

Yellowstone Currents
A Newsletter of Yellowstone Presbytery
December 2018

You never know where your resources are going to come from!

I didn't have a lot of news for the Currents this month. Then Dan Holland sent in creative ideas for presbytery giving. And Garrett Mostowski offered his inspiration for a new program that First Presbyterian Church in Miles City is beginning called "Communities of Belonging." I'm grateful to them both for sharing.

As we enter December, we enter a sacred but busy season! May Jesus surround us all with his grace and peace and presence each moment as we celebrate his coming.

O Holy Child of Bethlehem,
Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in:
Be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell:
O come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Emmanuel.

-Phillips Brooks

Youth Ski Retreat 2019

Junior and Senior High youth will gather at First Presbyterian Church in Butte for the 2019 Ski Retreat. Many thanks to the folks in Butte for your wonderful hospitality!

Date: February 22-24, 2019

Location: First Presbyterian Church Butte

Arrive: Friday, February 22 after 6:00 p.m.

Ski: Saturday at Discovery Ski Area

Depart: Sunday, February 24 after worship

Brochures and registration forms will be available in January.

Upcoming Events

Jan. 10 Pastoral Ministry Team FPC Bozeman 10am – 3pm

Feb. 22-24 Winter Youth Retreat FPC Butte

March 8-9 Presbytery Meeting FPC Billings

March 14 Pastoral Ministry Team FPC Billings 10am – 3pm

Presbytery Meetings for 2019:

March 8-9 FPC Billings

Tis the Season (for Giving) by Dan Holland

Last month we mentioned our next column would contain ideas for ways to help finance the vital ministries provided by Yellowstone Presbytery. We certainly don't want to disappoint you by going back on our word, but by the same token we realize that everyone gets bombarded with requests for contributions at this time of year. So consider this as less of a year end appeal and more of a series of suggestions on how to be more giving.

Be Creative and Have Fun: When our Presbytery held its spring meeting in Harlowton last May, we observed a very clever fundraising program. The church had a surplus of mismatched coffee cups, so we were urged to buy one of the cups, use it throughout the two day meeting, and then take it home with us. The proceeds from these sales were then used to help fund one of their mission projects. From our viewpoint this would qualify as a win-win-win. The church gets rid of a bunch of excess coffee cups; the church adds unexpected monies into its outreach programs; and now when we drink from our Harlow cups we get to pray for our sisters and brothers in Wheatland County. This is small taste of how you can put the 'fun' in fundraising.

IRA Rollover Gift: Let's face it, our demographic is an older one, and many of our parishioners are over 70½ years of age. As a result those folks are subject to the IRS' required minimum distribution (RMD) rules for their Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs). A unique aspect of these same rules allow the owner of the IRA to send their distribution directly to a charitable organization (say, for example, Yellowstone Presbytery) without having to count the distribution as part of their gross income. They wouldn't get a deduction for that same money, but under the new tax law some folks won't be able to itemize their federal deductions anyway. So it's yet another win-win.

Gift of Securities: The stock market has been a roller coaster ride this fall, but for the most part it has seen a significant up-swing over the last few years. That obviously means there are significant capital gains residing in many folks' portfolios. The prospect of paying tax upon the liquidation of these holdings gives many of these same people pause. But wait, there is a mechanism available to circumvent the capital gains tax. If you give the stock directly to the charitable organization, then not only do you avoid paying tax on the gain, but you also get a charitable deduction for the fair market value of the stock holding. Space doesn't allow us to print how many wins that is.

Life Insurance Gift: Do you have one of those old life insurance policies laying around that is literally just sitting there doing nothing? Many of them have a small cash balance inside the policy earning next to nothing. Put that money to work by giving it to the charitable organization of your choice (we have suggestions for potential recipients.)

Charitable Bequest: This may seem like a no-brainer, but many folks neglect to specify charitable organizations in their wills. They assume their beneficiaries will continue to give in the same manner they did. As we know, that is not always the case, so taking time now to memorialize those bequests will help insure your favorite ministries will continue long after you have joined the church eternal.

