

Covid-19... Devastating drought & Western Wild Fires... Hurricanes... Inequities and Racial injustice ...Roiling Protests for Racial Justice & Reform... Unsettling & divisive politics, taking center stage this week with the elections... Sputtering Economy...Joblessness, food insecurity and homelessness on the rise...Different ways of doing and being Church... Disrupted rhythms in all of life – family, community, church, business, agriculture, ...

And, God is with us in these *shaking* times, *empowering* us in all of it, Inviting us as disciples to think/reflect, make disciples and live the Gospel differently as God's *SENT* people in changing contexts and communities.

It is a time to Lament and honestly grieve the struggle, the injustices, the changes, the isolation and the losses as we let go of many things into God's hands, loving, listening & praying for one another.

It is a time to Hope in our Triune God who specializes in Redemption, in Resurrection and in Reshaping/Re-forming of souls, of our disciple communities, of our ways of embodying Christ & joining Christ's ministry and mission, and of the healing and flourishing of our communities and world, just as we recite in the Lord's Prayer.

- When we are prevented, like Paul and companions, from doing ministry in the places and ways we are used to, or we suffer adversity, God is *still present*, empowering, giving a new vision/leading to discern and follow, being transformed and joining the Spirit's transforming mission (Acts 16:6-10...).
- When Covid-19 prevents large-group, in-person worship/church, gatherings, "church in a building in the ways many of us have become used to", we pray, discern, reflect & learn from many sources including the church in other places and times past, explore/experiment in such ways as gathering outside, in small interactive groups (such as pods/microgroups), interact virtually via social media and zoom on line, families talking about faith and serving together, and in other new ways of being church together.
- The western Church has seen decades of moderate fruitfulness, aging congregations, and entrenched practices, ways, mindsets, with diminishing results.

Let us lament the passing of such patterns of ministry that may still be meaningful to some, but do not make resilient disciples who embody and share the Gospel and God's ways fruitfully in their *present* context. Let us stop and ask again, "Where is God in all this?" God is not surprised, desperate or confused. So, what is God up to – and what does God hope for from us? And let us hope, with open minds, hearts and hands letting go, learning and adapting to receive and join in the Hope of all Jesus offers and is doing, in a new season empowered by the Holy Spirit.

What are key Questions for leaders, churches and presbyteries to be asking as we attempt to discern the times and God's and opportunities : *See separate sheet, to come. What are you using?*

Presbytery Priorities

A. **Supporting and Equipping rooted, resilient Leaders and churches who are making, equipping and sending disciples who seek to grow in love for God, love for the people of God and the work and mission of God in the world God loves –**

1. Nurturing Spiritual practices and pods/little groups where this takes place, including Transferable concepts (Stan Ott) & Pods with purpose and Small Group Discipleship. Workshops Oct 3 & 6, & Pods with a Purpose workshop 10/26 Pod-church.com and see handout from workshop online @ <http://www.yellowstonepcusa.org/documents/StansHandout-YellowstonePodswithaPurposeworkshop.pdf>

2, Both Leadership Cabinet and the Pastoral Ministry Team have met more frequently to pray, support one another and the presbytery, listen, learn together and be adaptive and responsive to the challenges and God's opportunities

A New worthwhile resource:– *Tempered Resilience: How Leaders are Formed in the Crucible of Change*, Tod Bolsinger's A very timely book for Christians in this time of struggle, change and suffering, utilizing the biblical metaphor of the forge and process of shaping and refining metal: *"I watched those artisans- so physical, so purposeful, so violent with hammer and inferno, so precise and exacting. They seemed a living icon of God for we are the raw material, scraps of hardened resisting steel and they the craftsmen are so like God in precision and purpose, using the heat of challenges, the anvil of community, and the hammer of practices to transform us from raw material into something useful and beautiful."* p.2

B. **Discerning the Times, Trends and Direction of the Holy Spirit (like the tribe of Issachar)**

1. Various new mindsets, ways to connect, engage, disciple, gather, serve, such as on-line ministries, pods/tiny groups, - what are you experimenting with?

2. Prayer and joining together - Presbytery-wide day for repentance, prayer and fasting, October 20, 2020. Thanks to all of us who participated.

C. **Help churches discover, re-frame new ways of being vibrant, disciple communities as God leads them to love and serve in their context and communities.**

1. Maintaining deep roots in faith and valuable heritage/traditions

2. Adapt and innovate new understandings, practices, ways of operating/organizing and ministry that are more relational, empowering, congregational and pod-based and less building-based. Kathy, Debbie Blackburn, Julie Boksich, Russ and Jamie, Susi Ennis have been educating ourselves via webinars and other resources related to this area.

3. New Worshipping Communities – Long a priority for us, now, this has become urgent. New people outside the church are VASTLY more likely to join a new church plant/community and rarely an existing one. Some of our congregations are unlikely to be vital 10 years from now unless they not only adapt/change swiftly but also are equipped to start new pods/groups of those OUTSIDE their fellowship, with ties to it. The Transforming Congregations webinars show and teach how to do it. Book – Deep Roots, Wild Branches by Michael Beck. This process has been referred to as cultivating wild branches.

4. The Existing birthing congregation and the whole presbytery is energized and grows as a result. **LC discussed and has nucleus of a group to start conversations, explore a group/Task Force of those with gifts and calling for this and deeper discipleship.**

5. Fascinating podcast with the perspective that perhaps **the Spirit is working in the scattering and group size limits, providing opportunities to birth new house churches!** Especially focused on those done with church but not with God and their search for God and spiritual growth. Related book, *Joy Fueled: Catalyzing a Revolution of Joyful Communities*

<https://open.spotify.com/show/2ByLWaXGNfJCMbS53d2nF6>

D. CRE Cultivation, Identification, Recruitment and Development

1. Recognize that the old system of ‘professional’ pastoral ministry is fading in small rural communities (many in our time are recognizing the ways over focus on clericalization of congregations and ministry has crippled disciples, the vitality of disciples communities and hindered equipping “the saints” and joining Christ in his mission).

