



Edinboro Presbyterian Church
Newsletter Update
February 4-17, 2022

From the Pastor:

Celebrations, comfort zones, and God's callings

A fascinating – and helpful – conversation at this week's First Wednesday supper at FUPC.

Before I outline for you my highlights of what the folks there that night said, I want you to “play along” with the questions that guided the discussion. Take a few moments to reflect on what you would say, as you think about this congregation, whether you are a recent addition to the household or you were born and baptized into Edinboro Presbyterian. Write down your responses:

1. As you think back, over the years or in the past several years, what are aspects of this church that have been *especially meaningful* to you? (Maybe in addition to “meaningful” you might use a descriptive category such as *helpful, life-changing, beneficial, productive, profound, fruitful* or another term.)
2. What is sometime which *God might well be hoping* this congregation would focus on, although many of us would likely *feel uncomfortable* if we actually tried to do it?

Please don't rush on to read further, until you have invested some pondering time on these important questions.

Now then, this is my summary of *some* of the highlights of the discussion among 15 of the people who are active in FUPC, many of whom have for many years been part of this part of God's ongoing enterprise in our part of God's world. (There were many other helpful and fascinating ideas discussed too, and I want these conversations on these topics to continue.)

Most of the strengths or highlights of our current, recent and past ministries relate to the interpersonal connections which a strong church will provide. We care for each other. We reach out to help people in the community. Several of the people attending Wednesday night spoke of the family-like relationships that are built when we pray for each other, worship together, and eat and serve together. Edinboro Presbyterian has helped parents be better parents. There is some element of being foster grandparents and foster grandchildren to and for each other, whether or not our bloodline kinfolk are also members of this church – and especially for families who are far away from their actual families, whether that distance is measured by geography or the quality of families' relationships.

Even as the average age of FUPC's membership inches older and older, we (more than many of our partner congregations) have a meaningful intergenerational outreach and connections with younger families. We help each other out in the hard times of life. The church and its people were “there” when something happened. Multiple mentions of our music program were written down after our supper, so there is something special that happens during worship and during rehearsals of our music groups.

When I asked that our discussion shift gears toward God's dreams and calling specifically for FUPC, that was a little bit harder, but these folks did develop thoughtful responses. On one level, I know that there would be good consensus on what God wants God's people to do, regardless of the era or of which congregation or denomination you were considering – live righteously, share our faith, feed the poor, visit the downtrodden, worship faithfully. That list could go on and on. The Bible is full of mandates and commandments and guidance and callings and nudgings.

During the relatively brief time we invested in this conversation this week, we had several themes which got nods from people around the table. We could do more and do better to reach out to people who are different than ourselves. As much as we like our current music, some asked if we need to modify our music choices or worship styles to better connect with younger generations – those already part of our household and others who are not involved with us (yet, anyway).

I shaped my part of this conversation the way I did because I really want us to bring our comfort zones to front-level awareness. If we are uncomfortable doing something – even if it good for us – we need to address those internal dynamics. If I need to get to the gym or eat healthier or take any other noble action, it is important to acknowledge my preference for the status quo. If we are uncomfortable about taking a step of faith – even when we become certain it is the Lord's calling for us – there is some level of pain or inertia or discomfort which is important to not brush aside.

In light of our anxieties and discomfort with the New and the Different, one good thing about making any additions to our repertoire of mission and ministry and events is that we have recent experience with living beyond our comfort zones. We simply can look back at how things have been in the past two years. The upheavals and disruptions and disasters of this "Covid Era" have shown us that we are flexible and able to adapt. This is true for each of us and all of us. Just look back at how we have learned to do some things differently. We accomplish similar tasks in a variety of "workable-now" ways. On the secular level, none of us in 2019 were shopping for groceries and food with all the options –order online, delivered, dine-in, curbside pickup, etc., etc. In church-centered adaptations, we have had the Lord's Supper online, meaningful Bible studies via Zoom, worship is in-person and on our website, and church meetings could be virtual or gathered or hybrid.

The other key point I shared then and share with you now: as FUPC moves toward the Next and the New, we do not discard our past. Filling any gaping holes of inadequacies and totally untried steps likely will cause us to stumble if we try to become something we are not. Rather than focusing on the empty blanks, transformation and renewal and faithfulness are always best accomplished by *beginning with the current strengths*. We are faithful, caring folks. We have history of reaching out to people in need and college students and addicted members of our community. We *can* do this, because we *have done* this. If it is God's calling, it will be God who will guide and empower and equip us. If something is God's dream, it is not an impossibility for us, because "we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us."

Next steps now? Before we go rushing off to expand on anything or to try something completely different or go off on some self-conceived tangent, one of our elders gave the Wednesday night group a good personal menu, and ideas for what this congregation can do this winter and this spring. Build up our own spiritual lives. Prayer can be persistent. Writing or journaling is a helpful technique. Bible study, individual and household and gathered, will give us strength and assurance and direction. Listening for God is vital in times like these.

