

General Presbyter Report to Yellowstone Presbytery Kathy Goodrich June 16 2023

"You are my witnesses, says the Lord and I am God." Isaiah 43: 12b

"...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1: 8

Spirit Sightings and Surprises as we live/write Acts 29+

seems an apt heading to cultivate the practices of "having eyes to see" to discern the voice and work of the Holy Spirit and telling the story/ being witnesses as we worked on with Dr. Ron Pyle at our March Presbytery meeting. I have been integrating this question and a time for sharing into my report time with the Leadership Cabinet. These times have fueled our faith and imaginations, encouraged and given hope. The questions we ask, what we measure and focus on are highly determinative.

I and the Leadership Cabinet look forward to integrating this spiritual practice into our presbytery meetings.

Question: what may be some of the benefits of experimenting with integrating this practice into all the groups (ALL ages) and worship in your church?

I want to share with you just a couple of the WIDE, astonishing, delightful, humbling and convicting, confirming, exciting and energizing, gifts, experiences and insights of my and our last few months. Gifts of grace in this season of loss for us.

In addition to our lives and ministries in Montana, George and I were invited back to Pennsylvania in April for wonderful celebrations and reunions.

~the 250th anniversary!! of First Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh where we were both ordained, I the first woman (1978 & 1984) and where he was an Assoc. Pastor for youth and camping and I worked in camping and youth while in seminary.

~Camp reunion for Ligonier Camp and Conf. Center (formerly First Presbyterian Church Camp) 109 years of visionary, remarkable example of anticipating, reflecting, imagining, and adapting Christian ministry for the future needs for kids, families, adults out in God's creation, a visionary risk when much of the country still lived in rural areas! Did we tell you we LOVE camping, youth and family ministry and ministry, living in Christian community?!

~wedding in the family of dear friends, from hundreds of years of Mennonites, who have modeled for us Jesus' sacrificial love for their severely handicapped non-verbal son, now 40.

~precious moments with a few of the seasoned saints whom God used mightily in our very young lives. We got to hug and tell them we are forever grateful, wiser, richer and blessed.

Some **Spirit Sightings and Surprises** include:

1. We could hug and rekindle bonds with some dear ones we had not seen in 40 years because in Christian community, life -on-life we had learned, listened, lived, loved, labored together in relationally based ministry with them at an inner city rescue mission service and at camp/retreats in the widest array of circumstances - with an injured or homesick camper, praying as we gathered hundreds of kids and staff in a small basement during a tornado warning (no cell phones! only a radio), agonized with kids and teens over the early death of a parent or fighting divorcing parents. ..What a privilege to be entrusted with deep fears and questions they felt safe to share, to play pranks (toilet papered people's houses dressed in dark clothes), to spend New Year's Eve with MANY senior high students and some college staff at an inner city rescue mission where George spent a week incognito on study leave (ask him!) as we got to know and listened respectfully to the stories and wisdom of men living on the edges of life and hope; encouraged fearful kids and staff up a 50' rock cliff and talked through how to "TRUST the rope and your belayer" to repel down; huddled prayed and listened to the Spirit through each another for situations WAY beyond our years or human wisdom and witnessed the Spirit move in healing, life-giving power.

Now, we were hearing countless stories from these ones of walking and wrestling with Jesus, making disciples (apprentices) down the decades wherever the Spirit sent them, and some of the painful places and relationships in which they found themselves seeking to respond to the Spirit's love and transforming invitations, wounded healers per Henri Nouwen.

“As you are going, make disciples . . .” Mt. 28:18

“If you are faithful in [what may seem] the little things you will be faithful in the large ones.” Luke 16:10a NLT

Friends, how can you and I, our churches, help one another not to underestimate or get distracted (seduced or enticed!) from the foundational, transforming, people/community and world changing, core mutual discipleship practices of Jesus — prayer; 1-1 & small group *life-on-everyday life together*; rooted in and shaped by the Word written and the Word lived/Jesus; equipped and encourage to *live sent*, to join the Spirit already at work as we bear one another's burdens, serve, share and embody the Good News, love, justice, compassion . . . of Jesus for the sake of the flourishing of not only the disciple community but the wider community and world outside our buildings, and for God's glory and Big purposes!

