

*Stories from a Journey*  
Oak Grove Presbyterian Church  
Pastor Paul Moore, visiting preacher  
November 26, 2017

What a privilege it is for me to be here. Again, my name is Paul Moore. I am the **installed** pastor of Chain of Lakes Church, a Presbyterian **church** serving the north Metro. 288 hours ago I was the organizing pastor of Chain of Lakes, a new church development serving the north Metro. We're a church. As we would say at Chain of Lakes, Yay, God!!

I'm very glad to be here. For three years Oak Grove and Chain of Lakes have had a sister-church relationship. You are—I think the second-oldest Presbyterian church in Minnesota. You were formed in 1855. We are the youngest—two weeks old, formed November 12, 2017. It seems right for us to partner together. Your experience and expertise at Oak Grove are valuable to the people at Chain of Lakes. Folks from Oak Grove have shared with me that the energy, enthusiasm and the willingness of people from Chain of Lakes to try things that are out-of-the-box are valuable to you.

This partnership started three summers ago at Target Field when Bill and I watched a baseball game. The game didn't go well for the Twins. But our conversation did. The two of us started talking about how our congregations could help each other.

As Presbyterians we put together a committee of people from Chain of Lakes and Oak Grove. We meet about every-other-month. We have a Purpose Statement. I think it's worth reading.

Oak Grove Presbyterian Church and Chain of Lakes will be in a sister-church relationship. This relationship will be mutually beneficial, in which spiritual, emotional, and mental resources are shared to help meet the needs of each church.

SLIDE

Ultimately we want our lay people to be connected to each other to represent the best ways that Presbyterians connect to each other. We expect to support each other in ways that help each congregation to partner in mission to impact the world.

Two parts of this are important to me—1) our relationship is mutually beneficial—and 2) our lay people get to know each other and work together.

Bill and I are friends, but we can always find reasons to get together. We relationships to be developed among you, so that our congregations can help each other.

We've done ministry together. I led the Men's Retreat for the men of Oak Grove at Presbyterian Clearwater Forest in February of 2015. We've done musician exchanges.

In October of 2015 our congregations organized an event called 12 by 12. Twelve lay leaders from each of our congregation gathered. Jeff Japinga—the Executive Presbyter of Twin Cities Area Presbytery—spoke. Then we broke up into groups. Lay folks from Chain of Lakes shared what was working for us in worship and small groups and youth and family ministry. We shared some of the challenges we are facing. Lay folks from Oak Grove did the same. I know the conversations were stimulating. I remember riding back to Blaine that night. The folks in our car talked the entire way about the conversations. We are planning another 12 x 12 event this spring.

Today I want to share some stories about our journey of going from a New Church development to an organized Presbyterian congregation. I hope these stories can perhaps help you as a congregation be clearer on your own mission and help you as individuals discern the presence of the Spirit.

We do a lot of videos at Chain of Lakes. I do sermon series and many of the sermon series I share have preview videos that we communicate via Social Media. Almost every sermon that has been preached at our church is put on the Chain of Lakes Vimeo page. And we do videos for special events. We put the chartering service on the page. I think there is over 200 videos on that page. You could binge watch Chain of Lakes videos. We just did a video of our history. It's a wonderful story. Take a listen.

VIDEO

VIDEO

VIDEO

VIDEO

How do you start a new church? I started in February 2009 when I met with seven families who came to a meeting to meet me. That group of people didn't know each other, they didn't have a Purpose Statement, five of the families weren't going to church, they all had a bit of Presbyterian background. Basically they were coming to a meeting.

To start a new Presbyterian church, don't you gather the Presbyterians? That was the Presbyterians in the Blaine area.

The model is called a parachute drop. You parachute drop the pastor into the area and say, "it's all yours."

Churches don't start using this model anymore. It's a very difficult way to start a church. I was energetic and excited about starting a new church. I had a call to start a new church. I had the experience of redeveloping a new church. And I was naive—that's one of my spiritual gifts—naivete.

We were willing to give it a try. We've worshipped in five different locations. We've become known in the community for helping homeless youth. We have a Purpose Statement and eight Core Values that guide everything we do. We're not afraid to try new things. If something doesn't work, we learn from it and move on. We encourage people to think out-of-the-box. We were willing to give it a try.

