragmentation of both our regional and national networks increases the difficulty of accessing both practical knowledge and vital resources needed beyond seminary.

We need to know you.

We need to know what you know, because

We don't know, what we don't know.

But you do.

Be patient if we seem too bold or not bold enough, too risky or not risky enough, too passive or too aggressive, too needy or too brash. Belonging breeds identity. While we are still getting used to our robes, it's hard to trust when the communities and institutions around us feel unstable and fractured. Our 'doing' and 'being' are just beginning to click.

We need to be known, by people we can trust, in places we truly belong.

Yes it's an investment, but if you are asked by a young pastor for your ear its because you are respected, honored, and valued as someone with something sacred to share. We need access to that. These relationships can't be manufactured, but they can be cultivated.

There are NO WORDS to describe the gratitude for such a gift as a mentor's attention and time.

Model grace, creativity, and hard work in your leadership, but don't pretend to be Jesus. Show us what Sabbath looks like. Be honest. Any tips on how to work through a conflict are greatly appreciated. Tell the story of when you botched the funeral, forgot your sermon, or dropped the Cup. Teach us. Learn from us. Collaborate. Encourage risk. Support us when we fail. Share the sacraments and pulpit. Say YES. Listen. Hold us accountable. Most of all, expect the best for the future of our denomination and her churches.

We do.

With Great Hope,

Rev. Lori Archer Raible

(PS- To my mentors, there are no other words than, Thank You.)

[1] Yaconelli, Mark. www.theearthstorytelling.wordpress.com