

In these times, we need to cultivate the gifts and practices like the Tribe of Issachar, “those who [1] *had understanding of the times*, [2] *to know what Israel ought to do*”. (1 Chr 12:32). [*Contextual Intelligence: Unlocking the Ancient Secret to Mission on the Front Lines*, Leonard Sweet & Michael Beck.]

In the midst of the swirling currents and circumstances, with a dizzying rate of change and challenges, God is calling us to understand our new context, embrace new opportunities.

Figuratively we, like Lewis and Clark’s Corps of Discovery, are at the top of Lemhi Pass (the divide in Beaverhead Mountains on MT/ID border). Endless, rugged Rocky Mountains were not what they had experienced, were trained for or expected. Their purpose/commission as written and agreed upon would NO LONGER be achievable. At a crisis choice point, they slowly accepted that they could not “Canoe the Mountains” as they had canoed the rivers in flatter territory up to now. What did they do? They struggled, checked things out, talked, and chose:

- a. to reframe their understanding of and how to pursue their mission in changed circumstances
- b. to adapt their ways of traveling including what they took with them from the past,
- c. to value and cultivate different things and capacities,
- d. to empower and follow those best gifted to scout and lead them in the changed topography and chapter—the young Native American woman with her baby who was native to the region and context (Sacagawea) and the pioneering, risk-taking, non-conformist mountain man almost thrown out previously, (John Colter)
- e. to value teamwork, collaboration, experimentation
and much more from: *Canoeing the Mountains: Leadership in Uncharted Territory*, Tod Bolsinger

As we think about how to lead, resource/equip, and support the Churches and Leaders in the Presbytery, some things seem to be important for all of us now:

1. **The power of the Holy Spirit. Sunday, May 23rd is Pentecost Sunday...** If ever we needed a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit for the refining, transforming, renewing and of our life and mission as the Church of Christ, it would seem to be now. God gave the word to Zechariah (4:6), “Not by might, nor by power, *but by my Spirit.*” The ways of the world are not the Jesus’ Way. Will you join us this Pentecost in praying for a fresh out-pouring of the Holy Spirit on God’s Church and for an increased ability to be healed, transformed and to embody the message, ways, priorities and mind of Jesus? To love and follow the Spirit’s leading into worship, life and joining *Christ’s* mission wherever the Spirit sends us?
2. **The church is God’s idea, that others may know and experience Jesus incarnate in and through the disciple community. God loves and wants to purify, unify, bless and empower the church. Yet, the Church has never existed for itself, it’s ‘members’, but always to be a blessing, for God’s glory and mission, sent by Christ into the world as salt and light, as ambassadors for Christ.**

To further equip us all to explore and live this out, we are excited the Leadership Cabinet has invited *the Rev. Shannon Kiser, PCUSA pastor, church planter, trainer, coach (see her bio on invitation letter)* to be our Conference speaker and trainer (via Zoom) for this meeting. The LC’s Planning Team has been working and collaborating with her that she can help us *rethink, explore* how God might be leading each of us and our the Yellowstone Churches to embody and share the Love, Good News and Justice of God in our contexts, our towns, communities, workplaces... We invite you to join us for the Dwelling in the Word and equipping sessions of the presbytery meeting for valuable training/coaching and insights!

3. **How are we to make sense of things, to love God, one another and all others well, just as Jesus loves us, living in a culture of contempt, fear and selfishness. LOVE is Christ’s command and THE way the world knows we are Christians.**

What does it look like NOW, in practice, to “keep the main thing the main thing” which is Jesus Christ and the Good News, growing more in love and like him, making disciples and joining in his mission?

4. Most of us have learned and grown during this time in the ways we have experienced the Spirit at work virtually, in small groups, reaching out virtually to new people and in new ways, including in worship. Let's Keep moving forward building on what we have gained. This week the CDC changed its mandates and recommendations for dealing with the virus. This means changed suggestions for how we may meet and conduct worship indoors. We encourage sessions to think through how each church might go forward with in-person and virtual worship (hybrid worship). Some will simply long to return to worship, "the way we have always done it." Understandable, yet not possible. Contact us for suggestions, ideas, and to share what you are discovering, trying. We will gladly meet with your session.

5. The virus restrictions and myriad associated griefs, losses and changes, are also birthing opportunities, igniting our imaginations and practices, opening many new opportunities in the ways we are envisioning and fulfilling our callings as a presbytery, churches, disciples...

