

What we are all doing here?: At the beautiful Easter Service in Hysham, we were **about** to baptize a baby boy. His older sister (about 5 years old), spoke up to explain, “Mommy says, “M” is like a baby calf and we are putting God’s brand on him!” To all of you pastors and leaders in Yellowstone Presbytery, who are teaching, preaching, living, leading and passing on the faith, what you are doing is **so** worthwhile. All of us, together in Christ, indwelt by the Spirit, are making a difference, generation to generation as we make disciples and disciple-making congregations and are sent out to join Christ in Christ’s mission here and around the world.

Encouraging Signs Across the Presbytery:

1. **The Stated Clerk Transition: Grateful!** Grateful to Debbie Blackburn for her two plus years of extraordinary service as stated clerk to the presbytery. Masterful job! And we are grateful for Jim Tarr (elder St. Andrew) willing to be nominated and to Melissa Perrault-Baumann (elder Lewistown) for being willing to assist him. LC appointed him as acting Stated Clerk as of April 1, standing for election at the presbytery meeting, Tuesday, April 3 (during a recess in LC meeting). Extensive training took place the last two weeks of March as Debbie, George, Kathy, Susan and Sheryl worked on parts of this; Jim will attend training by the denominational leadership in May. We are very grateful for the work and wisdom of the Stated Clerk Search Committee and their unanimous decision regarding this team of Jim and Melissa going forward.
2. **PMT: Churches are receiving pastors.** God is providing! Big Hole, Miles City, Philipsburg, White Sulphur Springs, and Lewistown have received or will definitely be receiving new pastors in the near future. Dillon still has the wonderful interim with Steve Webber during their search; Jordan recently suffered a disappointing set back when the only candidate withdrew. Prayers for Jordan, please. Hysham is searching but has received no matches. The session is meeting to consider raising the salary figure they are able to offer. Hysham reports real joy in the gifted pulpit supply preaching they are receiving. And Colstrip will be without clergy after Robert Shy departs December 31. Please continue to pray.
3. **Whitworth Fellows and Growing Young:** The Fellows, Kristin Kochner and *Growing Young* equipping & conversations were helpful and thought provoking at the March Presbytery. Two from last year have asked to return again (Luke Ekstrom and Joel Shroeder). Several churches have already signed up to have the fellows preach, share the “Growing Young” ideas and dream how that church is being called to implement this, and help in other ways, such as with VBS and counseling at camp. Joel and David Hendricks, sensing they are called to ministry, will be placed as student pastors in the Jordan church for the summer preaching, pastoring and much more, learning about rural ministry. If your church *is committed to*: a. reading *Growing Young* and b. seriously exploring it’s implications for your congregations and would like to get on the fellows’ schedule this summer, please contact us! The Fellows are here June 1 - August 15.
4. **Camp - Expecting an amazing summer:** Westminster Spires Camp is fully staffed with many of the quality staff members from past summers returning for the 2018 season. All are college-age or graduates and dedicated in Christian faith. Curt Kochner continues to work tirelessly to make this ministry/mission possible and coordinates logistics. George will be the speaker and spiritual resource for the elementary and junior high weeks. Rev’s Katie Emery (ELCA pastor in our Terry church) and her husband, Rev. Will Johnson, will again be the speakers for senior high week. Our four Whitworth fellows will also participate as staff for portions of the summer camping season.

Please encourage not only your campers and all children and families in your churches, but pray for “Jesus’ people eyes”. Seek out and invite other kids in your neighborhoods and communities to attend, with some scholarship help if that is needed! Brochures have gone to all attendees of the winter ski retreat and of camp last summer; and been mailed to all the congregations.
Our May presbytery offering will go to our Westminster Spires camp scholarship fund for this vital mission.

5. **St. Timothy’s Chapel:** The presbytery’s relationship with St. Timothy’s Chapel on Georgetown Lake is being rekindled after strain due to misunderstandings. Jack Bell has joined the chapel board. George has attended and also been in closer contact with board members. St. Tim’s presented by-law changes and its budget to the Leadership Cabinet at its April meeting. We are back on track and grateful for the work of the Leadership Cabinet and Debbie Blackburn.
6. **Presbytery Meetings:** The mini-conference model, content, resourcing and life together we are experiencing as a presbytery are being favorably received. Kudos to the planning teams. Several churches had non-commissioner lay folks attending who commented excitedly on how helpful the meetings are for them! Years ago, a ruling elder commented, as presbytery was ending, “I feel like I have been on a retreat!” That’s the goal. Presbytery meetings: Resource-full, Relevant, Vision- giving, Collegial, Inspirational, equipping, empowering and connecting. Yup.
7. **This Presbytery Meeting- General Theme: “Jesus’ People Eyes – seeing the people and the world around us from God’s perspective and with God’s incarnate, active love.”** George is presenting on how to understand God’s leading and how to hear, pay attention to God’s “voice” in our lives as we live out the Gospel in our personal contexts and communities. Kathy - Christ sends us out into our communities. Why? How can we better pay attention there, see with *Jesus’ people eyes*? Where do I/we start? Hearing and learning from stories from other churches. Now, like Dorothy and Toto, we are no longer in Kansas but in OZ in our rapidly changing culture and world. What does this mean? The Implications? Tools, next steps.

