

A quick, productive labor

By [David Williams](#)

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"It's all about the process," I hear, over and over again, from my oldline comrades.

This is a familiar refrain amongst us Presbyterians in particular, from pretty much every corner of the fading denominational churches. We gather to discuss. We meet to talk. We convene and review and analyze and evaluate. We make process our goal. And we assume, as we take forever to do anything, that this is all well and good, because it's the process that counts.

This just ain't right.

Because process does not exist for the purposes of process. It exists to serve a purpose. And as such, endless process is a sign that something's wrong.

I offer into evidence the last meeting at my little church. After conversation and prayer, one of our members had indicated she was ready to serve as an elder, and we needed a formal congregational meeting to elect her.

The session called the meeting, and we announced it well ahead of time. There's a particular pattern to these things, specific protocols that must be pursued, and we diligently followed said protocols. We began with prayer, held a vote to appoint a clerk for the meeting, and read the call of the meeting. We declared an official quorum. The agenda for the meeting was presented and approved. We received a motion to elect, which was seconded and then voted on. We received a second motion, this one to adjourn, which was approved by consensus. And we closed with prayer.

The whole event took two minutes and 24 seconds—badda bing, badda boom—which may or may not be a record for a Presbyterian congregational meeting.

Because most meetings are like labor. They are a point of decision, a point of crisis, when something is decided and a new reality is born. Sure, we could have drawn it

out. Most opening prayers last longer than that meeting.

But a long meeting was not necessary.

We oldliners often confuse our points of decision with gestation, the time during which a new thing is growing to fruition. That happens in conversations, as new things grow from the seed of a dream or a vision. That's the time to be patient, to attend to doing things in their own time. Similarly, overcoming conflict or trauma requires time and sustained relationship. Mutual change requires trust. It is not procedural. It is the long conversation, the prayerful study, the shared worship.

When we gather to decide, it must be when the decision-time is ready.

This is why no one ever, ever tells a pregnant woman: "I really hope you have a long, complicated, multi-stage labor. It's so important to attend to the process."

Because if you confuse the fierce, purposeful immediacy of labor with the organic patience of gestation, and stretch out the process of birthing endlessly, you are misplacing your energies. You put both mother and child at risk.

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