

Yellowstone Currents

A Newsletter of Yellowstone Presbytery

August 2018

As the sun pours forth its life that we on this earth may live,
may I pour forth my life this day in service to others and in love of you, my beloved God.
Remind me in countless ways as I walk the sunlit hours of this day that I am on a sacred journey;
along with the stars traveling through space, I am on a pilgrim path.

a brief excerpt of a “Wednesday Morning Prayer” by Edward Hays
from his book *Prayers for a Planetary Pilgrim*

Report from General Assembly in St. Louis

John Patterson’s ‘TOP 10’ from having attended the 223th General Assembly as a Ruling Elder Commissioner from Yellowstone Presbytery.

- 1) **To have seen that the PCUSA, rather than dying, is very much alive and well** – That, indeed, we’re reforming for the 21st century under the inspiring and certainly motivating leadership from our new Stated Clerk J. Herbert Nelson. It’s apparent we’re getting beyond being an ‘institution’ that only worships together on Sunday morning - as we deal with issues like gender identity, gun violence, suicide, climate change, racial and social injustice among others. For us to be vital congregations we need to. And, the PCUSA is there to help and support us.
- 2) **To have shared the experience with 2,000-3,000 other Presbyterians** – Commissioners and advisory delegates, staff, registered observers (like my wife Judy) and over 1000 volunteers from St. Louis. We are a ‘connectional church.’ WE are the PCUSA.
- 3) **To have experienced and shared wonderful Worship, music and Communion** with a diverse group of speakers, musicians and worshippers in different styles and languages.
- 4) **To have been part of the election and installation of our new Co-Moderators:** ruling elder Vilmarie Cintron-Olivieri and teaching elder Cindy Kohlman both of whom are excited to be helping lead us as Co-Moderators during the next two years.
- 5) **To have had the experience of being on the Social Justice Issues Committee** – discussing numerous resolutions such as: ‘On Celebrating the Gifts of People of Diverse Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities in the Life of the Church,’ a ‘Declaration on Where We Stand Regarding Concerns About Direction Towards Autocracy That This Country Is Taking,’ ‘Responding to Racist Nationalism,’ and ‘On the Degradation of Civil Discourse’ among others. Quoting Kathy Goodrich – I literally had to ‘listen in stereo’ to the two or more sides of an issue as I tried to discern the will of God.
- 6) **To have been a voting Commissioner in the plenary sessions** where final discussion and voting is done on the many reports, recommendations and resolutions that come before the GA. And, where all the commissioners and advisory delegates really do have a chance to participate. The experience included being with fellow Presbyterians who felt their church – the PCUSA - important enough to stay until after midnight on Friday evening to finish up the work before us.

7) **To have experienced more of the connectional church in the Exhibit Hall** – where my wife, Judy, and I got a chance to visit and talk with folks at some of the more than 110 Exhibits related in one way or another to the PCUSA. It turns out there are real people at places like the Presbyterian Mission Agency, the Presbyterian Foundation and others....!

8) **To have been involved in my first Social Activism march**, as part of the first time GA ‘Hands and Feet Initiative’ which took social activism into the streets of St. Louis both before and during the GA. Hundreds of us marched to the St. Louis Justice Center, led by Cindy Kohlman, one of our Moderators and J. Herbert Nelson, our Stated Clerk. The cause was to ‘End Cash Bail’ which keeps the poor in jail and their workhouse for minor offenses because they and their families can’t afford relatively low amounts bail. Those attending GA donated more than \$42,000 toward paying cash bail for inmates.

9) **To have experienced and rejoiced in the diversity of ages, gender identity and color that is the PCUSA.**

10) **To now have had the opportunity to share with you – Yellowstone Presbytery** – a bit of the experience of being at General Assembly. I hope you’ve gotten a glimpse of how we’re part of something much bigger than we see here - the PCUSA which is, indeed, very much alive and well and reforming for the 21st Century....!

Tamara Lucht, John Patterson and Dick Davis representing Yellowstone Presbytery



General Assembly Plenary Session



Thank you, John, for your service and for this report!

Westminster Spires 2018

The 2018 camp season at Westminster Spires concluded on July 27. Campers came from Anaconda, Billings, Butte, Decker, Dillon, Hysham, Manhattan, Alexandria, Virginia and Lynnwood, Washington. We were blessed once again with a very experienced staff of leaders and counselors. Our amazing cook Bill Scott completed his tenth and last season at Westminster Spires. We are so grateful for his service and care of campers and he will be deeply missed.

We had eight campers for Elementary Camp, seventeen for Junior High and eleven for Senior High. Teaching was provided by George Goodrich for the first two camps and Katie Emery and Will Johnson led the Senior High Camp. The four Whitworth Fellows participated in all or parts of the camp season and were a great addition to the staff.

