

The Coast Is Clear

April 18, 2018

On Monday, I got stuck in my driveway. The driveway itself wasn't the problem. The problem was the heavy April snow piled deep along the edge of my driveway by the county snow plow. Because of dense bushes where I pull out of my driveway onto the busy country road, I need to stop and look carefully before turning. On Monday, in my caution, I slowed enough to lose all traction – forward and backward – in the deep snow.

After several tire-spinning moments, I unstuck myself enough to back down the driveway. Now, I had a dilemma between (1) the slow, but cautious, turn onto the country road with the likelihood of getting stuck again; or (2) busting through the piled snow at top speed onto a busy road with no visibility. Rejecting both options, instead I called my husband.

He acted as my spotter, standing on the road and motioning me forward when it was finally clear. Picking up as much speed as I could, I broke through the rutted snow onto the road and gave him a happy wave as I drove off.

Coming from Colorado with its renowned ski resorts, I've learned the importance of "spotters." Before taking a ski jump, you always post a spotter down below who can see the landing and wave you forward when the coast is clear. It's hard enough to make the jump and land upright. The spotter ensures the risk is manageable and then encourages the jumper to move.

This Presbytery has identified "risk" as one of its core values. You aspire to be a place where we can experiment and try new forms of ministry. We hope to be entrepreneurial and think outside the box, but risk doesn't tolerate perfection. We will try, and we will fail, and that's okay if we learn from those setbacks. Despite numerous failed attempts at creating the assembly line, Henry Ford persisted until he succeeded. He later wrote in his autobiography, "Failure is simply the opportunity to try again, this time more intelligently."

One way that we "try again more intelligently" is by posting spotters. Spotters ask tough questions. Spotters help manage risk so that others aren't hurt innocently. They literally eliminate our blind spots.

However, the spotter's role is not to convince us that the risk should never be taken. The spotter is not the perennial naysayer who reminds us that "we tried it before and it didn't work." Instead, the spotter must be on board with the risky decision and prepared to wave us on when the coast is clear. If we hesitate too long, the moment might be lost. The spotter's confident, all-clear signal gives us courage in the moment to act.

As the Presbytery explores what it means to take risks and to experiment, we will need good spotters. For those who would much rather be at the bottom of the jump than the top, we need you! Your role is important to our collective success because it's equal parts caution and encouragement. Thank you for helping us see our blind spots and urging us forward!