

**PMT's Paths & Processes for calling pastors & lay pastors
from outside the PCUSA in our ongoing, deepening pastor shortage**

QUESTION: What are the challenges, & what may be *God's opportunities and invitations* here to the presbytery & PMT, to churches/sessions/members?

Some Background, Trends and Realities churches seeking pastors/lay pastors face are:

1. There is an ongoing and deepening national pastor shortage in the PCUSA and denominations with which we are in full communion – UCC, RCA and ELCA, as well as a wide range of mainline, semi-mainline denominations as well as the Catholic church.
2. #1 is compounded by the reality that it is increasingly difficult for small churches in rural and/or remote locations to find pastors, and now even lay pastors, who are a good fit for the church and the congregation's needs and mission.
3. There are many demographic, cultural, generational, institutional, spiritual, economic factors involved. At Yellowstone Presbytery, our General Presbyter has never had as many networking requests and contacts, even pleas, from other presbyteries, search committees and headhunters/consultants as we have the last few months. The shortage and desperation are increasing. (This is true for other denominations throughout the Rocky Mountain west as well.)
4. Some churches and denominations are continuing to try to "Canoe the Mountains*" with predictable results, and often a lot of internal blame. More flexible, adaptive churches are gaining. (See excellent book, *Canoeing the Mountains* by Tod Bolsinger. This metaphor identifies the reality, choices, and the need to adapt to God's opportunities in the next season faced by existing churches/leaders in these rapidly shifting times.) The rigidity of some denominations (i.e., the Episcopal church) is resulting in "mostly qualified" pastors becoming discouraged or prevented from serving in many pastoral aspects of smaller churches in towns and rural areas.
5. While searching outside the denomination's CLC system does not guarantee a church will secure pastoral leadership, simultaneous searches for some churches can sometimes yield possible candidates.
6. Of the 22 churches in Yellowstone Presbytery, only eight will have a pastor or CRE/lay pastor as of July 1: Anaconda (CRE), Billings 1st, Bozeman, Butte, Deer Lodge (Interim), Lewistown (CRE), Miles City, and Philipsburg.

QUESTION: Through all this, what may the Holy Spirit be saying and inviting us to? Prayer, continued LIVING our vision and equipping, empowering and encouraging?

In light of the difficult picture all this paints, we in Yellowstone Presbytery and, indeed, across the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) *must*, in addition to our ongoing networking and collaboration with other denominations with whom we are in Full Communion or officially in correspondence with, prayerfully seek new and creative ways to identify pastoral leaders who may come from another background than what we are used to who can serve our churches with "energy, intelligence, imagination, and love." What this might look like will require all of us working within the spirit and provisions of our reformed polity, keeping our Reformed theology, mission, and ecumenical traditions in our sights as we explore and craft processes and paths which can offer those from another background who DO want to join us, a way to do so. This can happen even if the person's background has not followed the traditional routes to pastoral leadership that "we have always done in the PCUSA," or which we have been used to in a world which no longer exists.

There are ways to work with and educate those who have a desire to learn about and understand the Reformed theology, connectional ecclesiology, polity and culture and sense a call to become part of the Presbyterian Church. Yellowstone Presbytery's PMT is not only willing, but also excited, to work with churches to develop ways to smooth the path to pastoral leadership for people who have this sense of call and desire.

Thus, should someone qualify in all of the above, there is a path, processes and requirements which can be put in place that should satisfy both a congregation's needs and the denomination's requirements and Yellowstone Presbytery's needs. The process includes but is not limited to:

- Feeling a sincere call to the PCUSA and a desire to join the PCUSA
- Sensing a call to a church and its ministry, including attendance and participation in the life and work of Yellowstone Presbytery
- Is willing to work with the PMT to fulfill a range of requirements

General Presbyter Kathy Goodrich has been researching this possibility since last summer and found a presbytery who had a person with gifts, a sense of call, and had some history of ministry. The person was also working informally with a particular church/fresh expression/church plant.

The path/process that presbytery followed to train this person well in pastoral leadership was:

1. Pastorally gifted person joined the PCUSA church as a member in which they were already involved;
2. Person studied, accepted a call to become and Elder, and was ordained as an elder;
3. Person entered the presbytery's CRE process & completed it;
4. Person was commissioned to the ministry the Spirit had called them to and continued a fruitful ministry with the church - win/win/win.

Below is the outline Kathy shared with the PMT team, and Stated Clerk Caroline for prayer, discussion, exploration and discernment:

1. A person presents who has researched and read our *PCUSA Constitution (parts 1 and 2)*, sees themselves as being able to affirm our Ordination vows, and is willing to submit to and work with our PMT and its processes

NOTE: PMT is working on what other agreements and conditions need to be expanded here

2. The person would need to join the PCUSA through a local congregation (likely the one to which they are sensing a call and to which the PNC/session and PMT are in full agreement this can go forward)
3. Person will be elected as a Ruling Elder
4. Person will go through the CRE process to become eligible to become a CRE for the congregation
5. Person will commit to attending and taking an active part in the presbytery

There are still questions, possible steps, and details to be explored and crafted together, but PMT is committed to collaborating with each congregation in their particular circumstance as together we seek God's will for God's future and mission of a congregation.