Many thanks to all for your prayers and financial support in helping campers attend camp at Westminster Spires.

Thanks to Curt Kochner for this report!

Sally Ralston Retirement

Congratulations to Sally Ralston on her retirement from ministry, most recently serving Presbyterian and Methodist parishes in Drummond, Hall, and Philipsburg. Thank you, Sally, for your service to Christ and Christ's people in these communities! May God refresh, guide, and bless you in this next season of your journey with Christ, in your time with family, and in each day's opportunities.

from George and Kathy on behalf of all of us in Yellowstone Presbytery

Israel Pilgrimages

Dave Thompson and George and Kathy Goodrich recently returned from trips to Israel. George and Kathy traveled with a group from Whitworth University and Dave Thompson led a group from First Presbyterian, Billings. Dave's reflections were included in the July issue of Currents. This month we include the following reflections from Kathy and George:

Someone has said that we are separated from people in history by time and place. Going to the place that others have lived brings us closer to them and to understanding their context, leaving only the one dimension of separation: time. This was true for us during our visit to Israel and Palestine during May and June of this year. Jesus... His contemporary followers... His detractors... His story – and those stories of other Biblical figures were suddenly alive in our imagination in the places they lived.... We could “see” Jesus preaching the Sermon on the Mount *on the mount*; Jesus healing Peter's mother-in-law *in Peter's house*; Jesus walking the streets of Magdala with Mary Magdalen in Magdala; Jesus speaking to the crowds from Peter's boat *on the sea of Galilee*; Jesus teaching in the synagogue of Capernaum *in Capernaum*; Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane *in the Garden of Gethsemane*; John baptizing Jesus in the Jordan *by the Jordan River*; Golgotha *at Golgotha*; the empty tomb *at the probable empty tomb*.

No longer separated by distance or place, our perspectives changed. Names of previously unseen and uninteresting towns in the Bible became actual locations – now real on a map and in our hearts. And the people we have long-read about and have tried to learn from in scripture were a full dimension closer to us. Neither of us will read the Bible or preach the same way again.

But there is a second dimension to deal with. Our understanding of the current tensions in Israel and Palestine had been dimmed by separation of place (although we live in the same dimension of time). We had, through our America-based understanding of current events, felt strong compassion and empathy for the Israeli-oppressed Palestinians, sentiments we still strongly hold. We met and had dinner and an evening with Palestinian Christians in Bethlehem. Truly, they are a wrongly oppressed people in need of international support.

But we came to understand the Israeli mindset, too. They are a people who have been conquered by the Babylonians and ruled by the Assyrians; conquered by the Greeks and the Romans; conquered by the Muslims (a couple of times); harassed by the Crusaders and dispersed through the world; oppressed in many homelands and decimated by the holocaust. It is therefore not surprising that Israel will take every precaution to see that they are not oppressed again. Israel deserves a homeland (ask us about that, too). But one would think that their terrible centuries of suffering would sensitize them to the plight of the Palestinians they now control.

Is there hope for this complex situation? We think so. The Old City of Jerusalem is divided into four quarters, very different people with different faiths living in proximity: Christian, Jew, Muslim and Armenian. Sometimes tensions flare and the armed Israeli soldiers are always present. But the Land of Israel is still “Ground Zero” for the love of God introduced into the world in Christ. God's eye is on Israel and Palestine. And so we “pray for the peace of Jerusalem” (Psalm 122:6) – and for all of us.

We look forward to sharing our experiences and perspectives with the leaders and churches of the presbytery. Feel free to be in touch with us further.

Thanks, George and Kathy, for this report!

Upcoming Events

- Aug. 11 Ordination and Installation of Garrett Mostowski, First Presbyterian, Miles City 3 p.m.
Lunch served from 1 – 2:30 p.m. Call 234-4855 for more information and to RSVP for lunch.
- Aug. 31 – Sept. 2 Highland Holy Days at Westminster Spires sponsored by St. Andrew Presbyterian
- Sept. 11 Leadership Cabinet Billings 10 a.m.
- Sept. 13 PMT Bozeman
- Sept. 15 Sexual Misconduct/Boundary Training FPC Billings 10 am – 2pm
- Sept. 29 Sexual Misconduct/Boundary Training FPC Bozeman 10 am – 2pm

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)

Presbytery Meetings for 2018:

Nov. 2 – 3 First Presbyterian, Bozeman

Remember our Round of Prayer

as we keep our churches, ministries, and leaders in prayer:

- Sunday, August 5: Community Presbyterian Church, Jordan
Glacier Presbytery
- Sunday, August 12: Rev. Freeman McCall, Honorably Retired, Dillon
- Sunday, August 19: Community Presbyterian Church of Treasure County, Hysham
- Sunday, August 26: Rev. Susan Thomas, Pastor At-Large, Billings

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