Wishing you Jesus' Peace and Jesus' Joy,

Greg

Becoming a Better Listener

Attentive listening to one another is a Christ-centered trait. It is important especially during the context in which we live, where so much of the culture seems to be divided and divisive. Good listening and understanding is vital – be that in a romantic relationship (appropriate for the month when Valentine’s Day happens!), in families or churches, or in the workplace and marketplace. A recent article posted online by the [Harvard Business Review](#) leaned toward improving listening skills among business leaders, but this information can apply to all of us.

A participant in any conversation has two goals: first, to understand what the other person is communicating (both the overt meaning and the emotion behind it) and second, to convey interest, engagement, and caring to the other person. This second goal is not “merely” for the sake of kindness, which would be reason enough. If people do not feel listened to, they will cease to share information.

“Active listening” has three aspects:

- **Cognitive:** Paying attention to all the information, both explicit and implicit, that you are receiving from the other person
- **Emotional:** Staying calm and compassionate during the conversation, including managing any emotional reactions you yourself might experience
- **Behavioral:** Conveying interest and comprehension verbally and nonverbally

Getting good at active listening is a lifetime endeavor and needs to be adapted for whomever with whom you are speaking and for the purpose of the particular conversation. However, even steps toward improvement can make a big difference in your listening effectiveness. Here are helpful tips:

1. Repeat people’s last few words back to them, but usually say them exactly.

If you remember nothing else, remember this simple practice helps so much. It makes the other person feel listened to, keeps your conversation on track, and provides a pause for both of you to gather thoughts or recover from an emotional reaction. Don’t “put it in your own words” unless you need to ask to check your own understanding.

2. Offer nonverbal cues that you’re listening — but only if it comes naturally to you.

Eye contact, attentive posture, nodding and other nonverbal cues are important, but it’s hard to pay attention to someone’s words when you’re busy reminding yourself to make regular eye contact. If these sorts of behaviors would require a significant habit change, you can instead, let people know at the beginning of a conversation that you’re on the non-reactive side, and ask for their patience and understanding.

3. Pay attention to nonverbal cues.

Well over half of communication is *not* the words used. Remember that active listening means paying attention to both the explicit and implicit information that you’re receiving in a conversation. Nonverbal cues -- tone of voice, facial expression, and body language -- are usually where the motivation and emotion behind the words is expressed.

4. Ask more questions than you think you need to.

This both improves the other person’s experience of feeling listened to, ensures that you fully understand their message, and can serve as a prompt to make sure important details aren’t overlooked.

5. Minimize distractions as much as possible.

You’ll want to avoid noise, interruptions, and other external distractions, but it’s important to minimize your internal distractions as well. If you are preoccupied with another topic, take time to recenter. Admit if you are tired.

6. Don’t rehearse your response while the other person is talking.

Take a brief pause after they finish speaking to compose your thoughts. This will require conscious effort. People think four times faster than other people talk. Stay focused and take in as much information as possible.

Mission of the Month

Show your love during February with our neighbors served by the Edinboro Food Pantry

Each month, we encourage our members and friends to contribute to a selected ministry beyond your regular contributions to this church. Our Mission Team designated the Edinboro Food Pantry as our February mission. The Edinboro Food Pantry serves individuals and families from the General McLane School District and from Cambridge Springs. Volunteers meet with the recipients on Thursdays at space provided at a dormitory building on the Edinboro University campus. If you know someone who would benefit from receiving groceries from the program, you or they can contact the coordinators at 814-732-FOOD (3663).

In addition to the groceries items donated and the purchase of food locally, your gifts provide funds to purchase bulk amounts through the Second Harvest program of northwest Pennsylvania. Often for pennies on the dollar, Second Harvest “rescues” food which would be thrown away otherwise, thereby multiplying the hunger-fighting impact of our gifts.

Your contribution to our mission of the month can be made at sanctuary worship or by mailing it to FUPC Mission, P.O. Box 789, Edinboro PA 16412. Mark your envelope or check with “Food Pantry”. Find out more at edinborofoodpantry.com.

Watch for details on the upcoming annual meeting

The annual meeting of the congregation will be scheduled soon by the elders of our session. It will take place at a Sunday morning worship service, likely in late February. Our revised bylaws also allow participation by electronic means, so the upcoming announcement will also include guidance on how you can join (and vote) through our Zoom meeting.

At that time, we also will provide printed and electronic versions of our annual report – FUPC’s 2021 “Year in Review”. (*Team leaders and others who would like to submit highlights, photos or other content for that should e-mail it to Sue Johnson at office@EdinboroPresby.org.*)

Prayer updates, birthday/anniversary lists, events calendar

Edinboro Presbyterian’s weekly **Prayer/Calendar** is a helpful way for you to connect with the people of FUPC and the mission we carry out in our local area and beyond. For confidentiality purposes, this is kept within the congregation and those who have a connection with us. Ask to receive this by mail or email.



Mailing: FUPC, P.O. Box 789, Edinboro PA, 16412
Location: 4281 Route 6N (Waterford Road)

Website & Online Worship: www.EdinboroPresby.org

Zoom meeting number 814 734 3511
Password (for Zoom and web videos) 814

Office@EdinboroPresby.org (814) 734-3511 Mon-Wed-Thur 10am-2pm

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