



Are You in the Loop?

Best Practices for
Staying Connected
to PW

BY SHELDA WILLS

Presbyterian Women (PW) is a connectional organization. PW exists at the congregational, presbytery, synod and national levels. The true lifeline of keeping PW groups and individuals at all these levels connected to one another is the PW communications loop.

The PW communications loop is a circle. It may not be a perfect circle. Perhaps it's a little oblong, or a little square, or more rectangular in shape, but it's still a circle of sorts, and every woman is part of it. In fact, each individual woman is in the center of a communications loop; that includes each of you as well as me.

Around each of us, we have our congregation PW group, other PW groups in the congregation and our local PW Coordinating Team (CT). Around our local CT, we have our Presbytery CT that helps

us connect with other churches in our presbytery. Around our Presbytery CT, we have our Synod CT that helps us connect with other presbyteries in our synod. Around our Synod CT, we have the Churchwide CT/PW, Inc. Board of Directors that helps us connect with others by providing resources, vision and guidance.

That's five different levels—individuals, congregational CTs, presbytery CTs, synod CTs and the churchwide CT. Each level has a role in the communications loop. Because we are a connectional PW, each level both receives communications from others and shares communications with others—hence the idea of a loop. The loop is not a one-way street. It's meant to be a living, responsive network of information that flows from one person to another, one church to another, one presbytery to another, etc.

Messages and Mediums

The loop helps us stay up-to-date and informed about everything from events and programs to resources and activities. It helps us learn from one another through leadership development and training. The loop helps us work together for justice, peace and mission, not only in our local communities, but also all over the world. A strong communications loop means that details about ways to participate in PW are shared with all interested in PW. The loop isn't just information but also support and encouragement. If the loop is healthy, then our PW organization is healthy.

Various communication formats make up the PW communications loop. Many of PW Churchwide's core resources are printed—*Horizons* magazine, the PW/*Horizons* Bible study, Birthday and Thank Offering materials and Annual Mission Fund appeals. Other publications like *PW NewsBytes* (PW's newsletter) or *PW Essentials* (the newest incarnation of the PW Manual) are digital (but easily printable and shareable!). PW groups and individuals at all levels use emails, texting, social media such as Facebook, or websites to communicate. However, we must remember that not everyone is digital. Many PW groups also use phone trees or printed newsletters because everyone does not have internet access. We must be inclusive and intergenerational. We do not want to leave anyone out of the loop.

Sometimes the best form of communication is face-to-face—talking to one another one-on-one or in a group, such as during a coordinating team meeting, an annual gathering or even more casual settings like church coffee hour. However, we must be sure that the other person understands what we are saying. When dealing with printed or electronic materials, we can usually go back and review what we have read, but that's not the case with verbal communication. Something may interfere with the verbal message we're attempting to share.

Clarity and Confirmations

A typical communications loop consists of four basic elements—sender, message, receiver and feedback.

To be true communication, information must connect with the receiver. A connection has been made when there is some kind of response from the receiver.

The response may be some feedback or some type

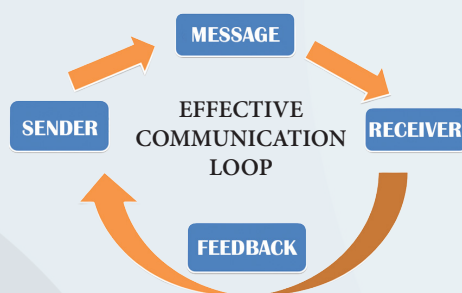
of action. However, we must remember that something may interfere with the message. If so, the feedback may be a confused look on the receiver's face. Perhaps there is static on a phone call, other people may be talking to the individual while we are talking, so our receiver does not get a clear signal.

Semantic noise is a journalistic term that refers to interference that leads to misinterpretation. You're likely familiar with this concept if you played the "telephone" game as a child. One person whispers something to another person, and that person whispers the message they heard to the next person, down the line to many individuals. By the time it reaches the last person, it may not sound anything like the original message. Perhaps someone either dropped part of the message or decided to embellish the message just a bit. One way or another, the message gets changed.

Semantic noise can also occur when the sender and the receiver do not share the same understanding of a word or phrase. I remember a journalism textbook included a cartoon depicting an adult saying to two children, "John is a giant." That's it: just "John is a giant." One child's thought bubble shows a huge, tall person—a giant. The other child visualizes a person wearing a uniform with the word "Giants" on it—a member of a sports team. That silly example demonstrates how two people can receive the exact same message but understand it differently.

Fine Tuning the Message

Remember trying to use a hula hoop? A hula hoop is great as long as it's circling our waist. However, when we begin to get tired it starts to wobble and is in



danger of falling to the ground. To keep it in place, we must adjust our body movements. The same is true when we're talking to someone. We may have the correct information, but when we begin to share it, we may need to adjust how and what we say so that the information is understood. We may even need to repeat ourselves to be sure our message has been heard.

Information in the PW communications loop can be shared downwards, starting anywhere on the chain from national to synod to presbytery to congregation to an individual. It can also be shared upwards, from an individual to congregation to presbytery to synod to the national. Communications can

(and do) originate at any level. What is most important is that the information is correct and that it is shared in a timely fashion.

Each of us has the responsibility to keep PW's communications loop strong. We keep it strong by following a few guidelines. We need to pass along information we receive. We cannot let information stop with us. We need to stay connected in every way possible. We need to listen or read carefully to what is being said or written so that we truly understand. If we don't understand, we should ask questions to help us understand. We need to be willing to provide feedback. If something works, we must let our leaders know that it works. By the same token, if some-

thing does not work, we must let our leaders know that as well. If we abide by and follow these guidelines, our communications loop will do what it is supposed to do.

The loop shares what PW does with, and for, women everywhere. Our PW Purpose contains action phrases such as "we commit," "we nurture," "we support," "we work," "we build," "we strengthen," "we witness." Participants in Presbyterian Women can do all these things with an effective PW communications loop. We are connected. We are all in this loop together! 🍷

Shelda Wills serves as the PW Board of Directors Representative for the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic.



We'll see you there!

Pam Snyder, 2024-2027 PW Moderator
Kelsey Law, 2024-2027 PW Vice Moderator

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

2027 Churchwide Gathering of Presbyterian Women

The 2027 Churchwide Gathering will be an exciting faith-filled time for Presbyterian women to gather for worship, education, community building, fun and renewal.

August 5-8, 2027

Save the date and stay tuned!

presbyterianwomen.org/gathering