

The Big Day

February 7, 2018

This past weekend, the place was packed. Nearly every seat was filled, which wasn't surprising. Leading up to the Big Day, reservations poured in. It was expected to be the largest attendance in the event's history for this locale.

The excitement started early that morning. Young and old, they came. Longtime friends greeted each other, while others exchanged introductions. People mingled. A buzz filled the air.

At kickoff, people settled into their seats, eager for what the day would hold.

Then Rev. Nicole Farley opened the meeting with prayer, a reading from Scripture, and, of course, directions on how to find Southminster's restrooms. Wait, what?

No, I'm not writing about the Super Bowl (but what a game, eh?). Our Big Day happened on Saturday, as ruling elders and deacons – 67 in all!—came together for leadership training. Their love for the church and eagerness to serve effectively was palpable. Some congregations even brought their full complement of deacons and elders, and a few pastors sneaked in for a refresher. What could be better than Presbyterian polity on a snowy Saturday morning?



In the various assessments you've undertaken in the last several years, leadership development and equipping our congregations for ministry consistently ranks at the top of your priorities. So, we've responded. For the last couple years, this particular training for ruling elders and deacons has grown in popularity. Attendees have given high marks for the usefulness of the information and the interactive format that lets them grapple with real world issues.



Overlaying all the training is a reminder that serving in this capacity is a calling. It is a way in which God has singled out each person for unique service to the church in line with their particular gifts.



Each person received a nice, crisp Book of Order and Joan Gray's *Spiritual Leadership for Church Officers: A Handbook*. Gray reminds us that spiritual leaders need to both honor our system of ordered ministry and dare to discern how God is calling the church into a new way of being: "Many churches wither and die because their leaders are afraid of trying and failing. Like the third servant

in the parable [of the Talents], they are afraid to take the risks necessary to do the Master's will. God is always going ahead of us, doing new things and inviting us to join in. Trying something new usually

involves the possibility that it may not work.... Effective spiritual leaders know that in the church, success is about faithfulness, and faithfulness sometimes requires taking risks.”

Discernment of God’s will is not for the faint of heart, but Milwaukee Presbytery is bold. You regularly express “risk” as a core value, and your history of activism bears this out. In this time, the church is being called to try a new thing and to be the church is a way never seen before. Your ruling elders and deacons accepted the invitation this past weekend to begin discerning this new thing that God is doing. They are now equipped to move us closer to the goal line. Though Justin Timberlake did not perform during the lunch break, we can be sure the angels were singing a chorus in heaven!