Phyllis Tickle, writer, publisher and Christian thinker refers to this season as one of the spiritual awakenings or “rummage sales” that Christianity holds about every five hundred years, sorting, letting go of what's no longer essential or workable and in this process of reforming itself for the new era [1] she sees us as entering “the Age of the Spirit,” when our overfocus and reliance, perhaps obsession? with control and order would fail, even harm us, and once again [Read Acts, The Acts of the Holy Spirit] we would HAVE to rely on the Holy Spirit whose ways are rarely predictable, changeable as the wind. [2] Near the end of her life at an Emerging Church conference in 2013 she proclaimed, “Our jaws should drop open in amazement,” “I think we're seeing a shift in Christianity as dramatic as that first Pentecost wildfire.” [3]

Filled by God's Spirit we are Empowered for FAR more than we can imagine! I Cor 2:9 Eph 3:20-21

Remember (and celebrate), Reflect, Re-Store/Re-story, Re-frame, Respond to the Spirit's promptings, invitations and opportunities.

PMT — A great deal has been happening - several transitions in both PMT and our congregations are underway or approaching and lived into with all the feelings, complexities and questions, frustrations, *and* God's opportunities. Several searches underway or will be. First off I want to thank so many on PMT who have been working extremely hard, often in ways which cannot be shared publicly, to assist with some time consuming processes and ongoing conversations, prayer and consultations on the phone when we had thought all was in place and then . . . Amidst it all we have also been privileged to have a front row seat to experience answers to prayers and the Spirit at work.

With gratitude and sadness we celebrate the friendship with and the Spirit's work in and through Teresa Kendall as she and Tom move south to be near their growing family. Thank you, Teresa, for all you have given to Deer Lodge and this body.

Congratulations to FPC, Butte & Karolee Larson whom we are examining at this meeting to become the called, installed pastor. Karolee just graduated from Dubuque Theological Seminary receiving 4 awards! See PMT report.

Networks and Partnerships are part of the new ways in which life in church and community is springing up and supported.

A fruitful initial ecumenical conversation regarding ministry was convened in eastern Montana in Glendive May 5-6 with 5 mainline bodies represented. Why? The dearth of pastors, lay pastors, disciples, empowered and sent members and much more is even more of a challenge in rural areas and felt across all types and stripes of churches. Yet, isn't desperation when we pray and rely on the Spirit?

Our team, Caroline, , Gail Beckam (Colstrip & PMT) , Jamie Schmeling (Terry & LC), Neva Rathbun (PMT) and Nancy Pehl, (Terry) plus Charley Blom (formerly Miles City) also joined, were, in my estimation, some of the most prepared, insightful and creative voices of leadership, partnership and possibility in the group of about 25 which wants to meet again this year.

I met and explored ideas with a wide range of people including a creative Lutheran Sr. pastor, in Sydney, Lutheran LPA, who started her training at 65 after pushing off God's call for decades!, A Methodist pastor from Tonga who loves small towns, Rev. Tony Clark, new UCC Conf minister, and rich talks with those from our team. Our group will report and keep you updated.

I am attending and/or preaching in a few churches, often those in transition, Manhattan, Bozeman, Brent Long's installation.

CLC – connecting, discerning, calling is rolling out and training for the NEW CLC (Church Leadership Connection, pastor church 'dating 'service!). Caroline, Neva, Debbie Blackburn, Chuck Wright and I attended a National Webinar May 31 for presbytery staff & COM mod's. (Recorded and archived for Mid Council Leader Use). This has been and will continue to require a great deal of learning and interpretive time and energy for me, Caroline, our PMT leaders and any involved in search processes. There are some improvements and adaptations. The rollout is bumpy as the new forms, instructions, manuals, FAQ's, have not been available or else not finalized to coincide with their trainings and now, full operation of the new system.

Rev. Brent Long was installed in UCC church in Big Timber June 4 and is already deeply appreciated by many. I preached a homily and was one of the contingent from Yellowstone which included George, Karolee Larson, Jim Tarr and several others from St. Andrew Presbyterian where Brent previously pastored.

The Board of Pensions is in a season of significant reassessment and adapting. DO read whatever they send. With dwindling clergy and mostly shrinking churches there are challenges and changes.

Leadership Cabinet – Good leaders, prayerful, listening and hard at work on a WIDE range of matters. Pertaining to living our vision in the context. See their report. Meetings with the presbytery planning team have been very blessed as well as busy. My time has been needed to work on transitions to a solo general presbyter – **wide range of information exchanged, gathered, perspectives.** More time was required for start up employment tasks and ongoing conversation and work with the Personnel subgroup- administrative, financial processes, paperwork, BOP, conversations . . .made more complex with various transitions in our presbytery and at the national level, plus the loss of our mothers. Yet, God is good and faithful.

Camping and Youth – God's provision and good news on Westminster Spires and campers for next week's all ages camp tup at Hyalite the wonderful Yellowstone team and See Daniel's report. FPC Bozeman's Rockhaven is full.

