

## Co-General Presbyter Report to Yellowstone Presbytery

November 5, 2021

Teresa of Avila: *"The world is on fire" ... "this is no time to entreat God for things of little importance." ...*

From her *The Way of Perfection*

*Context:* Volatility, Instability as the world was in foment. The church in Europe was rupturing with the Lutherans & Protestants! The church and the world were entering into a season of totally reordering upheaval and change, observable about every 500 years on an enormous scale in the last 2000 years.

### Where do we find ourselves?

Lately it's been like living *simultaneously* in 1918/19 (health crisis), 1929 (economic crisis) & 1968 (racial and social justice crisis), all colliding in massive political crisis, referenced by PCUSA pastor, Tod Bolsinger on recent workshop on *Tempered Resilience: How Leaders Are Formed in the Crucible of Change*, his recent book.

Yet, it is in times of difficulties, of searching for meaning, connection and hope, of darkness where the light of the stars shines brightly, where the light, love and hope of Christ and his disciple communities, the church, are so needed.

It was in the sufferings of plagues, persecutions, health and welfare crises, and political oppression and violence during the first few centuries where the Christian's, living and loving as Christ, in contrast communities, where people saw and experienced Jesus. Lives, cultures, caring systems for health and welfare, churches multiplied and the empire was changed. These are the times when the light of Christ can shine brightest.

**Remembering God's BIG story and learning from all who have gone before has been perspective-giving, hope-giving and life-giving.** Among the passages speaking to us the last few months are: Heb. 12:1-3, Heb. 10:19-25 & Heb. 11; I Kings 18 & 19 (Elijah) Jesus and the disciples Feeding of the 5,000 with 5 loaves & 2 fish – Mark 6:30-44 & John 6:1-15.

What about you? We would love to learn and hear how God has been speaking, working.

As 2020 unfolded we thought we were in a race, a 10K?, which turned out to be a marathon!

Then in mid 2021, just when we thought that we were finally approaching the finish line, someone handed us a bike and bathing suit!

"Keep going, this is a triathlon!"\* WHAT?!?

NONE of us had EVER trained for this!

As one pastor said, "Things were much easier in the spring of 2020 than they are now!" Who knew? Only God!

With unwelcome, significant Covid increases in many places, not to mention fires & smoke, droughts, significant challenges for children, teens and families including childcare and employment for women, serious food, housing & economic challenges in MT, nationally and globally, injustices, troubling, intractable challenges in the national and international realms, we see and feel an unease, increased fear and distrust, reactivity in anger, frustration, alienation, and a sense of many of us being worn out, overwhelmed.

All the Stats show how trends have been vastly accelerated, as if at least 5-10 years have passed in the last 18 months such as:

Pastors are retiring or leaving the ministry at the highest rate almost ever

Isolation, loneliness and relational disconnects are skyrocketing

Increasing Mental health challenges, for many but especially teens

Men are lonelier than ever

Parents are swamped

Montana has been referred to as a childcare desert, and few women are in the workforce

The 'great resignation' and multiple challenges for workers and employers have worsened.

Affordable housing is at a premium, becoming an oxymoron in parts of MT & other places → Homelessness.

We see interrupted church-going patterns, relationships, connections and priorities . Some have drifted into other patterns or dropped out completely, others are looking at other churches, in person or virtual. As the hymn *Abide with Me* says, "Change and decay in all around I see, O Thou who changest not abide with me."

**So, how do we keep going? Remain faithful and hopeful? As disciples? As church communities is a changed and changing world, in which we are sprinkled and sent as salt and light (Mt. 5:13-16)?**

**"When a crisis moves from acute to chronic, you need a whole new strategy—for your organization, but also for you." Carey Nieuwhof**

This triathlon we are in the midst of requires:

- New strategies, skills, *Learning many new things & unlearning others,*
- *Developing resilience, perseverance and endurance,*
- *Letting go of past expectations, of "the ways and what we are used to & much of what used to work",*
- *Realizing organizations, including churches, are most like a "start up" now even though the building, pastor, face, message. ... may be familiar,*
- *listening, exploring, dreaming and experimenting with new and different/adapted ways as leaders in churches (and all sectors).*

*Loving like Christ, with integrity and justice*

"Experimenting your way into the future" is how it is referred to in podcast with Rev. Dr. [Dwight J. Zscheile](https://mministry.org/podcast/a-conversation-with-dwight-zscheile/?fbclid=IwAR0n0yc-hzsUDxa6iydbCLFFt9ML6U9t1t3BQp03gUqDBUf-TBUuGHh_5zw) , of Luther Seminary [https://mministry.org/podcast/a-conversation-with-dwight-zscheile/?fbclid=IwAR0n0yc-hzsUDxa6iydbCLFFt9ML6U9t1t3BQp03gUqDBUf-TBUuGHh\\_5zw](https://mministry.org/podcast/a-conversation-with-dwight-zscheile/?fbclid=IwAR0n0yc-hzsUDxa6iydbCLFFt9ML6U9t1t3BQp03gUqDBUf-TBUuGHh_5zw)

