

General Presbyter Report to Yellowstone Presbytery, October 3-4, 2025 Rev. Kathy Goodrich

C.S. Lewis, in 1951, wrote : "Put first things first and we get second things thrown in: put second things first & we lose both first and second things...." From his letter to Dom Bede Griffith.

Luke 2: ⁴³ When the festival was ended and they [Mary & Joseph] started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents were unaware of this. ⁴⁴ Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him...⁴⁹ He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"^[k] ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he said to them...

Mary and Joseph were God-chosen, good, faith-full people. What happened?

Assumptions, living by the patterns and ways that had worked for them, the way they had always done things. They didn't pause and ask THE most important question, "Is Jesus WITH US?" "Are we on the same journey, together?" QUESTION

Our Triune God often acts, works in ways, in timing, that may be unexpected, counter intuitive, even in ways that are not 'reasonable' to us humans!

As Jesus was later to say to his disciples in John 4:34 "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work."

QUESTION: Are you and I, our congregations, our presbytery, open to, seeking to pause and ASK, ARE we WITH JESUS? Are we wanting, are we willing, To discern, to let to and only go and join Jesus where HE leads, in what HE is doing, in the WAYS of Jesus? As we pray in the line near the end of the prayer of confession "that we may delight in YOUR will and walk in YOUR ways".

QUESTION: Are we "Freed and Ignited to Live the Resurrection Life our theme for this conference/meeting?

Take these questions home and ponder, personally, with leaders and groups in your congregation.

*** It's important not to miss the deeper priority and call these questions point us to which CS Lewis summarized in his inimitable way:*

C.S. Lewis, in 1951, wrote: "Put first things first and we get second things thrown in: put second things first & we lose both first and second things...." From his letter to Dom Bede Griffith.

And it's this FIRST thing, this MAIN thing, which, is a prophetic call from God we see repeated in Revelation 2 & 3 in the letters to John's 7 churches.

These were churches who were being and doing a lot of things right. God recognizes what they HAVE done, all they have suffered, endured and persevered through and affirms most of them for a variety of things.

BUT...and this is a pivotal BUT, several of them have serious deficits, omissions, "things they have left undone that they out to have done".

And, it wasn't just anything they messed up on & missed. It was the FIRST thing, the MAIN thing. Which is..?

Revelation letter to church @ Ephesus 2:1-5 "I know your works, your toil and your endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not and have found them to be false. ³ I also know that you are enduring and bearing up for the sake of my name and that you have not grown weary. ⁴ But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the

love you had at first. ⁵ Remember, then, from where you have fallen; repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent...”

Abandoned the FIRST, the MAIN thing, LOVE for God. They are no longer on fire for Christ, out of which everything else flows. Remember Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians in 3: 14-21 rooted and grounded in this love for God out of which flows the love for others and oneself.

As Jesus distilled everything in the 2 Great commandments ³⁰ *you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.* ³¹ *The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’* Mark 12:30, 31.

Letter to church @ Laodicea 3:15, 16 , 20 Note there is NOTHING God commends them for – ouch!

“I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth... ¹⁹ I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent. ²⁰ Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and eat with you, and you with me. ...”

What dilutes, Divides, distracts our body, mind, soul and spirits, resulting in our being lukewarm, half-hearted, distracted from the FIRST thing, the MAIN thing of loving God with our whole being?

Christ wants to give more of Himself to us, to be more for us, and live more in union with us and through us. A longing and love. There is SO much more of ME to know, experience and love, DON’T settle for distractions and mediocrity. And this is HOW we are So like Christ, so overflowing with Christ, one with him that we, that Christ in and through us can touch and transform the world.

ONLY then, will we, in this world where disdain, even hate or rage, revenge, and unforgiveness have become common and idolized, will be people and the body of Christ which embodies the love of Christ, loving those we agree with and those we don’t, known for loving any we might deem other or even enemy.

If someone walked in to a group at your church, into our presbytery meeting and listened to what we say, HOW we say it, how speak of and treat one another, would they our experience love for God? Our Love for one another including in how we differ?

