



## Marking Milestones

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An old photograph on the screen showed a confirmation class from the 1950's, gathered around the baptismal font. Each class member was fondly remembered, and then Wendell "Pete" Paynter – one of the confirmation classmates – pointed to the font which still stands in the chancel of First Presbyterian Church of Clinton. "Four generations of my family," he said, "have been baptized at this font." Along with his parents, Pete's family represents five generations of church members. This story was one of many told Sunday at the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary worship of First (Clinton).

As in many churches, the memories – old and recent – include a deep care shown for each other in times of suffering. Recollected ministries of the church include vacation bible school, plays, and children's choirs, filling church members with a sense of joy. And then there are the tales of pranks, like when, during worship, a paper airplane came sailing down from the choir loft.

This past Sunday, 100 years from when the church first began, the pews at First (Clinton) were filled, and the chatter of children and long-lost friends rose up. Turn-of-the century games and candy were available under the tent. I did not try the pogo stick, though it was suggested to me.

This coming weekend, Linn Presbyterian Church in Lake Geneva celebrates its 175th anniversary with two days of events. You are warmly invited to join in the festivities.

We mark these significant milestones in our churches. It is good to remember. Sometimes we remember what was vibrant about our congregations; other times we remember how we came through a rough time together. I celebrate both God's faithfulness and the commitment shown by churches that reach these milestones.

My greater thanks, however, is for the churches' response to God's continuing call to serve in fresh ways. Though congregations like First (Clinton) and Linn remember the past, they are not stuck in it. Instead, they are eager to ask God, "What's next?" They are changing and learning and experimenting. For First (Clinton), some of that was done in response to their Holy Cow assessment as the Session listened to the congregation and chose healthy ways to lead from there.

At our September Gathering, we will consider whether to form a Congregational Vitality Commission. I don't imagine any congregation wants to feel stuck, but I can believe not everyone knows how to get out of the mire of "how we used to be." Identifying committed volunteers from our churches to serve on a vitality commission is one way we empower the leaders needed to help us get unstuck. Especially for you ruling elders who have an interest in this, I pray you will raise your hand to volunteer. No expertise required!! You will help us to envision the next 100 years for God's church in Southeast Wisconsin.