- a. A church is the people indwelt by the Spirit, not a building or limited to a structure. We adopted and adapted to virtual worship and meetings of all kinds, finding them easier to call, better attended and less expensive to reimburse. Although we all have missed in-person working and sharing. The Leadership Cabinet will be coming out in the near future with ideas for how the presbytery might meet personally and effectively in the future, likely with hybrid possibilities.
- b. We can travel to be with you again for worship, a class for session meetings. We are also available to resource you, a group at your church, through Zoom to worship with you or help your sessions explore God's vision and opportunities for your congregation.
- c. We have and will continue to offer and suggest quality webinars, seminars and studies, now available virtually, that were previously not accessible. Please look for these helpful links and resources.
- d. These are days of great change and stress upon the country and the church and none of us has been this way before (see articles below and opening section on *Canoeing the Mountains* and research and resources at end of report.)

Kathy's Focus in this season has included:

- a. *Equipping, resourcing the PMT (stretched thin by lack of team members) and the LC in their work, including important policies and opportunities to offer.*
- b. *Working with churches in transitions, their pastors, PNC's, moderating cong. meetings, transitioning new pastors*
- c. *Staff to Stated Clerk Search Committee and supporting training and transition for new Stated Clerk.*
- d. *researching changing realities and sharing facts, changing laws and advice,*
- e. *researching & equipping in new ways of leading and being church, adapting mindsets and systems to be more flexible and responsive in changing conditions including:
exploring ways to form New Worshipping Communities, Fresh Expressions of Faith*
- f. *Networking, listening learning from and with others – in presbytery, MT, PCUSA regionally, nationally*
- g. *Spiritual support and pastoral care of pastors, their families and church leaders in difficult, ugly times and joyous occasions. Thank you for sharing your lives with us.*
- h. *Framing Strategic Questions, Reflections and Planning for Yellowstone Presbytery Leadership*
- i. *Learning and ongoing adapting of new technology and social media skills*
- j. *With George and other leaders, evaluating, exploring ongoing adaptations for presbytery & churches*
- k. *Some preaching and teaching*
- l. *Prayer, prayer and gratitude and more prayer.*

George's Focus in this season has included:

- a. *Equipping the PMT and the LC in their work.*
- b. *Leading CRE training with JP Carlson.*
- c. *Continuing to preach and travel among the churches as asked and can safely do so.*
- d. *Supporting the PMT and the LC in their work.*
- e. *Serving as head of Presbytery Staff and liaison to the LC's personnel subgroup.*
- f. *Leading a weekly MT Clergy Zoom Gathering for 10 pastors, retired and active from Yellowstone Presbytery, and 10 from other denominations.*

- g. *Helping the Administrative Commission to the Harlowton Church*
- h. *Interfacing with Dakota Presbytery concerning its churches within our bounds.*
- i. *Serving on Boards of Rocky Mountain College and interfacing with MAC along with Dan Krebill.*
- j. *Maintaining Synod and GA relationships and responsibilities.*
- k. *Deeply praying for all of us in Yellowstone and God's Church across Montana and the world.*

Individually and jointly, we have been adapting and making time to prayerfully wait on God, reflecting, seeking to listen to the Spirit as to what God may be up to? What the Spirit may be saying and guiding us to do and be. We know **many** of you have as well and we have asked and sought the Lord together.

A Crisis of Christian Discipleship, past and present

Many happenings are revealing the immature state of discipleship and spiritual maturity in not only our congregations but nationally. It seems the loud voices, media and values of our divided, contentious culture, of systemic practices and beliefs such as racism, us vs them thinking, have been more formative and determinative than the mindset/attitude of Christ (Phil. 2), Christian discipleship, relationships and practices as they have been experienced up to now. This is not only sad and sobering, it is:

1. *damaging the witness and impact of the church and it's call to be a Christian counter culture and salt*
2. *leading to large numbers of pastors leaving the ministry (29% of pastors in credible survey said they have, are or have seriously considered leaving the pastorate), and*
3. *providing God's opportunities for learning, unlearning repentance, and DEEP change.*

Regional Presbyterian Opportunity for ongoing learning, continuing education

Whitworth Ministry Summit, For Such a Time as This: Faithful Witness in a Chaotic Culture June 22 – 24, in person and online, Speakers include: Rev. Esau McCaulley, Ph.D., priest, professor, author of *Reading While Black*; Inés Velásquez-McBryde is a pastor, reconciler and speaker, currently co-lead pastor at multi-ethnic church plant, The Church We Hope For & chaplain at Fuller Seminary. Several Other seminars.