As Jesus gave his new command in John 13:34, 35. *They will know you are my disciples by the love you have for one another.”*

This love is how BOTH loves initially are visible to the watching, lost world.

George and I spoke on this scripture at our first presbytery meeting in 2004 to a divided, sometimes unloving and a divided presbytery. We have seen the Spirit refocus us on the FIRST thing, and as we have sought to keep the Main thing the Main thing, loving God has usually overflowed in love and grace for and with one another.

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” - Matthew 6:33

“Keeping the Main thing the main thing” and it’s Jesus

LC – See their report. It has been a very active time for the LC since May with a wide range of work. Thank you to each of you who are so committed to us all in this role. My Work included camp, many administrative tasks. LC has just elected a Transition Team, see LC report I continue to glean info from other presbyteries and processes compiling input to pass along to resource the presbytery, particularly the LC and Transition Team.

PMT – See their report. Many aspects of matters related to our churches and pastoral leadership and sessions require a large amount of my and other EP's time and energy these days. Pastoral transitions and PNC's active. We welcome Laura Wood and Nicole Melara. Dillon MDP is now active. Pray for Jordan, Big Hole, Pray for our congregations, pastors and CRE's, CRE's

CRE program – our cohort is in their 7th of 8 classes! I gave input to the subgroup of Execs working on a draft CRE process for all of our presbyteries to consider, edit, adapt so there is some similarity. PMT is working on this We stay in conversation. I am getting input from what other presbyteries are adapting to maximize the gifts and possibilities of CRE's.

RepNom – They have been meeting regularly since spring, frequently of late and working hard (amidst challenges in many of their lives and families), seeking input and to discern gifts, calling and leadership opportunities. and I have been meeting with them.

Camping and Youth Ministry Team - see their report. I met with leaders in May and June and at the Ministry Team meeting in September as well, visited during camp and Limitless. God did many wonderful things this summer. Enjoy the stories to be shared at our meeting.

Board of Pensions: I have worked with Christine Long and some of our leaders in BOP on an error that occurred that took some time and energy.

Churches and pastors/CRE's - Make sure there is at least 1 person (an elder and treasurer) in your church who received BOP mailings, stays informed about new developments, offerings and seeks to coordinate with the pastor/CRE and session on these matters.

Funding Presbyteries - Many presbyteries are in financial need and exploring new funding models and options. There is a national TF on this. I have been trying to keep up with these developments.

Global Church – In light of the significant shifts in the strategy, personnel and partnerships at the national level many in our congregations are confused, frustrated, wondering, not knowing how to stay informed or partner. I have been contacted by 2 different groups seeking to build connections, partnerships.

We need to create a TF connect a few people in our churches who are interested in this.

We are part of our Christ's church, local, regional and global. How might we equip, embody and encourage ALL these dimensions, being Christ's "glocal" church?

We, through a letter I received just before presbytery, from Washington Presbytery, received an invitation to explore a partnership with one of the fastest growing regions of Presbyterians in the world, in Ethiopia, a new synod being formed. Seeking a presbytery partner. We are one of the few presbyteries without a global partner.

I hope the presbytery and congregations will explore all the Outreach Foundation offers. Rev. Kimmy Briggs becomes their Associate Director in January.

We are delighted that Paul and Lydia Neshangwe from Zimbabwe are joining us for this presbytery meeting.

Synod – I attended several Synod Staff Forum meetings as well as the Synod meeting September 29 in Denver. Thanks you to our commissioners, Jim and Ashley. All agreed CRE's can work across presbyteries. MANY pastoral and ministry challenges in colleagues' lives and presbyteries. This is not a time in Mid council leadership for the faint of heart or faint of faith.

I received A request from the Korean Church of Bozeman inquiring how to affiliate with the PCUSA. Pastor is member of the Korean Presbyterian Church in his home country. Caroline and I have discussed and she is researching this further before a face to face meeting.

Personal - Prayers welcomed for prioritizing as the work load at this point s far more than even 2 of us could do. And for some health challenges. Gillian and Peter and Ben have moved to Holland, MI where he is pursuing his MDiv at Western Theological Seminary.

