

## Charge to the Presbytery

In 1973 The Synod of the Northeast emerged from the former Synods of New Jersey, New York, and New England.

At that time the executive of the Synod of New England was heard to comment that Presbyterianism in New England was tried and failed.

Some might say the same today about Presbyterianism in Northern New York. In 1978, when I became a member of this Presbytery, we had over 5,000 members.

Today we have 2,3336 members.

Imagine!

Half of our membership lost in the last 38 years.

The numbers speak for themselves.

Enter Miracle Max!

Miracle Max is the snarky old healer in the movie Princess Bride.

Westley, the film's hero, has just died in the torture chamber.

His two sidekicks, in a last desperate attempt to save their friend, bring him to Miracle Max.

Miracle Max takes a long look at the limp body

and says: "**Your friend here is only MOSTLY dead.**

**There's a big difference between mostly dead and all dead.**

**Mostly dead is slightly alive."**

In spite of our presbytery's & denomination's discouraging decline

we are not here to install a miracle worker

to tell us that the Presbytery is not "all dead."

We already know that.

At worst, we are slightly alive.

And the spirit of Life that inspires us today is no different than the Life that inspired us 38 years ago or the Life that inspired God's people over 2,000 years ago,

or, for that matter, the Life that blew over the chaos in the beginning.

In confirming the Presbytery statistics with Scott Barton, our last Stated Clerk,

he offered some insightful reflections of his own.

Scott writes: "*Our job is still to try to be faithful*

*not because there are lots of other people who believe,*

*but because we believe.*

*I think this must be why Jesus said that thing about where two or three are gathered in my name.....*

*It was a lot easier when everybody was a church member.*

*But now, if you are part of the church of Christ,*

*it is less likely that you participate just because everyone else is.*

*Lower numbers mean a greater opportunity to think about why you are still here.*

*Fewer people in the pews doesn't diminish a single remaining person's faith one iota.*

*Or at least, it doesn't need to.*

*In fact, it may help us focus even more on what faith is all about.*

*It used to be that we were part of the Empire.*

*And how could you be faithful then?*

*But now it's different.*

*Now we stand out.*

*Or at least have a chance to!"*

So we are installing David Bennett not to be our Miracle Max  
but rather to nurture the Life that is already continually at work among us.  
And friends, that work is a two way street.

We need to nurture David's life as he works among us.

We may need to remind him that we expect him to work approximately 20 hours a week,  
not 20 hours a day.

We may need to remind ourselves

that, except for direct involvement with C.O.M. & the Coordinating Council  
we do not expect him to be a committee ombudsman.

We need to remember that we do not expect him to be all things to all churches  
but rather to facilitate communication among congregations  
and per-to-peer relationships among pastors.

Finally we must be diligent in our commitment review David's position after four months,  
with subsequent review every 6 months, as clearly stated in the position description.

**"There is a big difference between mostly dead and all dead."** said Miracle Max.

**"With all dead, well, there is usually only one thing you can do."**

"What's that?" asks Westley's friend.

**"Go through his cloths and look for loose change."**

Sounds just like the Roman guards dividing Jesus' clothes among themselves by casting lots.

Make no mistake; Jesus was not mostly dead,

Jesus was **all-dead**.

And as long as we are faithful to His risen presence at work in our midst it is enough .....  
to feel slightly alive.