Due to COVID, they are unable to offer their usual on campus housing or children's program.

<https://www.whitworth.edu/cms/administration/church-engagement/whitworth-ministry-summit/>

Personal Update: *Kathy's mom is doing better and coming to visit next week ... We are finally able to plan a visit to George's mom but she is in good spirits and enjoying zoom's with grandkids, great grandkids with 2 more due this year! ... Daughter Gillian and husband, Peter, are expecting their first child, a son, August 16.*

Research & News you can use

I. . Every pastor and leader is a learner, a student and functionally leading a "start-up" in today's swift changes, while our message and faith are timeless. [See Andy Crouch in 2 articles posted on our website @ <http://www.yellowstonepcusa.org/Leadingbeingchurchintimesofchangeandcrisis.htm>]

II. 5 Unsettling Cultural Predictions for the 2020's and How you Can Prepare Starting Now by Carey Nieuwhof, 4-9-21
<https://careynieuwhof.com/5-unsettling-cultural-predictions-for-the-2020s-and-how-you-can-prepare-starting-now/>

Excerpts below.

1. The Current Instability Will Continue. As much as you long for a return to normal, that's unlikely to happen. Politically, economically, socially and culturally, normal was dying long before COVID. The disruption of a global pandemic was the final nail in normal's coffin...

Agility is the best antidote to instability. Because agile leaders aren't committed to a particular model, they're able to preserve their mission.

The world will always have a need for the basics: Food, water, housing, health, safety, meaning, connection, love dignity.

The methods may change, but leaders who stay focused on the mission will thrive.

2. People Will Act More Selfishly.

...It's prudent to prepare for a season where most adults act like teenagers for a while... self-centered people are often angry people. Which makes selfishness doubly tricky to deal with...loyalty will continue to be fickle...

The best way to combat this is not to try to change others but to focus on changing yourself.

Leaders, if you see the world more broadly, you'll act less selfishly. You'll also lead far more capably.

3. Culture Will Remain Deeply Divided.

...a selfish culture is a divided culture... our hyper-individualism ...fuels division...

What does this mean for leaders? **Unity will be more needed than ever...**

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

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

4. The Moral, Theological and Philosophical Questions Will Become More Intense and Important....

I long for the day Adam Grant and I imagined in a recent conversation where, **because of the quality of thinking, the openness of dialogue and maturity of dialogue inside the church the best thinkers sense get attracted into ministry and church-life rather than get pulled mostly into the professions or business.** <https://careynieuwhof.com/episode405/> among many articles and podcasts

5. Deep Leadership Will Be Up to the Challenge. Shallow Leadership Won't.

...In fact, most leaders are perfectly prepared for a world that no longer exists... [Tod Bolsinger's *Tempered Resilience* and *Canoeing the Mountains* address this.]

Leaders unite people when others divide people. Leaders bring meaning where others only bring confusion.

And leaders find a way forward when others stand still or long to go back.

The key for leaders who thrive will be to develop a deeper, more robust emotional, intellectual and spiritual life. [cue T.Bolsinger]

I'd suggest you open up your learning and understanding.

III. How We Gather – insightful research on millennials by Angie Thurston & Casper ter Kuile

. "Millennials are less religiously affiliated than ever before. Churches are just one of many institutional casualties of the internet age in which young people are both more globally connected and more locally isolated than ever before.

Against this bleak backdrop, a hopeful landscape is emerging. Millennials are flocking to a host of new organizations that deepen community in ways that are powerful, surprising, and perhaps even *religious*."

The 6 themes millennials are searching for in their gathering and associating:

Community, Personal Transformation, Social transformation, Purpose Finding, Creativity, and Accountability

Their concluding observation provides an invitation and opportunity: **"it may be more difficult for [traditional religious communities] to innovate within a system that is struggling. The organizations we've identified, and the many others like them, are innovators at the margins who can reimagine community for the twenty first century. "**

https://caspertk.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/how-we-gather.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3hpeH7nQU2OR5R3ElvL_2QnfoPqawYWMZK_a5FJv0dGtBLu4YrpUS6C-Y