Resources and News you may be able to use:

New Barna Data: Young Adults Lead a Resurgence in Church Attendance*

This resurgence has been spreading in the US as well as in the UK and other places. Two primary findings surfacing in the research surfacing lately has been they are experiencing

1. spiritual hunger and curiosity. Andrew Root expresses how transcendence has [almost?] vanished from our western cultures and now this longing in how humans are created is resurfacing.

2. What I like to refer to as *longing for belonging*, for authentic relationships and community, to be connected, seen,

- https://www.barna.com/research/young-adults-lead-resurgence-in-church-attendance/?utm_campaign=14299753-Weekly%20Highlight&utm_medium=email&hsenc=p2ANqtz--7Sg-1L4YJA1yqCl6u9j0ne6FNuuFnyn7uyaSKZEUk5QLZdfgtzFPgafzCzrGJscu50baGo5XEKc5FYMQXn-RcZcLcw&hsmi=379590695&utm_content=379590695&utm_source=hs_email

Other research includes these as well as discovering one's purpose, making a difference.

So... how can we as leaders be preparing, becoming, adapting that we can be the people and church communities which can welcome, truly SEE, listen to the lives, longings, needs and be open in community, groups of all kinds where people are seen & loved, mentoring/discipling relationships?

As one PNC leader in another church & presbytery said to me, "Our younger members and attenders are so hungry to experience and learn about Jesus and have genuine community including intergenerational community...They want to be seen, unity not us focusing on our differences."

Utilizing our buildings and grounds space for mission and partnership – seeking the shalom of our communities

Exploring flexible, Spirit-led mindsets and processes which can spark innovative possibilities for stewarding our buildings and grounds for our vision and mission and seeking the flourishing of our communities and their needs. https://www.ministry-solutions.com/insights/church-growth-strategies-5-ways-to-start-activating-space?utm_campaign=16757870-Activated%20Spaces&utm_medium=email&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-8csi8s59HPELm30zkkOchZuytrQcSbj9sy7ABlkPk-7Wg4vAQbcZ2ZrE1RJVt3plARAK0tuIN9b3DLUuszE-rmFdX8EQ&_hsmi=379595120&utm_content=379594641&utm_source=hs_email

<https://cyclicalfullcircle.com/blog/>

In addition to church planting and revitalization, Cyclical also has an aspect of their work focused on building, more on selling one's building.

Childcare: Serving & connecting with young parents & kids. This group helps a church discern and will work with a church for administration and training

https://www.ministry-solutions.com/insights/using-childcare-to-build-trust-with-the-next-generation-of-families?utm_campaign=16757870-Activated%20Spaces&utm_medium=email&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-9sMGX75LQSFJVQKct3qU5opYSUxi0VS98NmHHD7thwLcNO_cmTpyG_gWGr1IF-nARQQWjZqO8eYZXj2aeYDEdG4iSIVA&_hsmi=379595120&utm_content=379594641&utm_source=hs_email

Learning Our Way Forward, Brief 10 minute podcast with PCUSA pastors Rev. Dr. Tod Bolsinger, & Markus Watson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wq7zILRk8Pc>

Learn how small, daring experiments from the edges can spark meaningful change in your church—without sending everyone into panic mode.

"We recommend that people consider additional, and smaller experiments from the edges that are likely to move the congregation in the direction that it needs to go without being too disruptive."

They discuss this quote from Raymond Chang in this podcast's previous Ep. 164, Building a Future-Focused Church.

THIS EPISODE'S HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

Leaders move congregations forward by initiating small experiments rather than launching large, disruptive initiatives.

Congregations learn and adapt best when leaders guide them through a series of modest, incremental changes.

Leaders invite trust and participation when they approach change as co-learners rather than as experts.

Experimenting at the margins allows churches to discover real community needs [as opposed to what church members may assume] before making significant shifts.

Genuine Spirit led experiments help congregations clarify their direction by focusing on questions and learning rather than predetermined outcomes.