

Equipping for ...

Sharing Good News in the Church: Annual Meetings

The Rev. Dr. Emily Bisset is minister at Calvin Presbyterian Church, Toronto, ON



The following process is based on discussion from the 139th General Assembly and a special focus on “Good News in the Church: Creating Vibrant Connections,” led by the Rev. Dr. Emily Bisset.

Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing. And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit.

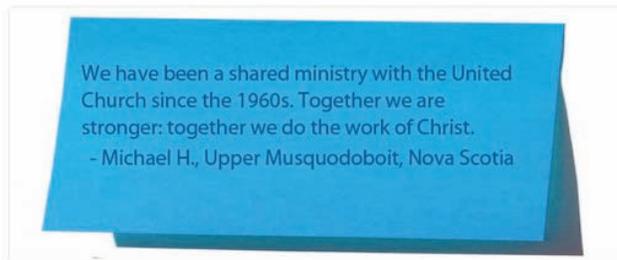
(1 Thess 5:11, 14-19)

Being a church of Jesus Christ is about sharing good news.

Whenever we gather, we have an opportunity to build one another up and encourage one another in faith. This is true for sessions and boards of the church. It is also true when we gather for our annual congregational meeting. Annual meetings can be a time of spiritual growth. And because I am a person of faith, I believe that it is possible for us to leave our annual meetings feeling invigorated, excited and hopeful about our congregation and our ministry.



Vibrant Connections



GENERAL ASSEMBLY

- General Assembly Office
- General Assembly 2013
 - 2013 Remits and Referrals
- General Assembly 2012
 - 2012 Remits and Referrals
- General Assembly 2011
 - 2011 Remits and Referrals
- Assembly Council
- Committee on History
- Committee to Nominate

All of us know how easy it is to share discouragement in our churches: there are not enough young people, givings are down, there are too few volunteers, projects are envisioned but never carried through. Bad news pours in and gets multiplied by fear and anxiety. Last year, the General Assembly Office of the PCC thought that it was time to spread some good news. That initiative began with the 139th General Assembly and a special focus on “Good News in the Church: Creating Vibrant Connections.” The Assembly set aside time to share good news happening in four very different PCC congregations across Canada. These good news stories involved ecumenical partnerships and resource sharing, community outreach and involvement, engaging the youth of the congregation in meaningful ways, re-envisioning physical church buildings, and holistic approaches to the health of a congregation. But we knew that there was a lot more good news out there to share. So, as part of the Sunday morning worship, we invited the community to share their own good news stories. Participants wrote examples on brightly coloured cards and brought them forward to put on a banner as a kind of offering to both God and the church. There was a sense of reverence, expectation and hope as, one by one, commissioners came forward with their own good news. In the time that followed, as people talked to one another and looked at the cards, our hope was

that people would be able to make connections with others and good news would multiply.

To read some of the good news stories shared at the 139th General Assembly visit presbyterian.ca/vibrant-connections.

As the season of annual meetings approaches, how might sessions and congregations engage in this same kind of sharing?

Suggestions for Preparing for the Annual Meeting

Several weeks in advance of the meeting, distribute brightly coloured cards in the Sunday bulletin. Ask people to share a good news story, in and about their involvement with the church.

For example:

- A time when they were new to the church and were welcomed or remembered by name and what that meant to them.
- A worship experience, or even a particular moment in worship, when God’s love or challenge was made clear.
- An outreach activity that informed their understanding of God and God’s call to justice or kindness.

- A meaningful or inspirational worship experience from a former congregation or a congregation that they have visited.
- A vision for a future event or initiative in a particular area of church life (outreach, hospitality, pastoral care, youth ministry, etc.) that they would like to see unfold.

Inviting People to Share Good News During Worship

Consider creating time in worship in the four weeks leading up to the annual meeting for people to share their good news stories in worship. Encourage a variety of people to share, including children, youth, seniors, men, women, newcomers, long-time members, elders and non-elders.

One option is to include this in the gathering part of the service, after the Assurance of Pardon.

Call to Worship
Hymn
Prayer of Adoration and Confession
Assurance of Pardon
Sharing Good News

When we enter into worship, we acknowledge God's greatness and our smallness. We are moved to confession and are assured of God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ. After sharing the Good News of God in Jesus Christ, we can then encourage one another.

Another option is to include this near the time of the offering.

Good News Offering
Monetary Offering
Prayer of Dedication (that includes both)

It may be introduced with words such as,

“We usually think of the offering time in our worship service as a time to collect money; however, it is much more than that. When we share our good news stories with one another, we offer them as a gift of encouragement and hope to one another. In so doing, we honour and acknowledge God's activity among us. We put our efforts, and the results of our efforts, into God's hands. This is a time to listen for the Holy Spirit among us as our comforter, advocate and inspiration.”

At the Meeting

Creating a good news wall or banner

During the annual meeting, designate a time and space to display the cards that people have prepared with their good news story on them. Encourage people to put their name on the cards somewhere so that you can follow up on an idea or a story. Take time in the meeting to put up your good news cards together and make it a prayerful and reflective moment of worship in the midst of your meeting.

Be sure to choose a place where the cards can stay up for a couple of weeks so people can read them, or alternatively, attach the cards to a long piece of felt using Velcro and put this up as a banner somewhere in the church, perhaps in the sanctuary, narthex or education wing.