Synod of the Rocky Mountains– Update on 2 Grants applied for by Synod, or will be submitted soon as they know which presbyteries are participating. A partnership among the presbyteries, for all who choose to join. Most are already "in".

CRE/CLP 2 year online training in a cohort (Jan. 2024-Dec. '25) in a pioneering partnership for the presbyteries in our Synod with Dubuque Seminary, Beth McCaw, former Glacier GP, and heading this up. Dubuque faculty working in partnership with Synod presbyteries on this. (A Lily Grant is part of the funding for this experiment) . This opportunity is for both those who are interested in the full program as well as those who may want to take a course or 2. Those in the 2 year program will meet together 2x a year. A zoom planning meeting 6/15 was very impressive and encouraging for a host of reasons. Who may the Spirit be calling to explore Lay pastoring? Pray and ask!

Synod Training of Presbytery Clerks to then do training at home in several areas: training clerks in churches, training Administrative Commissions, PIC's...

Sept Synod Assembly meeting will be in person and again include Execs as well as commissioners. They want a 5 minute video from each presbytery to highlight the Spirit at work there.

Personal – Many blessings. We celebrated with Gillian as she was awarded Excellence in Teaching award by MSU! We continue to live into this new season for us. My mother's memorial service and burial were June 9. We have felt your love and prayers and are grateful for those of you who came to worship, celebrate and hug us. Prayers for all the work and family complexities welcomed. In our off time we head east for George's mother's memorial service in Charlottesville, Va June 24.

A few Resources:

Webinar: Leadership and the Challenges Facing our Neighbors Today and Tomorrow with futurist Dr. Tom Sine,

In order to build adaptive capacity for the long haul of change, church leaders must be able to identify ongoing pain points in their community. But in an ever changing world, is it possible to identify pain points of the *future*? How can you anticipate incoming waves of change so that your church has lead time to create new ways to respond within your unique congregational calling? This is the question we explore in a free webinar with Tod Bolsinger, Executive Director of the Church Leadership Institute, and Tom Sine, author of *Live Like You Give a Damn: Join the Changemaking Celebration*, and co-author, with Dwight J. Friesen, of *2020s Foresight: Three Vital Practices for Thriving in a Decade of Accelerating Change*.

This FREE webinar replay can be watched @ <https://depre.org/webinar-leadership-and-challenges/>

There are some worthwhile reads from the week of May 19's *Presbyterian Outlook* pertaining to the priorities, hopes, practices and shifts needed as churches prayerfully explore acting on what we observe and learnings, with what I like to refer to as "holy experiments" I imagine many others of you do this as well, but I have found that "seeding, fertilizing and informing" my mind and imagination with valuable research, ideas, insights from others on this journey of discovery and transformation is crucial in order to not only see from my own vantage point, or solely based on my previous experiences, assumptions or comfort levels.

1. "Investing in Relationships OVER church programs". "...the church's potential to reach the younger generations with Christian faith depends on our ability to prioritize relational ministry over programmatic ministry. Programmatic ministry seeks to attract people to an event that usually happens in our building. Relational ministry seeks to build relationships with people, regardless of location. It seeks to know the real struggles, joys, and questions of young people. To me, if relational ministry is going to be the way we reach the next generation with Christian faith, then we also have to prioritize relational evangelism..."

<https://pres-outlook.org/2023/05/investing-in-relationships-over-church-programs/>

2. "I know decline isn't inevitable, but it requires adopting an entrepreneurial mindset and practices..." writes Rev. Graham Standish in "Have We Become Sears?" <https://pres-outlook.org/2023/05/have-we-become-sears/>

3. What can Christian summer camps tell us about the needs of the church?... I do know we are missing a powerful opportunity to raise leaders in the church by not listening to them and clinging to what we have always known. Church is not about me, or you, it is about the beloved community coming together to worship and serve. This is especially true in the PC(USA) where we pride ourselves on being able to worship together despite our differences. We are losing generations because we aren't willing to compromise, to listen, to empower, to let go of the past and make way for a yet unknown future. I am grateful for the experience camp gives to our younger generations and I abide in hope that we as a church will take that energy and empower it."

https://pres-outlook.org/2023/05/what-can-christian-summer-camps-tell-us-about-the-needs-of-the-church/?utm_source=Presbyterian+Outlook+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=76ba1558ea-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2021_10_13_07_31_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_b2a9be72d0-76ba1558ea-417106753&mc_cid=76ba1558ea&mc_eid=c8f47c307a