The Presbytery told us last year that if we had 85 people sign a charter document that we could become a church. We got to work getting signatures. We received 85 signatures. Guess which day we received the 85<sup>th</sup> signature? Easter of this year.

Now we're a church. 65 families at Chain of Lakes. 99 people have signed the charter book. 20 new people have connected to Chain of Lakes as disciples or what some churches would say members in 2017. Average worship attendance is 70 compared to 59 last year.

Since the start of the Fall year we've averaged 77 in worship—which leads us to think that we might have to go to 2 services since the worship space seats 100. We worship in a former bridal studio that we've turned into a place for our offices, worship, and ministry.

When are you going to build a church building?

SLIDE The Presbytery has purchased 8.9 acres of property

- North end of the Lakes Development
  - Lakes Development was the largest housing development in the history of MN
  - We are the only church who has property in the development
  - Access off of Main—well-traveled highway
- Can't wait to break ground
- People ask us from the neighborhood all the time when we are going to break ground
- Breaking Ground Task Force
  - At the end of January give us a projection of when we could break ground
- Possible we could double in worship attendance when we break ground
- It takes money.
- We'll be looking for a large gift to kick-start.

Until we can break ground we frequently have events on the church property

- Fall Fun Fair—our Fall Kick Off—where over 200 people attended
- Trunk or Treat—over 200 people attended

When I share stories of the journey of our church I can't help but share the story of Acts 2. .

This is foundational story for Chain of Lakes. When I met with those seven families I talked about this story. Every time we have a significant event at Chain of Lakes we come back to this story. For the past three weeks as we've celebrated our transition from a new church development to an organized church, we studied this story each Sunday in worship. I wrote a 21 day devotional on this story. If you use Facebook you can find this devotion on the Chain of Lakes Facebook page.

SLIDE In fact we put up a daily devotional on the Chain of Lakes Facebook page. If you'd like to use it, like our Facebook page.

Probably remember it—let me just share a bit

Disciples gathered. It was 50 days after Passover. Jesus had ascended into heaven. “Now what do we do.”

Sound

A large number of people had gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate a harvest festival called Feast of Weeks.

Ran over to the house

Wild scene—all (heaven) broke loose.

People were speaking in different languages

Speaking about God's deeds of power!

The cynical people thought everyone was drunk.

Peter stood up—gave a sermon

Remarkable that Peter got up

Peter—who had a powerful faith story himself

Peter—the impulsive fisherman. He had betrayed Jesus three times. Jesus called him the rock of the church—had had betrayed Jesus three times. The first Apostle—the betrayer—he stood up to bring order out of this wild scene. The first thing he said was these people aren't drunk. It's only 9 in the morning. It's too early to drink.

Then he gave them a history lesson. He told them that what was happening had been predicted by a man named Joel, many years earlier. Even though Jesus had died and was killed. God had taken Jesus from death and put him at his right hand. Jesus was alive. He was in heaven. It was quite a sermon—a remarkable story.

Imagine with me if you were in this group who had come over to the house. You had come to Jerusalem to celebrate this festival called "Feast of Weeks." You knew the story of the death of Jesus. You might have known of someone who had been there. Maybe you were ther yourself.

I'm just guessing, but there probably was a sense of regret among the people. Maybe fear about what would happen to them. Certainly uncertainty. Then Peter stands up and says, "Jesus is alive."

The story said you were "cut to the heart." All of these emotions all around you amidst this wild scene. They asked, "What shall we do. Peter said, "Repent." The English word repent is translated from the Greek word, metanoia. The Hebrew word is shub. It means turning to God. It could mean a physical turning. And it means going deeper with God.

Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Wow. These people who had participated or knew of someone who had participated in the murder of Jesus were now going be forgiven.

And they were baptized—3,000. In one moment the community—the church went from 12 to 3,000. Can you imagine? Wow!

Awe came upon everyone one

Awe is three letters, of course

A three letter synonym for awe is wow

Wow came upon everyone

When is the last time you said the word, “wow.”

Wow has a spiritual connection

I believe that when a person says “wow” the Holy Spirit is near. The church is in the “wow” business.

