

Below is a copy of an article written by Ken Garfield for a weekly e-newsletter to his conference, written after the Day of Learning event on March 3:

I gave a talk on church communications to 125 clergy and other staff members in Goldsboro , but it was the haunting words of one pastor that I carried home with me from eastern North Carolina .

The theme of the program was the importance of telling our stories to the congregation and community, that we must go beyond publicizing events and celebrate our people and ministries with warmth and depth. Pulling a page from Myers Park United Methodist Church : Don't just share the date and time of the first meeting of the widows' support group (ours is Sisters of Ruth). Share the tears of the widow whose pain inspired the creation of the group. The other main point of my day-long sermon was this: We all can tell our stories regardless of the size and wealth of our congregation. If you have to, circulate that powerful story on a mimeographed sheet of paper that you hand out after worship.

My friend in the front row, though, wasn't encouraged.

Near the end of the program, just before the women of the country church served barbecue sandwiches, he shared a lament that I'm afraid too many pastors take to heart: How can I tell our stories, he asked, when our church has to go to the funeral home to make copies? Some churches, he said, can't even afford Internet service at the office, the pastor has to go online at the parsonage. What's a church like this to do?

I worry that his melancholy hovers like a fog over his ministry, clouding his ability to reach people in all sorts of ways. I worry that my friend isn't alone, that other preachers who must toil with few financial resources allow that reality to drain them of passion, energy and the creativity to get the job done. If a lack of money keeps a pastor (and a church) from telling its stories, what's next? No resources for Vacation Bible School books and posters, so no Vacation Bible School ? Not enough money in the missions budget, so no more mission trips?

The other clergy at the conference assured me that I had I made my point: We all can communicate to the best of our financial ability. But I'm haunted

by the plaintiveness of my friend, and by my fear that other congregations allow themselves to be crippled.

Listen! Mainstream, mainline churches – many of them United Methodist – are losing members and, thus, money. It's not likely to get any better in these crisis-ridden times. How can we convince searchers and seekers that we are vibrant, hopeful places if we are neither vibrant nor hopeful?

We may not be able to do much about our financial vibrancy. But we must never, ever lose our hope. Even if we have to run to the funeral home to run off copies of that great story sure to touch hearts.