The Extraordinary Ordinary

Don't underestimate the usual activities of the church as important good news stories. When we sorted through the good news offered at General Assembly, much of it had to do with ongoing ministry that is having a positive influence and creating relationships among people both within the church and beyond it. Sharing God's good news in the church does not mean we have to do big, splashy things that are particularly innovative (although every once in a while those things lend a spark of needed new energy for a congregation). God most often speaks through the ordinary and we often fail to notice and celebrate it! Stop and notice and create a ripple of good news.

Scripture suggestions

Isaiah 52:7

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces
peace,
who brings good news,
who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'

Mark 16: 15, 19-20

And Jesus said to them, 'Go into all the world
and proclaim the good news to the whole
creation. So then the Lord Jesus, after he had
spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and
sat down at the right hand of God. And they
went out and proclaimed the good news
everywhere, while the Lord worked with
them and confirmed the message by the signs
that accompanied it.

1 Peter 1: 20-25

Christ was destined before the foundation of
the world, but was revealed at the end of the
ages for your sake. Through him you have
come to trust in God, who raised him from the
dead and gave him glory, so that your faith
and hope are set on God.

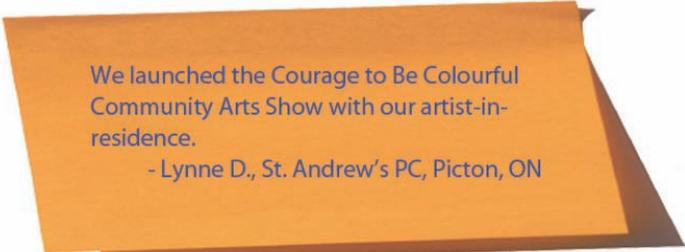
Now that you have purified your souls by your
obedience to the truth so that you have
genuine mutual love, love one another deeply
from the heart. You have been born anew, not
of perishable but of imperishable seed,
through the living and enduring word of God.
For

'All flesh is like grass
and all its glory like the flower of grass.
The grass withers,
and the flower falls,

but the word of the Lord endures for ever.'
That word is the good news that was announced
to you.

Ephesians 3: 20-21

Now to God who by the power at work
within us is able to accomplish abundantly far
more than all we can ask or imagine, to God
be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to
all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.



We launched the Courage to Be Colourful
Community Arts Show with our artist-in-
residence.

- Lynne D., St. Andrew's PC, Picton, ON

Statement of Christian identity example

God created the world for good and made human
beings in the image of the living and creating God. God
has faithfully walked with us throughout many
generations, even when we have turned away. In the
fullness of time, God sent Jesus Christ into the world to
proclaim the good news of healing, forgiveness and
hope. Jesus came to give life, and to give it abundantly.
Jesus embodied that good news in the resurrection,
showing the world that love is more powerful than
hatred or fear, light is stronger than darkness, and life
will triumph over death. Sending the Holy Spirit to be
our companion and comforter, we are now
commissioned to share God's good news with each
other and the world. When we have the courage to
testify to how we have seen God at work for peace,
renewal, healing and love, we show the world that truly
the kingdom of God is near and God is with us.

Hymn/song suggestions for use while people come forward

Same Love, Paul Baloche (Contemporary Christian song
played as a CD while people came forward with their
cards at the 2013 General Assembly)

10,000 Reasons (Bless the Lord, O my Soul), Matt
Redman

Praise to the Lord the Almighty (Book of Praise #321)

When the Poor Ones (Book of Praise #762)

Hey! Hey! Anybody Listening?, Richard K.
Avery/Donald S. Marsh



We have an awesome blended worship! New
musicians, younger families, a growing Sunday
School and effective session meetings.

- Meridyth R., First PC, Trail, BC

Prayer suggestions

Wherever you choose to place the good news sharing, either in worship or later on at the annual meeting, it might be helpful to conclude this offering with a prayer, perhaps in unison, such as:

God of Good News,
We recognize that you are the source of all goodness.
As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are seeking to be your witnesses in the world.
Open our eyes to see you at work:
bringing new life, hope and peace to your people.
Bless your church and grant us courage to continue to name and share the good news with each other and with those in our community.
Help us to trust that, in so doing, you are powerfully at work within us, and will accomplish abundantly far more than we can ask or imagine.
We pray these things in the faithful name of Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Going forward

Designate a small group of people (perhaps a session committee like pastoral care, outreach or planning) to sort through the cards when you take them down. Make notes of visions or hopes for future ministries. Make note of particularly meaningful worship moments or experiences. For example, perhaps there was a healing and wholeness service offered several years ago that moved someone profoundly. Could it be offered again? Make note of stories that might make a good article in the church newsletter and ask the person who wrote it down to say more. If there are a number of good news stories that the group thinks would be inspiring or meaningful to the congregation as a whole, perhaps make space for several weeks in Lent or around Pentecost or in the autumn of the year (Rally Day or Homecoming Sunday) to share them.

Our summer Vacation Bible School program continues to draw children from outside our congregation so that now half are not from St. Mark's! Several families have joined the congregation as a result of VBS.
- Paula H., St. Mark's PC, Charlottetown, PEI