Let me tell you a story of Wow. It’s the story of Frank. Frank isn’t his real name, of course. Frank was born in the Philippines. At the age of 2 he was adopted. He went to live in Mississippi with his adopted mom. His sister was living there too. Fast forward about 16 years to 2015. Frank’s sister decided to leave Mississippi and come to Minnesota. Frank went with her. They came to the Twin Cities. Frank’s sister started a relationship with a man who didn’t get along with Frank. Frank was kicked out of his home. He was homeless.

Any given night there are 4,000 teens who are homeless in Minnesota

1 in 3 homeless teens are trafficked for sex in the first 48 hours that they are homeless

40-50 teens at Blaine High School are classified as homeless

How can this be—we don’t see them.

Many are couch hopping

Some are staying in cheap hotels with their families

Some are homeless

Sleeping in parks, port--a-potties

It’s an outrage.

That was Frank. Thank God he was 18. Because he was 18 he could go live at Stepping Stone, a residential shelter for homeless adults. If he had been 17 he couldn't have gone there because he doesn't have a family. He's all by himself. He stayed at Stepping Stone and then he was able to live at a new residential facility for homeless youth that an organization called Hope 4 Youth was starting.

On a Saturday night last April Chain of Lakes was doing a Silent Auction for Hope 4 Youth. Lisa Jacobson, the Executive Director for Hope 4 Youth, asked Frank if he would like to come. He said yes. He came. The people from Chain of Lakes talked to Frank that night. Someone asked Frank, "would you like to come to worship tomorrow?" I don't have a car. We'll pick you up. Frank came to worship at Chain of Lakes. He kept coming. Every week someone from Chain of Lakes gave him a ride. I eventually asked Frank if we could have a visit. I took him out for a meal. He shared more of his story with me. He told me he had never been baptized. "Would you like to be baptized?" He said "yes."

In June Frank stood behind the baptismal font at Chain of Lakes. This young man, who's not in contact with his parents. This young man who had slept outside. I shared with him that he'll never be alone again. I baptize you in the name of the "....." No matter what happens to you, you'll carry this gift of grace with you from now on. It can never be taken away from you. Wow. That day we were full of awe about what God was doing.

I want you to know that you at Oak Grove were us that day when Frank was baptized. You have been an important part of our story.

Frank is one of the 20 who is becoming a disciples at Chain of Lakes in 2017. On Thanksgiving he spent the day with a family at Chain of Lakes.

People ask me how do you build a church from scratch? You don't have a building—we've been in five different worship facilities. Nobody knows you. At Chain of Lakes we've settled on four important principles for growth. I took this from a Methodist pastor whose name is Bill Easum.

#### SLIDE

1. We are constantly inviting people to our church and/or Jesus
2. Our congregation has a system in place to connect with newcomers that will cause the newcomers to return again and again
3. Our congregation has a system for helping people become and grow as followers of Jesus
4. Our congregation sends people back into the community as back yard missionaries

I believe that congregations who do excellent on all four of these principles will experience rapid growth.

The final story I'd like to share happened three years ago. It was the night before the first worship service at our present location. I was out shopping at a mall with my daughter, Hannah. We were at Northtown Mall. While I was there I looked at Music Director's Facebook page. She had posted a picture of a Christmas tree that she had just set up. It was beautiful. I showed my phone to Hannah. H & I decided to go look at it. Hannah hadn't seen our new location yet. I gave her a tour. Then the two of us stood in front of the Christmas Tree. She said, "Dad remember what we did the first time we worshipped at Lino Lakes Senior Center." I said, "No." She said we got on our knees and prayed. I said, how about if we get on our knees and pray right now. So the two of us got on our knees on the hard floor in front of the Christmas Tree. And we prayed. And I remember praying for every person who would ever come into Davenport would experience a sense of hope.

That's our story. Giving hope. Now we're a church—and we can dream even bigger dreams.

It's not just a church story it's each person's story. Wherever you are on your individual journey of faith today. I want to encourage you to never give up on hope. Even when life is falling apart, keep grabbing on to hope. As the Apostle Paul wrote, "hope does not disappoint us." It's a story to which we can give our lives.