

## **Two Times Two Equals Two**

Dennis J. Hughes

In Seattle Presbytery, on two recent occasions, two congregations have decided to merge into one new congregation. They have done it in two different ways, however. One is a more traditional merger; the other is a deliberate journey through dissolution of existing congregations to “new church development” to—we anticipate some time next year—a newly chartered congregation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

First, the more standard merger:

Ravenna Boulevard Presbyterian Church and Wallingford Presbyterian Church were located on the east and west sides of Seattle’s urban Green Lake (and Interstate 5). Both were small in membership but strong in history and neighborhood service. A Presbyterian-related counseling service had long had its offices in the Ravenna Boulevard building. In recent years, several creative stated supply pastors, the latest being Donna Frey DeCou (who was actually the designated pastor), served the congregation. Wallingford, on the other hand, had called a co-pastor clergy couple, Deb and Ken Sunoo, several years ago. Each worked part time and shared parenting duties. Deb, holding a Ph.D. in biblical studies, taught occasionally, and Ken worked in the presbytery office part time. The two congregations “met” through a shared North End youth group that included members of two other congregations. They shared in youth ministry and a ministry to homeless mentally ill persons, and “dated” by serving meals and sharing fellowship while caring for the homeless. It took several years, but after a long “engagement,” they “married” and took the Wallingford name. Deb and Ken remain co-pastors, and the recently retired Donna is their parish associate.

Second, the deliberate journey:

Westminster Presbyterian Church and Church at the Center (CATC) elected to join forces. Westminster was an older congregation located in the center of Seattle’s “Pill Hill” hospital district, near Seattle University and across the street from Seattle Central Community College. Church at the Center was a recently organized congregation with about a ten-year history. Because of local factors and some painful history, they elected to ask the presbytery to dissolve the predecessor churches, provide them with an administrative commission, and move through a new church development phase on the way to becoming Capitol Hill Presbyterian Church. Now, they are rich in staff and in new young members who are bringing great energy and new ideas. But they are also having the joys and frustrations of a building and a definite location (CATC met in a theater for ten years). In this situation, it was the fellowship and friendship of two pastors, Matt Owens of Westminster and James Kearny of CATC, who brought before their congregations and the presbytery the vision for a new future. Matt has gone on to serve in the Philippines, while James and a strong staff, assisted by the administrative commission, move forward to fulfill their call to form Capitol Hill Presbyterian Church.

Sometimes, God willing, two times two equals two!

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