

May 15, 2020

Don't Push Send

*This is a story, a very sad tale
Of intrigue, romance and electronic mail
A dangerous form of information
And the perils of instant gratification
How many times did I hit my Mac
Want to crawl inside and take the whole thing back
But it's no use say it again and again
Don't push send."*

—Carrie Newcomer “Don't Push Send” from her album *The Geography of Light*

Every three years clergy need to attend a Boundaries Training in order to keep our ministerial credentials up to date. Recently, I did just that. The workshop explored the meaning and practice of healthy boundaries in the context of ministry. The materials identified the signs, dangers and preventions of boundary violations, including those in today's social media. The workshop began with an assumption that the complexity of relational dynamics in the congregation is one of its greatest possibilities and its greatest challenges for ministry.

During the session on social media, I was reminded of the Carrie Newcomer song “Don't Push Send.” As the song indicates, a great deal can go wrong with email. It also reminded me that at one time Plymouth had a document that outlined email etiquette. Here are some of the suggestions:

- Email works well as a medium for sharing documents, scheduling meetings or providing quick updates about how things are going. Email is not a good medium for conflictual or relational communication.
- Pay attention to “reply all” and use sparingly. “Reply all” is the source of a good deal of offense being given and taken.
- Avoid using ALL CAPS. Bold features just make people sound loud and maybe angrier than a person intends.
- Keep your e-mail message short and to the point. Use the ten-sentence rule. If it takes more than this, make a phone call.
- When sending e-mails to multiple recipients please use the BCC (blind carbon copy) field. This limits the access of potential spammers to e-mail addresses. Insert your own e-mail address into the TO field to prevent e-mail showing as having undisclosed recipients.
- Do not use BCC to hide that you are secretly sharing an email to a wider audience.
- If individuals are discourteous in the emails they send to you, put them on your spam list or delete their emails. They are abusing a privilege. They will need to contact you via some other medium.

I encourage us to adopt these best practices (again). They make for a healthy and vibrant congregation!

Paula