



Unlocking Our Potential

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Rachel Yates

I'm in trouble now. I've got two keys on my primary key ring, and I don't know what they open. I don't have that many, so these two are really noticeable. I've tried them on my front door and at my mother's house. I'm pretty sure they are not my old house keys, and I have a distinct memory of returning the office keys to Chris Halverson.

They're not vehicle keys, padlock keys, or safe deposit box keys. I'm worried.



So, I'm going to do what I've always done: put them in a drawer with the other keys. I just moved a box of keys to Boise that no longer unlock anything I own...at least, I don't think they do...but you never know...better safe than sorry. Keys are important/valuable/essential. They feel irreplaceable, never mind that any hardware store will gladly replicate one, and a locksmith can rekey the really important locks. We speak of keys to our heart, keys to the city, and keys to success. Being able to lock and unlock items – tangible or metaphorical – captivates us.

Many years ago, I even read *12 Keys to an Effective Church*, by Kennon Callahan (1983). A few of those keys feel almost superficial, including high visibility and good landscaping. Sadly, it's not enough these days to have a prominent church building on a well-manicured lawn. However, I believe other keys identified by Callahan could still unlock the church's potential: Corporate, Dynamic Worship; Strong Leadership; Solid, Participatory Decision Making; and Specific, Concrete Missional Objectives. They tie closely to the Marks of Vital Congregations that the PC(USA) is currently using, including Spirit-Led Worship; Empowered Servant Leaders; Ecclesiastical Health; and Outward Incarnational Focus.

Beginning tomorrow, the Presbytery will head into the mark of Outward Incarnational Focus. Note that the mark is not entitled "Mission" Focus. We can get caught up into mission activities and miss the incarnational piece, the embodiment of God through our very lives and relationships.

I wrote last week about moving from transactional mission to relational and advocacy ministries. That's at the root of outward incarnational focus. Cindy Stigler responded to my question about how to move deeper into those second and third phases of mission, by sharing what Forest Park is doing. She writes, "Several years ago, our mission committee interviewed a number of agencies (police, fire, school, food pantries, etc) not only in New Berlin, but also the surrounding communities West Allis seemed to have needs in the school setting with a growing population of homelessness. We do a school supply drive every year for ... the West Allis-West Milwaukee (WAWM) schools homeless program. We have 5 adults tutoring once a week at a local WAWM school (4K-3rd grade). At the end of September, [Pastor] Kim Trimboli and I are meeting with Nic Bur, School Psychologist in charge of the homeless program, about developing a mentor program for parents who find themselves homeless. Our hope is to meet individually with a parent and work with them to assess what needs they have, whether that be filling out an application for housing, learning how to develop and live within a budget, how to job search, etc." Thank you, Cindy! These are helpful examples of how to have an outward, incarnational focus.

As we look to unlock our potential as the church, may this focus inspire us to be a tangible witness to God's love.