



# IN THE LOOP



Personal Reflection by General Presbyter Dan Schomer



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### Just a thought...

Football fans speak of the home field advantage. The advantage is the so-called “twelfth man”—the crowd. First time visitors to Browns Stadium or Heinz Field are bound to notice how loud the fans are. Players says that support from their fans gets the adrenaline pumping and helps them play their best.

In a way, Presbyterian Churches always have the home field advantage. We are never alone. We are always cheering one other on.

## Telling Stories

The holidays are a great time for hearing stories. Grandmother or Great-Grandfather share how family traditions got started or perhaps demythologize long-held assumptions about why a particular holiday practice has been perpetuated for generations. Mother or Father tell stories about when we were children and share the adventures of putting together what seemed like a million pieces to finish the big wheel or doll house in time to get it under the tree. We hear stories and, in the process, we gain insights into our identities.

Five churches in Eastminster Presbytery have committed to focus on stories in 2012. Through their participation in the Spiritual Strategic Journey under the direc-

tion of Consultant George Bullard, Cuyahoga Falls United, Salem First, Wickliffe, Hubbard, and Champion Churches will reflect on stories past, create their future stories, and determine how they will live into their future stories on an ongoing basis. Their year-long journey will be biblically grounded, Spirit filled, reliant upon prayer, and intentionally imaginative. The pastors and congregational leaders from these five churches will serve as learning partners as they form a Learning Cluster Group.

My conversations around the presbytery tell me that some folks have gotten the wrong impression about the Spiritual Strategic Journey—that the only churches that “benefit” are the five

churches I just named. Not so! I am currently working with several small churches that may choose to explore a small church spiritual strategic journey. Other churches have chosen other paths to follow in their journeys of faith and can count on the presbytery and me to share what we are learning from George Bullard that may be applicable to their journeys. Several churches have already stated that they may be ready to participate in a Spiritual Strategic Journey with George Bullard in 2013 should it be offered.

Every church needs a vision—a story that guides them into the future. Invite me to a Session meeting, and let’s explore what this might mean for your congregation.

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## Conflict Management Training

You saw it in the presbytery packet and can find it on our website—conflict management training will be provided by Consultant George Bullard for all interested pastors, commissioned ruling elders, and members of the Commission on Ministry.

Why conflict management

training? Such training is particularly timely in periods of rapid change. Any pastor who has sought to lead a congregation through change, no matter how necessary and beneficial, knows that one of the results of change is conflict. Conflict is not a bad thing. Conflict can work as a catalyst moving a church to-

ward growth and vitality; but conflict can also produce some very damaging results.

February 3 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.. we will gather together and explore ways to address the seven levels of conflict described by George Bullard in his book *Every Church Needs a Little Conflict*.

## Eastminster Presbytery

3833 Main Street  
Mineral Ridge, OH 44440

Phone: 330-505-2167  
Toll free: 800-215-2416  
E-mail:  
danschomer@faithfulness.com

We're on the Web:  
[www.fidelity.com](http://www.fidelity.com)



## Presbyterian Acronyms

The 220th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) will feature some new acronyms:

**TEC's** are Teaching Elder Commissioners.

**REC's** are Ruling Elder Commissioners.

Also, changes in terminology for ministers and elders has resulted in an acronym for Commissioned Lay Pastors. They are now **CRE's**—Commissioned Ruling Elders.

I could have a sweatshirt made that reads, "I Survived Two Weeks of Grandparenting," but that would be dishonest. I *loved* two weeks of grandparenting. Some days I didn't even get outside although the sun was always shining and the temperature was mid-70's. I was occupied with holding, rocking, feeding, changing, and singing to a little guy who was captivating even when he was sleeping. Did I ever enjoy my own children this much?

Probably not. When I was Dad, enjoyment was tempered by responsibility, stress, and

sleep deprivation. Joan and I were a big help to our daughter and our son-in-law appreciated the freedom to go to work without feeling guilty, but ours was always a supporting role. I have been told by many of you that there is nothing like grandparenting. I now share your viewpoint on the matter!

Christmas is a time when families take the time to focus on and value family relationships. Biblical scholar Ken Bailey provides a fascinating perspective on the birth narrative of Jesus through the lens of middle eastern culture. Accord-

ing to Bailey, it is unthinkable that Joseph and Mary couldn't find a place to stay in Bethlehem. After all, it was Joseph's place of birth and he would have had many relatives there. Bailey points out that the Hebrew word translated "inn" is more often given the meaning "guest room." Thus, according to Bailey, Jesus was born in the main living quarters of a relative's home surrounded by family and was laid in a manger which was a standard feature of every peasant home. Christmas, families fussing over a new baby, and we are blessed again.

## The Common Good

I have been sensing for some time that we have lost something, something essential to the very fabric of our society, that has manifested itself in a number of ugly ways. In a book recently written by Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann, I found that "something" that is missing. In *Journey to the Common Good*, Brueggemann explores the Bible, especially the Hebrew scriptures, in order to gain a biblical perspective on contemporary human society. Brueggemann takes us from Egypt under Pharaoh's rule to Babylon and the return from exile, contrasting individualism with a concern for the common good and a sense of scarcity to a theology of abundance. Here's just a taste of the book: *Sabbath, in the first instance, is not about worship. It is about work stoppage. It is about withdrawal from the anxiety system of Pharaoh, the refusal to let one's life be defined by production and consumption and the endless pursuit of private well-being.*

Brueggemann challenges the contemporary church to witness against anxious scarcity that so dominates the mindset within our culture and holds up neighborly common good as a worthy ideal reflecting the will of God. The 122-page book is not a difficult read, but it has great theological depth. You won't be skimming this book and you won't want to try. What makes this book particularly compelling is its application to the very matters addressed in the lead stories on the evening news. Consider reading *Journey to the Common Good*. This book would be a good choice for an adult ed. class and would likely invite some lively discussion.

## Adventures in Grandparenting