We hope this has given you food for thought. We also wish you the most joyous of Advents, and we give Thanks for your Giving.

What is new around Yellowstone Presbytery?

The First Presbyterian Church in Miles City is beginning to form small groups called “Communities of Belonging.” With permission, we are reprinting Pastor Garrett Mostowski’s church newsletter article that introduces “Communities of Belonging.”

From the Pastor’s Study—September

You’ve probably met and know other people who follow Jesus or go to church, especially if you are reading this...And maybe they have found healing through the church they were a part of and the people they met. How many of us could say we are one of those people? We found healing through our church. We found community here. We found a place to belong, no matter who we are and what weird quirks we bring along with us.

I have it on good authority that many of you in the church read *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* by Kara Powell. If you are like me and haven’t read the book, don’t worry, my wife, Sarah, has offered us all a brief summary:

1. **Unlock Keychain Leadership:** Keychain leaders entrust others with access and authority. They empower all generations including teens and emerging adults with their own metaphorical “set of keys” to help influence and shape the direction of the church.
2. **Empathize with Today’s Young People:** This means “feeling with young people” as they grapple with doubts of their faith and answer questions of identity, belonging, and purpose; as they experience divorce and the self-absorbed adults around them; and as they act out a desire for connection through social media.
3. **Take Jesus’ Message Seriously:** One young interviewee said, “The goal for our church is not really effectiveness with young people, but serving and following Jesus. And young people like me are attracted to churches that want to do that.”
4. **Fuel a Warm Community:** “Warm is the new cool” in these congregations, where authenticity triumphs over worship style or a multitude of programs. Be welcoming, foster belonging, try to accept others no matter what, be hospitable, and be caring.
5. **Prioritize Young People (and Families) Everywhere:** As one pastor put it, “Everyone rises when you focus on young people.” Involving young people in every ministry has allowed these churches to thrive with authenticity and intergenerational relationships.
6. **Be the Best Neighbors:** The authors found that in churches growing young, the community accepts the difficult task of offering young people a thoughtful path to neighboring well. They provide opportunities for teens and emerging adults to serve others, pursue social justice, find their calling, interact with popular culture, and respond to heated cultural issues.

Here are a few more of their findings worth pointing out: Young people regularly expressed their desire for relationships, not just with young youth leaders but, with more seasoned leaders, as well; U.S. teens are not hostile towards religion, but they do not care much about it either; Churches that successfully engage students don’t water down the gospel or the cost of following Jesus; Rather than merely inviting students to *volunteer*, youth-focused churches help students *participate* in the life of the church; The highest response of what kept young people in church was personal relationships and warmth; Churches that are growing young genuinely prioritize young people and their interests in programs, budget, participation, and emphasis.

What if I told you that every single one of us—every single Christian—owes their faith to a single small group of ordinary, if not lackluster, people? Some had families that they raised. Some did not. Some had spouses. Some did not. Some wore white-collars. Some wore blue. Some were teenagers. Some were mature adults. Some were foolish. Some were wise. All of them committed to gathering together in a community. All of them committed to creating a space where people belong. The results are immeasurable.

What if I told you, too, that Jesus set the example for the findings laid out in Kara Powell's book *Growing Young*? Jesus fueled a warm community. Why do you think he had so many followers (Acts 2)? Jesus unlocked keychain leadership. Do you remember when he sent his disciples out two by two (Luke 10)? Jesus empathized with everyone. Do you remember the story of the woman at the well (John 4)? Jesus prioritized young people. Do you remember Jesus saying, "Let the little children come to me?" (Matthew 19). Jesus must have been a wonderful neighbor (Matthew 22).