[Note how reality is unfolding with the profound, prescient and practical articles by Andy Crouch: Strategies for Winter <https://journal.praxislabs.org/strategies-for-winter-redemptive-leadership-in-survival-times-f15a7791035a>

With the enormous acceleration in disruption, trends and the rate of change, every church/organization needs to consider itself as if a start-up and empower the innovators, disruptors, entrepreneurial, apostolic, creatives, build resilience, grieve and lament, hope and new vision, adapting and rebuilding...

**How do you live and lead when you don't know exactly what is going on around you, you are not sure where you are going, can't see but a step or two ahead???**

**What does it look like to be Christ's, in Christ, loving and following Christ in HIS way, & in community, to and for the world God loves?**

**Focus on the main thing, JESUS and God's mission in the world and:**

- 1. Deepening our Roots. Nurturing our love for and relationship with God.** developing our spiritual practices and Discipleship – personally and together with others. Our root system sustains all else.
- 2. Pacing** – Sprinter pace is NOT sustainable in an ironman! Be realistic, adapt, slow down & take care.
- 3. Time and courage for *honesty and* reassessing, re-prioritizing, dreaming and adapting**

Tod Bolsinger's *Canoeing the Mountains & Tempered Resilience*

Article on the research showing how businesses with adaptive mindset and practices did much better than those that are merely agile. Adaptive = initiating change, Agile = reactive

<https://go.stripe.global/rs/072-MDK->

[283/images/Accelerate\\_Growth\\_with\\_an\\_Adaptive\\_Mindset.pdf?mkt\\_tok=MDcyLU1ESy0yODMAAAGA](https://go.stripe.global/rs/072-MDK-283/images/Accelerate_Growth_with_an_Adaptive_Mindset.pdf?mkt_tok=MDcyLU1ESy0yODMAAAGA)

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#### 4. Build and strengthen relationships, connections & community. People over programs.

Increased hunger for connection, to be known, seen, understood, respected.

Importance of listening well

Providing & empowering folks to be in and start pods (tiny), anyone can initiate and lead one.

<https://www.pod-church.com>

*“PEOPLE ARE HUNGERING FOR CONNECTION & BELONGING, ENCOURAGEMENT, MEANING, PURPOSE! CONGREGATIONS NEED FRESH WAYS IN THIS PANDEMIC TO CONNECT, GROW AND SEND PEOPLE. SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP IS NOT ENOUGH! “*

Wagon train principle – When the early pioneers traveled with a train, they could all help and look out for each other, and the many gifts of the group helped ALL circle up against danger, keep the vision and dream alive as they journeyed and around the campfire telling stories, singing, shared hopes and dreams and sorrows.

The lone explorer, traveler does not fare as well, is not as safe...

5. **Engagement** is catalytic. It is what determines and generates attendance, spiritual growth, and much more, not vice versa. It involves relationships and action. It involves both person to person & digital/online with the dramatic shifts in how folks operate, connect, relate, affiliate... including with church.

*The Ultimate Guide to Church Engagement: Seven Successful Engagement Practices of Growing Churches.*

Actionable ideas & stories with a range of links: a 23-page booklet

1. **Simplify Your Strategy**
2. **Shrink Your Church [through Groups]**
3. **Lead the Way With Technology**
4. **Clarify Membership Expectations**
5. **Diversify Engagement Possibilities**
6. **Help People Discover & Develop Their Unique Contributions**
7. **Be Specific About How to Get Involved**

@ [https://grow.pushpay.com/rs/592-KPW-150/images/Definitve-Guide-Engagement-2021.pdf?mkt\\_tok=NTkyLUtQVY0xNTAAAGAGsNWCXbVQla0LWh9GthuYmQHomOZcOAN7quRnXFG21T-NiVF6N1s3VafHXpyUlsMlun2NCyDlpyh7JXU3CGL\\_6UscCsRC6TU9x4wKoLS4s09cgo](https://grow.pushpay.com/rs/592-KPW-150/images/Definitve-Guide-Engagement-2021.pdf?mkt_tok=NTkyLUtQVY0xNTAAAGAGsNWCXbVQla0LWh9GthuYmQHomOZcOAN7quRnXFG21T-NiVF6N1s3VafHXpyUlsMlun2NCyDlpyh7JXU3CGL_6UscCsRC6TU9x4wKoLS4s09cgo)

6. **Unity is more essential than ever...** this is Jesus' intent and prayer for his people to embody what unity in Christ can be.

