



A Matter of Privilege

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Not long ago, I shared about airing the church's dirty laundry. In voting on proposed GA amendments, we opened ourselves (somewhat unintentionally) to public scrutiny about how to handle misconduct and discipline in the church. To my surprise, public reaction was positive. Outsiders considered our process a sign of health. We debated; we voted; we made decisions together. It felt refreshing to those who had no church experience or who had known only a different polity and way of decision-making. It didn't matter whether we were talking about misconduct, minimum terms of call, ecumenical relations, or pastoral transitions. People were attracted to HOW we functioned as the church, because it offered a healthy approach to WHAT we did as the church.

Now, let me share the key to that aspect of ecclesial health: **saying yes**. Lance Loveall, pastor at First (Kenosha), shares a story that brings this home:

"I am the chaplain for the fire department in Kenosha, which largely means I stop by fire stations, drink coffee, and chat. The other day I was telling a group of fire fighters, many of whom are Roman Catholic, about my work on the presbytery's nominating committee. They were particularly interested that 'non-priests' could have such voice and influence in church matters, especially beyond the local congregation. In their talk, there were a lot of we/they phrases about the church.

"As I told them about Presbyterianism, they asked, 'So the people ARE the church and run the church?' I assured them it was a partnership. The conversation was a wonderful reminder to me that what one could often see as a responsibility, and perhaps even a burden at times, is really a wonderful privilege that not everyone has. We have a polity that allows everyone to have a voice in what the church will be and how it will function. We forget just what a privilege it is to have a polity that allows teaching elders and ruling elders to work side by side all the way to the highest levels of church government."

Saying yes is key because our HOW depends on volunteers who agree to serve on our various commissions and work groups. Without people actively participating in the decision-making, our perspective and insight are narrowed. Power is put in the hands of just a few, and Presbyterians like to see power in the hands of many.

Here are two ways to test the waters of **saying yes**:

1. Make sure your Session is electing commissioners to attend each of our quarterly Presbytery Gatherings. No long-term commitment, but lots of opportunity for enrichment. Check out this [short, fun video](#) to use with your congregation or Session to encourage participation in the gatherings.
2. Sign on for a group at the presbytery level. There are varying commitment levels. Afraid of a 3-year term? We often need to fill one-year vacancies, so try it out. See how you like it. Worried that you



don't have the skills? No one does at the beginning, and we offer orientation and grace because everyone is learning together.

Lance shares his special invitation: "As chair of the nominating committee, I would like to offer you the opportunity to find your voice and sense of ministry at the presbytery level. Whether your gift is for process and polity, finances, care and compassion, or creativity, there are places for your voice in the life and growth of this part of the Body of Christ. Give me a call or [an email](#) and let's find your spot."