Needed: A new vision and a new name for CRE’s – teams of discipling leaders and equippers developing and using their Spirit –given gifts from ministry.

2. Developing Gift-based ways of ministry in congregations so that discipling, pastoral care, sharing the gospel, outreach, and the administrative ministries, etc. are fulfilled.

3. Pods/microgroups with purpose – prime places for disciples to grow and get a taste of discipleship vs a consumer of church goods and services, they provide opportunity for growth, connection and hopefully some will desire to pursue further training to discover, develop and deploy their spiritual gifts and talents in a more focused way.

E. Support, pray for/with and equip Church Leaders in these Difficult Times – Being the Body of Christ and learning, growing Together...

1. We are praying, praying and work closely with PMT to pastor pastors and leaders, seeking to listen, refresh them in a variety of ways spiritually, emotionally, intellectually.

2. Resourcing by presbytery zoom and in-person offerings.

3. Group Spiritual Direction for Montana Clergy offered by George on Thursdays

4. Opportunity to re-think, evaluate, rebirth Clusters (changing times, many pastoral departures/deaths): Future - Thematic more than geographic? Zoom? In-person? Presbytery pods? Hybrid?

F Future Models and drawing upon Gifts for Presbytery Staff and Mission

1. Presbytery Staff – structure, necessary gifts and mission / ministry priorities

2. Training and Resourcing needs and opportunities that are priorities staff should provide with limited time and budgets.

3. Funding models? Per Capita or Mission Dollars? Ric Tieman

G. Partnerships – Continuing, Fading, Emerging...

1. General Assembly and Synod offerings and partnerships – churches and leaders receive regular information. And, the GA level, with decreased income in these times in reprioritizing and having to make tough choices. Pray for us all.

Vilmarie Contron-Olivieri, Elder, lifelong educator, lover of Jesus and small churches, former GA Co-Moderator, will be with us again speaking & preaching for our presbytery meeting Mini-conference and worship – Shaken, Empowered & Sent, Part 2. See the flier and docket.

2. Whitworth University Office of Church Engagement and its new million dollar Lilly Grant program “Resilient Church: Discovering the Past, Discerning the Present, Designing for the Future”, to lead churches to develop a deep root system in the historic Christian faith, to understand their cultural context, and to adapt resourcefully and creatively to new circumstances, challenges and opportunities in ways that serve the gospel.

<https://news.whitworth.edu/2020/10/whitworth-office-of-church-engagement.html?m=1>

3. Stan Ott & Leading Moments, Building One Another, Vital Churches Institute: former GA Co-Moderator Vilmarie Cintron-Olivieri. It was great to see all who joined together on Monday evening, October 26 for the zoom seminar on Pods with Purpose with Stan. 1/3 of our churches were represented.

4. PCUSA 1001 NWC, Fresh Expressions and those places doing it well now – Northwest Coast Presbytery, Pueblo Presbytery are among those in the West.

5. Mainline-line denominations across Montana have joined together in support of their clergy for the Thursday Montana Clergy Discernment Gatherings which they asked George to lead.

Other....?

Fascinating and important reading for churches and leaders to learn from, discuss

1. Andy Crouch’s newer article posted under Pandemic Resources [Strategies for Winter: Redemptive Leadership in Survival Times](#) - by Andy Crouch others, in *The Praxis Journal*

2. N. T. Wright, **God and the Pandemic.**

3..” ***The New New Rules of Business***”s from FastCompany business Leaders/Innovator Roundtable the last few weeks.

Bring democracy to Work

Invest in Community

Define Your Purpose

Be authentic

Curiosity is Currency

Change is Constant.

“Companies say they embrace change, but all too often they are really just *reacting* to external forces.

“What if what we’re trying to create is not some new stasis, but *organizations that are capable of rapidly changing as conditions require?*” says Barbara Humpton, CEO of Siemens USA.

Such organizations, she says, will “gain from disruption rather than being broken by it.” For many leaders, creating nimble organizations comes down to *people*: “Change is not the ‘what’ but *the ‘who,’*” says Rob Katz, chairman and CEO of Vail Resorts. “Who are the people who can change, who have that ability to let go of something they’ve been doing a long time?”

Will these new rules of business be as prophetic as the ones *Fast Company* put forth in 1995? We hope so. But as Bill Taylor and Alan Webber would caution (“Break the Rules”), even they will soon need rewriting.

In these fast-moving and uncertain times, the only thing any business can prepare for is change.”

https://www.fastcompany.com/90559866/the-new-new-rules-of-business-fast-companys-advice-for-the-next-25-years?partner=feedburner&utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feedburner+fastcompany&utm_content=feedburner&cid=eem524:524:s00:10/13/2020_fc&utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=Compass&utm_campaign=eem524:524:s00:10/13/2020_fc

Personal

We have so much to be grateful for. We seek to sink our roots deep into God and God’s Word, and to look for and discern what the Spirit may be saying, doing, God’s redemptive, restorative opportunities.

We welcome your prayers as the multifaceted effects of this time are impacting all generations of our extended family as they are yours. George’s mother is now wheelchair bound in a retirement facility near his brother and his wife in Florida. My mother has been living here with us in Montana since June.`