Can you remember why you started coming to church? Who made you feel that you belonged? Who handed you the keys of leadership? Who passed the mantle on to you? One of the elders in my home church, Todd, invited me and some of my friends to watch Jackie Chan movies with him and some of his friends, then he invited us to help pull weeds at the church and mow, since no one was signing up to help him at all. We took frisbee breaks in between our chores. Afterward, he asked us if we would be ushers on Sundays, since, again, no one was signing up to help him. Another elder, Bob, wanted to know if my friends and I would like to go to Michigan with him. He said he was headed there to run some errands and see some family and friends. He said he could use the company on the drive and was willing to drop us at the ski resort that was nearby, so long as our parents were ok with that. He didn't ski with us, since, as he put it, "My skiing days are past me." Another elder, Cookie, asked me if I'd like to join her small group. She had agreed to lead a study on the Book of Esther, which she admitted she had never read. She said she had invited another one of my friends, a few older teenagers, two young families, and two or three elders. There were eleven of us in the group, ranging from twelve to sixty-two. We met each Wednesday evening and shared a meal, read the bible, discussed, and prayed.

I haven't quit going to church since these experiences. That was twenty years ago. I'm sure you all have similar stories. Maybe your grandmother invited you to one of the groups that met. Maybe your elders showed you how to participate in the life of the church. Maybe a friend invited you and you felt as if you belonged. Maybe you've never been part of a small group but have another story of another way that you were invited into the church. Whatever the case, it's our turn to be the grandmothers and grandfathers inviting grandchildren to participate in the life of the church, it's our turn to be elders teaching young people how to lead in church and how to participate in its life, whether that is pulling weeds or fixing doors or passing offering plates or tagging along on a ride to some other state. It's our turn to be the friend inviting friends along to a community where they can belong and lead and thrive.

Friends, it's our turn to continue building a church here in Miles City. Praise God we inherited a beautiful building.

Every single person I have asked, "What do you love most about First Presbyterian Church Miles City?" has responded, "The people." When my friends and family ask me why I felt called to a church in Montana, I say, "The people," and when they respond immediately asking me if the people are worth enduring the weather, I say, "Absolutely." You all are so generous, loving, accepting, and caring that I can't help asking you to organize into small groups—Communities of Belonging (CoBs)—not only so that we can pour into one another but, so that we can find a space to invite others along. Those who may need a place to belong.

Jesus and his disciples created the first community of belonging. They ate together. They went to weddings together and drank together. They walked and worked together. They prayed together. They learned and served together. They engaged their world together and sought to create change. Then, they multiplied. And, here we are. Here I am, writing. Here you are, reading. And I don't know what our CoBs will do with one another. My hope is that we will eat, laugh, cry, pray, chat, and beyond that, I'll let God guide us all.

CoBs are forming for this Fall. We have a few brave leaders who have so kindly agreed to journey with me through all the disorganization and anxiety and awkwardness of starting these. If you are interested in joining a group email me or call me or text me or come see me in my office or Facebook me. Whatever you need to do.

Yellowstone Presbytery Clusters

Our clusters typically meet each month. If you have not been a part of a cluster and would like to explore the idea of joining in, please contact one of the following coordinators.

Miles City Cluster - Neva Rathbun (msrev@midrivers.com)
Billings Cluster – Dave Thompson (pastordave@fpcbillings.org)
Butte Cluster - Teresa Kendall (teresakendall@mac.com)
White Sulphur Cluster - Debbie Funke (funkepastor@yahoo.com)

Remember our Round of Prayer as we keep our churches, ministries, and leaders in prayer:

Sunday, Dec. 2: Rev. James Bell, Honorably Retired, Laurel
Sunday, Dec. 9: First Presbyterian Church Lewistown, Pastor Diane White
Sunday, Dec. 16: First Presbyterian Church Poplar, Pastor Susan Ennis
Sunday, Dec. 23: First Presbyterian Church Billings, Pastor David Thompson
Tuesday, Dec. 25: CHRISTMAS! CELEBRATE THE LORD'S BIRTH!
Sunday, Dec. 30: First Presbyterian Church, White Sulphur Springs, Pastor Wenda Fry

Please send news and announcements to Susan Thomas at ckochner@mcn.net.