

"In essentials, unity; in differences, liberty; in all things, charity." - Philipp Melancthon, 16th Century Reformer theologian with Martin Luther in Germany, whose home town of Wittenburg we visited on Sabbatical. Wherever we go through the Synod and the denomination, we continue to be proud of our way of life together in Yellowstone Presbytery and the work of unity, collaboration, discipleship and transformation God is working among us.

Sabbatical – We pursued it in three installments:

- A. Discipleship & spiritual formation training with the Imago Christi Movement for four days in January, Richland, WA by the Rev. Dr. Tom Ashbrook, Lutheran pastor, author of Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth. Based on Scripture and the paradigm of phases (mansions) in the writings of Teresa of Avila, ongoing spiritual transformation in Christ-likeness and love relationship with Christ/in Christ is integral for Christians and essential for leaders and the life and ministries of our congregations. Spiritual formation is not something "relegated to one of the aisles in the consumer market," one optional program for leaders or for a few 'spiritual' types. (p. 240) There IS ALWAYS more of Christ to know, love and experience and embody to others. What are practices that nurture this?
- B. Reading, travel in Germany and reflection on three periods of time when the Church was refined and redefined itself in the face of opposition and/or pressure from culture, state and/or church institutions: the Lutheran Reformation, Bonhoeffer and the Confessing Church and German resistance and the Holocaust under the Nazi's, followed by the Church in East Germany enduring of persecution under the USSR. New Testament scholar, Dr. Jim Edwards led this superb Whitworth University trip mid May into early June.
- C. Six weeks in August and September for training, reading and reflection and rest and visiting family; George began his Spiritual Direction Certification Course with Leadership Transformations, Inc. Kathy attended the annual National Association for Marriage and Relationship Education conference and is now a Certified Instructor for 2 Relationship programs/classes ideal for growing in faith as disciples and for outreach and to serve our communities. Equipping kids, teens, and marriages yields startling benefits for years.
- D. Learnings to continually inform and shape us and to share over the next months and years. *One summarizing observation: The work of God through God's people is often difficult and opposed.* Leaders of the East German Church were led to dedicate themselves to 10 years of concentrated prayer, spawning a movement (prayer gatherings, candles, peaceful vigils...) joined by many outside the church. And at the end of 10 years, the wall dramatically came down without bloodshed or violence! Faithful work is often seen in patience, persistence in the face of persecution or suffering, courage and prayer.
- E. We have returned rested, too. "We serve God by taking a rest." Philipp Melancthon.
- F. Thank you! Thank you for this opportunity to pursue a sabbatical; *we strongly encourage our Churches with long-term pastors to explore providing a sabbatical for their pastors. All benefit.*

Vision Development

- A. The Vision Structure Task Force is bringing a report... Visioning is always on going for any ministry or presbytery, but HUGE THANKS to the Vision Structure Task Force!
- B. Helping Churches and Pastors vision and discern God's leading. Also George is making himself available for pastors and sessions to help them discern God's leading through Spiritual Direction (see later section on this).

A Culture of Discipleship and Spiritual Transformation in Yellowstone Presbytery –

- A. Our Vision Statement calls for this to be developed.
- B. Three Pastor Groups in Clusters are engaging in this now: Butte, Billings, and Miles City.
- C. George is willing to meet with interested sessions to help learn more, to develop plans for spiritual growth.
- D. *Engage!* The Evangelism and Church Growth Office in Louisville took our suggestions! They have produced new, user-friendly materials in the form of 3 booklets which are already very popular, heading into 4th printing. Please order and consider using. <http://www.pcusa.org/news/2013/1/9/new-pcusa-curriculum-congregational-minisries-publ/>
Consider having a group join the WEBINAR with Ray Jones (or the replay) Tuesday, October 1, 2013 @ 4 p.m. ET <http://pres-outlook.org/ministry-resources/special-offers/18714-webinar-engage-discipleship.html>

By participating in this webinar you will:

- Strengthen your ability to tell your own stories of transformation and the witness of Scripture
- Identify your spheres of influence, where you can tell those stories and equip the others to do so, too
- Develop a plan to deepen your relationships with God and with others both within and outside the church

Mission and Ministry Priorities – We look forward to working with the Leadership Cabinet to prioritize the presbytery mission for 2014 and beyond. We have tried to think of the best options and God-leavings, and these are included in the VSTF report as “The Fifth Strand.”

