



## **Stumbling Forward**

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As I drove to work last week, a contractor moved up beside me on the interstate in his work pickup. It was the kind of truck with a sheet-metal shell covering the pickup bed, a place to organize tools for his work. Sharp looking. A very fine vehicle. That is, until the morning sun ricocheted off the side of the shiny shell, through my side window, and toward my head. The focused beam of light and heat instantly brought to mind the torment insects must suffer under a magnifying glass. Though this torture was short, it was quite unpleasant while it lasted.

I share this encounter in the current context of personnel evaluations that your Presbytery Personnel Team is undertaking. They have received self-evaluations from all Presbytery staff and reviews from people who work closely with staff, and they're in the process of delivering those evaluations ... like being under the magnifying glass again.

Okay, I'm being a bit dramatic. I actually enjoy evaluations. Because I want to continue to improve our systems and processes and my own knowledge, evaluations are a time for positive learning. If done well, they don't need to set your hair on fire.

In our collective ministries, we frequently evaluate whether what we're doing is working. We put programs, attendance, and expenses under a magnifying glass, looking for results. But, if we study too intently or for too long, people can feel burned by the scrutiny.

The key distinction we all need to make is between "pursuit" and "perfection." We should encourage pursuit of ministry goals, even when we know we'll miss the mark of perfection. If we require that every new initiative or effort be completed without mistake, then we'll be paralyzed to even try. How often have we over-thought a proposal, enumerating all the "what-if's" that might cause us to achieve less than the desired outcome? By taking small, reversible steps toward a new vision, we can pursue our goal, even though perfection is far from certain.

We must be prepared to fail repeatedly. A theme from [The Agile Church](#) (a guide for church revitalization) is "[f]ail early to succeed sooner." Innovation requires a high tolerance for failure. If we take risks for the sake of the Gospel – a core value you have espoused for the Presbytery – then we must be prepared to improvise and course-correct on occasion. That's okay. As long as we learn from our mistakes and "stumble forward," then we can keep moving in the right direction – toward the Kingdom.