

While looking through a vacation and tourism magazine as I waited at the doctor's office for my name to be called, I couldn't help but notice the large number of ads for resort and retirement communities inviting prospective residents to "come and live the dream."

What comes to mind when you think about the dream life? Winning the lottery? Living in extravagant luxury? An easier job? Marital bliss? Early retirement? Perfect health?

However you see it, most of us think of a dream life as an upgrade in our circumstances, a life with fewer challenges and a greater degree of comfort and convenience.

But is this really God's dream for you?

In describing the "end times," the Old Testament prophet Joel envisioned a faith community that is motivated by God-inspired dreams and visions of multiple generations:

*"And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. (Joel 2:28)*

Though we are conditioned by our culture to think of the dream life in terms of personal prosperity, we are called as God's people to desire a "dream" life in terms of purpose and mission, as John puts it, 'God is love and we are to live God's love.'

In other words, the dreams and visions that are generated by the Spirit of God give your life and mine genuine significance.

I think of the dreams and visions of the men and women who have come before us in this congregation, God's dream and vision for First Presbyterian Church that began some two hundred years ago a few blocks away, just inside the arch with Moses Waddell and those twenty or so Presbyterians.

Think about it this way, we are living their dreams and visions for First Presbyterian Church.

I believe the challenges you and I face today are actually the opportunities we have to participate in making God's dream a reality for those who come after us.

As the Stewardship Committee said in their letter that included your Pledge Card, "...we are convinced that we can do great things for God together if we each share in the story of generosity to which God has called us."

In other words, living the dream.

The word "dream" frequently has been used as an acronym, and you know how we Presbyterians like acronyms.

You just heard from the Pastor Nominating Committee, the PNC, and they've read a lot of PIFs and sent out their MIF through the CLC to the PCUSA and will work with the COM, all to get a P-A-S-T-O-R.

So being a good Presbyterian I googled "dream" as an acronym.

I discovered that in computing, "DREAM" can represent "Distributed Routing Effect Algorithm for Mobility."

In many cities, "DREAM" is a call to "Downtown Restoration, Enhancement and Management." In Orlando, "DREAM" stands for "Disney Resort Experiences Are Magic."

So, what about "DREAM" for First Presbyterian Church?

And this is not original with me, but it does come from a good Presbyterian pastor, so I want to share it with you.

I propose that for this congregation "DREAM" means "Doing Risky, Encouraging and Authentic Ministry."

Let's break down the "DREAM."

**Doing.** James writes in his letter: "Be doers of the word and not hearers only." (James 1:22)

Simply said, do the gospel; as John says, "We love because he first loved us."

I think the Pastor Nominating Committee says it well of this church: "Through our vibrant, living relationship with the Gospel we want to strengthen and support each other with the hope that we all will come to experience life, our own and our neighbor's, in the way God wants us to: in generous giving, in putting the good of others before our own interests, thankful of the beauty around us, and working to make the world better for our having lived in it."

Keep on doing the work that needs to be done, not with frustration and resentment, but with love and gratitude, the joy of God's love in you!

**Risky.** This is how the church began, as Luke tells the story in the Acts of the Apostles.

Barnabas and Paul were being sent from Jerusalem to Antioch as the church began to grow, there and this was in the letter of introduction from the church in Jerusalem, "...we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 15:25-26)

As I've said before, 'faith is a risking business. "Or let me put it this way, "You can't learn to swim unless you get in the water!"

We have to be able to work beyond "the pull of the past" and "the fear of the future."

So often the past is where we are comfortable, and the future is not guaranteed; and when God gives us the dream, we say, "It's too risky. I'm not sure we need to do that."

This walk with God is a risky business, but nothing can replace that sense of peace and purpose when you take the step to walk in the present with the living God who is always moving, moving, moving us on ahead.

**Encouraging.** This is the word from Paul to the church, "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

The story is told that when Robert Fulton was getting ready to launch the first steamboat up the Hudson River, and it belched a couple of times, someone on the shore was shouting, "He can't start it...he can't start it!"

But then it roared to life, and off it went, and this same person started shouting, "He can't stop it...he can't stop it!"

We all have known people whose gift seems to be 'discouragement'!

I think of a child learning to walk, we hold out our arms, encouraging them, and when they fall down, which is to be expected, we help them up, and encouraging them some more.

Isn't it true that when we live with encouragement, we learn to be confident for taking whatever steps are needed to wherever we are going.

**Authentic.** Listen to how Eugene Peterson translates Paul's words to the Philippian Christians: Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious – the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. (Philippians 4:8a)

I daresay that Eugene Peterson's own life is a definition of 'authenticity' for the Christian faith.

Sad to say that he has entered into Hospice Care, but this Presbyterian minister brought an authentic faith to so many people through his Bible translation, "The Message," his books on ministry and spirituality, and his own life.

I recommend you look up the YouTube conversation he had about the Psalms with Bono of the rock group U2.

What we can learn from him is that authenticity is not a style.

Authenticity is not found in our favorite kind of music or the architecture of a church. Authenticity is not found in robes or liturgy or grammatically correct bulletins!

Authenticity is found in the people gathered together around the communion table:

- who experience the promise of God in and with the community of faith for faithful living,
- who experience the lordship of Christ as a community of hope for a hope-starved world,
- and who experience brotherly and sisterly life in the Spirit as a community of love in a fear-filled world.

As Eugene Peterson says, “It is not so much by what we do or say to one another but in the way we are when we meet one another... to plunge us into the depths of love.”

It means discovering your own unique set of skills and abilities and using them to make the world as much better as you possibly can.

It means finding what you do best and doing it with all the commitment and energy you can muster: a passionate commitment to the truth, in what we do, what we say, and in our relationships with others.

When we are true to ourselves, we cannot be false to anyone else.

### **Doing Risky, Encouraging, Authentic...**

**Ministry.** Timothy, the young minister in the New Testament is told to “...keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.” (2 Timothy 4:5)

Imagine being able to easily put your intentions into action. Imagine being able to maintain a clear sense of purpose and a rock-solid focus.

When you are aware of the impact you have on everything that touches your life, your life and the life of this congregation are opened to the beautiful, overwhelming abundance of positive possibilities.

Again, from the Pastor Nominating Committee as they say in the Ministry Information Form that candidates are reading: “We as a congregation are excited to build on the work we have done and to share the bounty with which we have been blessed.”

You have several choices for your ministry with your financial commitment, your faith commitment.

This is a time that you are making decisions about stepping up to new levels of commitment to confront the opportunities and challenges of our day.

You can choose to do the easiest thing or choose to do "what everybody else does", or you can choose to “discharge all the duties of your ministry.”

**DREAM** – Doing Risky, Encouraging, and Authentic Ministry!

Comfort and convenience can lead to complacency. Dreams and visions lead to proactive, mission-driven living.

That’s the story we need to be telling, living God’s dream.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.