



The West Side Presbyterian Church

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The 100 Day Report of the Senior Pastor

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Dear Friends and Members of West Side Presbyterian Church,

In the pattern of other certain well recognized leaders in our country, I am sending you a report, from my view, of our first 100 days together. I became your Pastor on February 1st. Yesterday was the 100th day of our new relationship. Today is a good day to write a letter to you.

As you know, West Side is a congregation in recovery and rebuilding. You have been through a long period after the fire of meeting in diverse places. You have fought hard to rebuild out of the ashes. You have raised millions of dollars to build new facilities. You have said good-bye to beloved pastors and interims, and hello to new ones (even a transplant from the other NFC East cities – Dallas, Philadelphia and Washington DC).

There are many signs of healing and new growth. Long term members who disappeared from our midst for awhile are now coming back. New people are investing. Visitors desire to join. Families with children and youth are connecting and deepening their participation and service. Long term ministry strengths such as worship, music, family, youth, children, mission and care are flourishing. Hopes for new emphases on spiritual formation, discipleship, small groups and mission are growing.

There is a very positive spirit on Sunday mornings. There is lots of warmth and good-will reverberating among all. And there is plenty of activity. This congregation of 1500 has more going on than other churches of 2000 to 3000 members. Everyone I meet has a strong sense of mission. Most are passionate about making positive changes in a challenging world.

All this hopeful energy is in the face of huge financial challenges locally, nationally and globally. All of this is in the shadow of, probably, the toughest 8 years in this congregation's 97 year history.

We must not forget God's abundant intervening mercy and sustaining grace through these traumatic days. We may think we are doing it all by ourselves, but the simple fact is – God is working through all the pain and hard work to capture our attention, build our trust, expand our endurance, confront our fear, and heal our wounds. We are being

carried on divine “eagles wings,” so that as we run we will not collapse, as we lift we will not break, as we serve we will not burn out.

But some have reached exhaustion. We need to give them some rest. Some have become disillusioned. We need to gather round them with encouragement. Some have been hurt. We need to bandage their sores. Some have felt neglected. We need to bring them back into the fold. Some have felt uninformed. We need to answer their questions. Some have felt attacked. We need to offer them an olive branch. Some have felt misunderstood. We need to give them an ear. Some have felt under siege. We need to give them a truce.

We need to allow God’s abundant grace to be poured out over all our grief and anger. We need to confess our mistakes. We need to forgive those whom we feel have made poor decisions. Having gone through what West Side has experienced, there is no way we could come through without some scars and losses.

But think of the miracles: a gorgeous new sanctuary and rebuilt education facility; a new organ. We only owe \$3.5 million on a \$30 million project. That is amazing! The congregation is worn, but together. The historic ministries are thriving.

There is no doubt that we still face a financial mountain before us, but God enjoys working through faithful people to remove mountains. The moving of this mountain is not impossible. It will demand communal prayer and mutual generosity. We cannot turn to another and say, “It’s up to you.” No! It’s up to all of us pulling and pushing together with the Holy Spirit. Some who have lost jobs will not be able to contribute what they want, but others will step up and do the heavy lifting. And our ringer is God, who strives in us and with us to help us do what we cannot do on our own. It’s up to God to partner with us to restore West Side to financial wholeness. And God will do that. God has a huge investment in West Side to show the resurrection power of Jesus Christ to Ridgewood, Bergen County and Northern New Jersey. God has an eternal reputation to keep – to show the world that faithful people will not perish.

For the next 400 days or so, we will be like Israel in the wilderness, collecting just enough manna to keep us going each day. We may have just enough money to pay our bills, but we will pay them. We may not have enough to save for another day, but we will make it. We may not be able to pay off our mortgage now, but we will pay it off later. Right now we will focus on doing the ministry God gives us to do. We will take one day at a time. Today, we may only survive, but tomorrow we will prosper.

In keeping with the manna theme of “just enough for today,” I have asked our elders and trustees to focus on our annual budget and giving for 2009. We will not campaign, this year, for any more money to pay off the mortgage. (Please continue the commitments to the building you’ve already made). But, unlike previous years, we will not use any endowment (October 9th fund) money to pay for our operating and ministry budget this year. We will pay for the entire ministry budget of \$1.5 million (not including the mortgage) with income raised this year.

This is a huge step of faith. Our EOG's (Estimates of Giving) were less than \$1 million. We need \$1.3 million in congregation giving to pay for the \$1.5 million ministry and operating budget (we expect \$200 k to come to us as other kinds of income). You can see we have to give another \$300 k beyond the EOG's. Some do not think this is possible. I do! I think you want to support the ministry, the staff and direction we have set. I think you have the faith and the passion, even under the financial storm clouds.

Our elders and trustees have set July 1st as a key marker to see if we have the faith and will to contribute half of what we need for the whole year. That is an income of \$750 k by July 1st. Our officers have agreed that if we can make that goal, we will sustain this year's budget. If we cannot make the goal, we will cut the budget mid-year by the amount we are unable to give.

July 1st is the go or no go date. As of the end of April, our total income for 2009 was \$515 k of the \$750 k goal. That is 70% with 9 weeks to go. We need another \$235 k of income through May and June.

Join me in prayerfully thinking about what God is calling us to do together to make this very important mid-year target. What sacrifice are you willing to make to help us all get there?

Remember, we are on the manna way, just enough for today, just enough by July 1st! If you cannot give any more, you can pray for the rest of us to give just enough. You can pray for our good Lord to give us a modern day miracle.

Then, of course, if we reach the mid-year goal, we have to double it by December 31st! We have come so far. We have worked so hard. We have weathered the perfect storm together. Let's not give up. Let's give beyond. Let's pull and push together with our Lord who holds the ropes.

Its 50 days to July 1st! That's a Pentecost hope. I pray I will be able to write the 150 day letter with good financial news! All in all, if God is with us, who then can be against us?

Your Pastor,
From the view of 100 days, to the promise of the next 100 months,
In hope and faith, surrounded by Christ's Love,

Gareth Icenogle