...” the real opportunity will be in leaders who can rise above the division and focus on what unites us, not on what divides us... That’s your opportunity.

**\*\*The culture needs an alternative to itself, not an echo of itself. A divided culture needs a united church.\*\***

**Hybrid Church Article** – The church can learn how to adapt to new ways & patterns of how people engage both in person and online: *Target Corp and the Flexible Church: How Target Teaches us to Innovate for Relevance and increased Engagement* - Ask Kathy if you would like a copy of the article pdf.

**ALL churches need to understand the new shifted ways of living, operating, connecting, and being church → what does total HYBRID reality entail.**

**Keys – Flexibility, relevance, equipping, relationships/community/connecting** (*Contextual*)

*Intelligence* by Leonard Sweet & Michael Beck)

People can now get content MANY places in person, online from their pocket.

It's important to focus on:

1. resourcing and equipping our existing people for Gospel significance in their own homes [work, schools, affinity & activity groups communities] with what they need to reach their own communities and spheres of influence.
2. facilitating experiences and relationships people can't get digitally, with a focus on connecting everyone with each other and with God.

### **What have we been up up?**

During this tumultuous time we have sought to pray, listen, weep and rejoice, be present, observe, learn and explore, equip and encourage, and seek to maximize each's gifts and strategic impact implementing the Presbytery's vision in fast-changing times.

Our time the last months has included:

#### **1.Pastoral Ministry Team:( K & G)**

- a. Significant stresses, challenges and needs for both pastors/CRE's and congregations
- b. A GREAT DEAL is needed related to all just above in this report. This MUST be a major focus for the whole presbytery and churches.
- c. In this time, honestly, ALL churches are actually in significant transition and all ministry has an aspect of transitional ministry to it.

Churches without pastors, some in pivotal seasons, raising important honest questions

Several sessions and Search committees are at points requiring a great deal of training, support and work from PMT, and us, which has been short several members with the gifts, the last 3 years.

We are blessed to be in touch with, pray with and learn from, resource and encourage and support wonderful brothers and sisters in using their gifts for ministry in their churches and communities and Yellowstone Presbytery.

- d. We rejoice in God's provision and calling of pastors. It's been a joy to welcoming and work alongside churches and new pastors. What an honor to be part of the Ordination and Installation for Mary Grace Reynolds and the Ennis Church.

We were part of the Installation services and celebrations with these congregations and the Admin Commissions for Kimmy Briggs (Lewistown) and Jamie Schmeling (Terry) – Kathy and George

These were welcome times for community, connecting and celebrating. Thank you to all who were part of the Administrative Commissions.

- e. PMT, with 2 experienced new members, has formed a Candidates/Preparation for Ministry subgroup for focus and support of our inquirers and candidates for ministry. We have 2, Kori Robinson, Bozeman, @ Pittsburgh Seminary and Karolee Larson, Butte, @ Dubuque online.

Part of our calling is to continue to prayerfully be open to those who might be gifted for ordained ministry in existing churches, planting new worshipping communities, and other forms.

- g. Boundary Training – in June and October, we attended and supported.

h. There have been a few unusual challenges and this Team works very hard.

- i. Dan Krebill and Jody McDevitt's Retired after almost 25 years at FPC Bozeman. Kathy & George and Caroline and Jack Fleming were at worship service. Kathy moderated the congreg. meeting and along with George and Caroline participated in the dissolution service. A beautiful picnic-celebration at a park followed in the afternoon with gifts, appreciation and stories thanking and honoring them for their 25 years of service. Dan Holland was MC

and Suzanne Bratsky spoke on behalf of the whole church and presented a gift. Attending from the presbytery were George & Kathy, Russ and Janet Kline, Mary & Dick Davis, Linda Smith, Debbie Funke, Freeman McCall. Note: Ric Tieman has given his wisdom, gifts and leadership sacrificially to many areas there beyond his role as treasurer. They also have a new secretary as Linda retired, Joann Sandoval.

J. Networking with other MT judicatories & Identified a new psychologist for required evaluation and consultations with all our Seminary and CRE candidates. Grateful to be sharing ideas across denominations.

k. A variety of policy and procedures and things which arise, in some instances, truth is much stranger than fiction. Debbie Blackburn's knowledge and work on these as well is an enormous asset.

**2. Equipping Lay preaching with CRE's and interested elders, monthly**– George, Fruitful, very positive feedback, engagement and growth. Interest expressed from another presbytery as they and many others are struggling to find future options and models equip present and future leadership for smaller congregations Strong tradition from Luther who trained the guild workers, artisans, stone cutters to preach. Let George know if you are interested in more information or joining.

