



## Open

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Late one night this week, I drove through an unfamiliar neighborhood. As I passed a church, I glanced at it to determine its denominational affiliation – a hazard of being your Presbytery Executive. My eye caught the lighted reader-board sign, and I'm pretty sure I saw just a one-word message: Open. It was dark out, and I was zipping along. So maybe I misread the sign.

But, it got me to thinking of what message that one word would send to the neighborhood. My first instinct was to look for orange barrels. I immediately assumed the roads were under construction, but the church wanted people to know it was still accessible and open.

Not seeing evidence of construction, I then considered whether this was just a message of their operational hours. Like a small neon light that flashes in a store window, the word "Open" would let people know when to stop by for ministry. Except, I puzzled, it's a mid-week night. It gave me hope that perhaps this church was one of the few – like our own Tippecanoe Presbyterian Church – that stays open all night during the winter to serve as a warming room for guests with no permanent housing. Maybe they truly were "Open" and were inviting those in need of rest or companionship to come inside.

In terms of operating hours, it's worth calculating how often we're "open" for ministry. Sunday mornings, for sure. Our buildings are a big investment. Are we maximizing their use for the church's ministry? Or, are they kept either pristine or cobwebby from non-use? Just as the word "Open" conveys one message to the neighborhood, what does the stated or implied message of "Closed, except for Sunday" tell the community?

Of course, maybe the church meant something much more theological in its reader-board message. Maybe "Open" was intended to signify the church's progressive theology and a belief that we need to remain open to God's constant but changing revelation of God's self. I wonder whether the church considered itself open to new understandings of the Bible and our relationship to Christ. What an exciting place we'd discover as we passed through the doors of a church open to guiding of the Holy Spirit! Open to change – open and affirming to people of all races, sexual orientation, gender, nationalities – open to the gifts that the stranger might offer. Can you imagine!?!

If you had the option of hanging a sign around your neck with one of two words, open or closed, which would you choose for yourself? How is that reflected in your ministry leadership...in whatever setting?

It is entirely possible, of course, that I misread the sign. It was late and dark. I was zipping along.