Opportunities and some challenges:

1. **Lay Training.** In living out our vision and response to requests from several congregations/sessions and lay leaders and as a partner with Whitworth University, we can offer training using their online Commissioned Ruling Elder/Pastor curriculum which can be customized. We have been working with the PMT on this important area. Talk with one of us if you want further information.
2. **Insurance:** We and Leadership Cabinet have been working since 2017 to ensure our insurance coverage is adequate and updated. Our current yearly insurance bill is about \$8,000 to insure the presbytery and camp. We could increase our coverage of all entities to higher and recommended levels for about another \$4,000 a year. The leadership Cabinet has determined that the suggested increases in insurance coverage are warranted. George, with others, is drafting the applications and submitting them on May 9th to our insurance agent, Central Montana insurance in Lewistown, MT, for final quotes.
3. **The Budget:** We are deeply grateful for God’s continued provision and your contributing to this body of believers and your sacrificial generosity. The decrease in Synod funding we have been receiving impacts us even more significantly next year. But again, God has been faithful in providing and had a loving hand on this presbytery. See Dan Holland’s report.
Recently, the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly and the Exec. Committee of the Presbyterian Mission Agency are asking this year’s General Assembly for a per capita increase of 39

percent from 2018 to 2019 and another 7 percent from 2019 to 2020, from \$7.73 to \$11.45. This would be an increase of almost \$6,324 for Yellowstone based upon our close to 1,700 members. In mid April, a large, and growing, number of presbyteries signed a letter to the 2018 GA explaining their concern with both the process that did not consult with congregations, synods and presbyteries which already must provide more and more of the equipping and support that the GA level used to offer, and the negative impact this would have on them and their congregations. This could occur along with Yellowstone's yet to be finalized increased insurance costs to properly protect ourselves in today's world and realities.

4. **Child Protection Policy:** We, and all those in leadership in the presbytery, are committed to honoring the sacred trust and mission entrusted to us by God in ministry to children and youth. We want to ensure each one is treated with respect, care, and God's love and to provide for safety. We have been working, since 2017, with leaders from Camping & Youth (Curt Kochner and Cynthia Kessler) and the Leadership Cabinet on a policy, which should soon be ready for consideration and action by the Leadership Cabinet and then the Presbytery. This will guide churches in their ministry to children and youth and guide the staff at camp Westminster Spires. We have been working with input from our insurance carrier, the guidelines presented by the PCUSA and the realities of our small-church contexts.
5. **Clusters:** Quite a few have had adversity and extra challenges, and like many in our country, are feeling somewhat overwhelmed. After devastating droughts and fires last summer, it has been a long, record-breaking winter. All four pastor clusters are functioning, and again, we invite you to participate for prayer, sharing, collegial support, dwelling in the Word, lectionary preaching ideas, and being Christ's voice and heart for your colleagues in ministry.

6. Mission trips: We and the Leadership Cabinet would like to know of and connect those churches/leaders dreaming about/planning mission trips. Please let us know. Thank you.

7. **Personnel:** LC has prioritized and reconstituted a Personnel sub-group for a host of important reasons. A very heavy workload. New Stated Clerk and Assistant Stated Clerk. Funding challenges. George turned 65 (no plans to retire yet) Personnel Policy needs a review & update.
8. **Personal** - We worked almost all of March with the work required for the Stated Clerk training/ transition and PMT/church needs, and extra time in April as well. We will be out of the presbytery from May 10 – June 8 for family visiting (March trip had to be cancelled) and weddings, (mostly on our off time) followed by study leave in Israel. We are looking forward to learning not only about Bible times and contexts, but also gaining insights into the complexities of the current situation there on this trip led by a NT scholar from Whitworth University (9 days of official study leave, our first trip).
Thank you for your concern and prayers for George's brother with his traumatic brain injury (7 months ago). He is making progress and finally able to return part-time to his Sr. pastor position! We are thanking God and praying for complete healing and recovery.