**3. Leadership Cabinet** – The comprehensive LC report posted for this meeting summarizes a great deal we have been working on with the LC over the last 6 months.

Listening, Planning for Presbytery meeting which will help connect p

Personnel – Working closely with this subgroup on several issues. We are deeply grateful for the time and wisdom of our good team. George

Budget and Finance analyzing and projecting. We are grateful for

**4. Camp 2021.** Kurt Kochner and George led camp again this summer. George organized and led staff training, ministered with presence during Elementary (Daniel Triller did a fantastic job speaking and connecting with kids) and Junior High Camps ( Kimmy Briggs did a fine job speaking) and was the speaker for Senior High Camp. All of the participants from senior high camp – staff and campers- expressed interest in the formation of a zoom group to meet during the off season, so George hopes to get this organized soon.

**5. Rep/Nom Min. Team**– George staffs. They have worked hard and prayerfully meeting multiple times this fall.

**6. Communication and interaction in the presbytery.** A regular newsletter and hopefully a more interactive communication option need to be explored. This is a passion for Kathy as she has written previous to you all. but other gifts and time required.

**7. Fundraising for our position since we are required to raise \$35- 40,000** towards the costs of our ½ time package and expenses. We are deeply grateful for each of you and the congregations whose prayers and contributions enable this position to continue and us to partnership with you in Christ's ministry here. We have a ways to go towards our goal and will be sending out a letter towards the end of the year.

**8. We are grateful for our wonderful new colleague and Stated Clerk, Caroline Fleming.** We have worked together, consulted on a wide range of matters, some very complex. We are blessed.

**9. Working with BOP and other Execs** as policies and challenges arise or various information is required by churches

**10. Resourcing, preaching, pastoring pastors**

G and K preached at FPC Bozeman twice, in addition to preaching or worship leadership in installations and ordination. Other opportunities were not possible due to health and vacation time. One cancelled due to Covid quarantine

**General Assembly Moderators Conference in November by Zoom 11-21.** For the third year in a row George and Vilmarie Cintron-Olivieri have been asked to lead their seminar, 'The Moderator as Spiritual Leader,' at the conference to train presbytery moderators across the country. We are grateful to say, it has proved to be the most popular of all the seminars 2 years in a row. Prayers appreciated.

Montana Bishop Laurie, ELCA, asked George to offer a **day retreat by Zoom for the Montana Synod of the ELCA** the end of the summer.

**11. McAllister Admin. Commission** – Kathy has spoken with Dan Krebill, Moderator, Charlie Mandeville and pastor Mary Grace several times on this over the last few months. Legal matters and processes have to be followed confirming title/ownership before next steps can be taken. The requirement to publish this in the town paper has generated questions, misunderstandings and more in both church and some community members. The AC and presbytery are very blessed by some good, generous lawyers in this and Harlowton AC work.

**12. Rocky Mountain College.** For 12 years George has been assigned to the RMC Board of Trustees, by virtue of his calling as Co General Presbyter. Rocky is now facing some key decisions, and the Board is becoming more active. George is rotating off. Someone with passion and experience with higher education and gifts for governance, with the time to be involved is needed. Share any suggestions with George.

IDEA generated from churches without pastors:

The presbytery offer, Initiate some studies in small groups, pods which can connect and equip others to replicate (which can be configured all with in a congregation or across congregations)

2 suggestions:

a. Advent study for 4-5 weeks

b. Acts "the Book of Acts, between the lines, and see how the Disciples were with people, which may have been as much Jesus as the words they spoke of Him." Reviewer of *Contextual Intelligence*

***Personal:***

Gratitude George recovered from his walking pneumonia but extra Rest required for quite a while. (diagnosed week after camp) Gillian and Peter had Benjamin George in August , 7 lbs, 8 oz. He is healthy, growing and pretty cute! We met him on our 44<sup>th</sup> anniversary – blessings overflowing! Prayers welcomed for Ben to SLEEP longer stretches than 60 - 90 minutes. Sleep deprivation is becoming a serious hazard to health and functioning for all. George's mother's retirement community no longer allows outside visitors again which is sad, isolating and not good for her. At least she can go out without being forced to quarantine. In late June Kathy took her mother east and settled her in after she lived with us for several weeks and we celebrated her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday!

In bonds of Christ's love,  
Kathy and George Goodrich

\*Metaphor drawn from Carey Nieuwhof's 8-30-21 article, (<https://careynieuwhof.com/feel-like-2021-has-been-harder-than-2020-on-you-as-a-leader-youre-right-heres-why/> )

\*\* quote from <https://careynieuwhof.com/5-unsettling-cultural-predictions-for-the-2020s-and-how-you-can-prepare-starting-now/>

