



the Rev. Sara Dingman

- Born and raised in Sioux Falls, South Dakota
- Graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary
- In final phase of Doctor of Ministry program at McCormick Theological Seminary (thesis topic: presbytery revitalization)
- Has served in the Church (South Dakota, Taipei, New York City, Edinburgh, Nebraska)
- Has served in the Presbytery (COM, CPM, Council, GA commissioner)
- Has served in the Synod (synod staffing task force, Heartland Resource Network, COM & CPM training facilitator, Quad Presbytery, Synod School teacher & worship leader)
- Currently serves in Omaha, Nebraska as Interim Presbyter of Missouri River Valley (9000 members, 51 churches)
- Enjoys being an aunt, travelling, outsider art, playing soccer, gardening and all dogs (especially Labradors)

When asked to share her vision of the 21st century Church, Sara wrote:

I'm a visual person. When I think of the 21st century Church I see a globe that's spinning toward the global South – because this is “their” century after all – this is where the Church is bursting open and coming to life. It may not be Presbyterian, but it is the Church. What can we learn from this?

I see the globe spinning to Italy, where Pope Francis is taking a selfie with his Smartphone and giving children a ride in the pope-mobile. In the flash of a moment he has brought the Roman Catholic Church out of its stone buildings and into the public (and virtual) square as the world watches with delight. Pope Francis has just used technology to reach a new generation and *connect a branch of the Church to the world* - but it's his human acts of justice, kindness and humility which matter the most to people. Love and grace are the real connectors here.



The 21st century Church's boundaries are being pushed like never before. (Some of its hot buttons are too.) This stretching is painful – it strains and it hurts. But as the Church becomes more flexible and agile, it *will* gain new momentum. The 21st century Church will build healthy muscle memory even as it blazes new neural pathways. Bursts of fresh air will energize and sustain the Church as it strives for *nothing less than the healing of the nations*.

If a 77-year-old pope can do it, why can't we?

I see the 21st century Church moving forward with fewer fixed structures and more mobile, modular networks. Form will follow function. A lighter, more permeable structure will help the Church serve Christ in the world. In real time. Polity will demonstrate a preference for “both/and” over “either/or.” Praxis will too: high-tech *and* high-touch, virtual *and* incarnational, viral *and* local. The 21st century Church will be spiritually alive, broadly inclusive and growing in mission.

This is *a crux moment* for the Presbyterian Church (USA) - when all that we've known - and much of what we've relied on to define us - is shifting. New congregational leaders will help us repurpose some of the symbols and structures we've 'always' had. Borders, budgets, buildings - somehow these three staked their claim on *us* during the previous century - when we thought it was the other way around! This century, I believe, will be about the hard but crucial work of *dismantling the sense of privilege* that our Church has known for so long. This privilege runs deep in the Presbyterian's veins, yes?



This is *a kairos moment* for the Presbyterian Church (USA). In all the stretching that is going on in virtually every church and every presbytery, something holy is taking shape. As we lean into more collaborative ministries, and lean on the human resources of one another, *we will be changed*. Picking up where our predecessors have left off, we will journey forward in faith. Yes there is ambiguity. And anxiety. And yes, there is grief. But there is also Possibility. There is certainly Hope. Even now the Holy Spirit is blowing on the coals of our congregations. Something sacred will emerge.