Committee on Ministry –

- A. Main actions are the resourcing PNC’s & sessions and calling of new pastors to vacant pulpits.
 - a. Teresa Kendall to Deer Lodge –approved by both presbytery and a unanimous congregational vote. She will attend our Presbytery meeting and Convocation.
 - b. Susan Barnes is in dialogue with St. Andrew. We regret being absent at the October 4 special meeting of presbytery to examine her due to commitment made 9 months ago for an important family wedding and reunion.
 - c. The Lutherans are working on placing a called pastor in the Terry-Fallon partnership. George has met with the session and talked with the Lutheran Bishop’s office.
 - d. Anaconda and Big Hole are launching their search.
- B. West Yellowstone – The separation agreement has been signed and payment of settlement has been received.

Resourcing pastors, leaders and members, churches – Fantastic Opportunities!

- A. WNLT in Jackson Hole, October 9-11 – Keynoters: rev. Dr. John Buchanan and Dr. Richard Mouw.
- B. Glacier-Yellowstone Convocation, November 7-8 in Great Falls – Keynote: Rev. Dr. Steve Hayner, President of Columbia Theological Seminary with many excellent workshops.
- C. PCUSA Evangelism, Discipleship and New Worshipping Community Seminar in Tampa-St. Pete, FL, August 11-15, 2014

In July George was privileged to partner again with Curt Kochner in training our camp staff and to be the Camp Speaker for the Elementary and Senior High Camps at Westminster Spires. Please see Curt’s report

Special Training we have received:

Kathy – How can churches help us grow and LIVE as Christ’s disciples in the places where we spend MOST of our time, at work and at school, in our marriages, families, communities and relationships?

Is now certified to teach either participants or others who want to train to offer - Love Thinks (PICK)/How to Avoid Falling for a Jerk(ette), teaches singles from young teens to adults how to build healthy relationships and how to

follow your heart without losing your mind, as well as a class to equip parents to do this with their own children from an early age;

Marriage LINKS for couples to enrich or restore their love relationship.

- A. George – I have begun training toward my certificate in Spiritual Direction. Eugene Peterson describes spiritual direction: *“Spiritual Direction takes place when two people agree to give their full attention to what God is doing in one (or both) of their lives and seek to respond in faith... whether planned or unplanned, three convictions underpin these meetings: 1) God is always doing something: an active grace is shaping this life into mature salvation; 2) responding to God is not sheer guess work: the Christian community has acquired wisdom through the centuries that provides guidance; and 3) each soul is unique: no wisdom can simply be applied without discerning the particulars of this life, this situation.”*
- a. The program is 2 years long. Five four-day retreats with much reading, writing, practicing, supervision, etc.
 - b. I can begin to work with interested folks now.

Other Service beyond the Presbytery

- A. George continues to serve:
- a. On the Board of Intermountain Children's Services on behalf of the presbytery.
 - b. On the Board of Trustees for Rocky Mountain College.
 - c. On the Synod Staff Forum with other GP's.
 - d. On the MAC Judicatory Heads Forum.
 - e. On the National Planning Team for the PCUSA Annual Evangelism and Discipleship Conf.
 - f. On the planning team for the Glacier-Yellowstone Convocation
 - g. As a retreat speaker. Soon for the Western Colorado Presbytery Pastors Retreat in January or February.
- B. Kathy continues to serve:
- a. On The Board of Trustees of Whitworth University
 - b. On the Synod Staff Forum
 - c. On Intermountain President's Council
 - d. On the PCUSA's Evangelism Network/Advisory Board for Louisville staff in this area.

Personal and Family News:

- A. Daughter Gillian and her husband Peter moved to Boulder, CO a couple weeks ago. He works in Denver. She hopes to enter graduate school in Spanish and Linguistics in the fall of 2014.
- B. Son Chip is in his last year at Whitworth University. He was engaged this week to a wonderful Montana girl and Whitworth student, Staci. They plan to be married at Christmas time. We are very pleased. Pray for them.
- C. George's parents celebrated their 64th anniversary and the family has a reunion at a wedding next month.
- D. Prayers appreciated for Kathy's mom with a tarlov cyst on her spine, facing possible spinal surgery in October.

What we would ask of the Leadership Cabinet:

1. Your prayers for us in Christ's ministry here with you and for the presbytery.
2. Your helping in interpretation, adoption and implementation of the vision and new vision structure.
3. Your working with us prayerfully prioritizing the work of the presbytery and our work to resource, equip, support, pastor.
Your helping us discern when to go part-time.... Perhaps June 2014 at earliest?
4. Your Growth in Christ, encouraging us all to ask, "Am I, are we, growing more like Christ, maturing as a faithful disciple(s) and disciple communities of Christ, joining Christ in Christ's mission?"

Parker Palmer – "We teach who we are."