

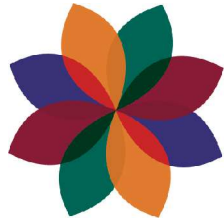
Presbyterians Today

August/September 2018

Fall Kickoff: Living out the Church's 'Great Ends'



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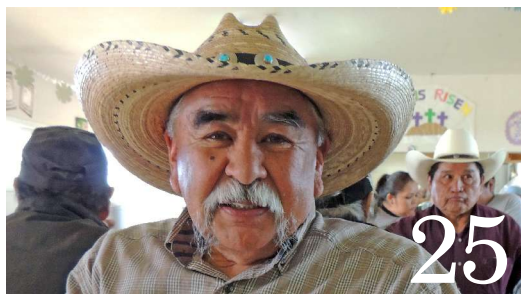
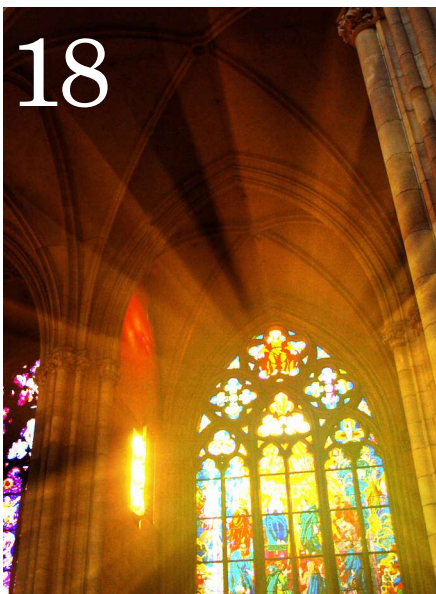


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God's kingdom: close, yet so far

Stepping up our kin-dom work

Dr. Brian K. Blount's book *Go Preach! Mark's Kingdom Message and the Black Church Today* sits on my desk. It's one of the books that survived the move from our rental in Maryland to our Vermont home. During packing, I promised my husband I would limit the books to three large boxes. What didn't fit wouldn't come. There just wasn't room in our 1760-something home for my dog-eared friends. It was painful, but I was brutal in my decisions as to which ones to keep and which ones to give away. It says a lot that *Go Preach!* made the cut.

Blount was teaching a class on "The Kingdom of God in Mark's Gospel" during my senior year at Princeton Theological Seminary. It was a topic that didn't interest me. I wanted to take the class on women mystics, but I needed one more New Testament credit to graduate. His class fulfilled that requirement in the only slot left in my schedule.

My attitude wasn't the best on the first day of class. I doodled a lot in my notebook. The doodles, though, surprisingly turned into a few notes, which then turned into an "oh-my-gosh-I-need-another-notebook" moment. I was captivated by what I was hearing about this kingdom that was ambiguous to me. It was always something I chose to keep at a distance, off into the future because I couldn't grasp what Jesus was saying (or, gasp, asking of me) when he said the kingdom is near. How near? Near me? Huh? Uh-oh.

Just as I was recently told how my walking around while preaching, rather than staying safely behind the lectern, made someone in the pew nervous, I found myself feeling nervous to meet this God on the loose, bringing a kingdom of radical change, radical welcome and radical love into my comfortable present moment.

In class, I began seeing glimpses of what God was up to as I listened to stories my fellow seminarians, including ones of color, shared. Stories of not just struggles, but hope seen in the way of community building, justice work and advocacy. I began wondering: If the kingdom had come near to us, then why did so many churches act as if it was still off into the future? Was it easier — and safer — to keep talking and dreaming about something ambiguous rather than living into the present realities of God making something new?

I've been thinking a lot about the kingdom of God lately. On one hand, I'm excited for the new thing God is doing. I can see the vision of a vibrant church that reaches out in ways beyond the traditional Sunday morning worshiping hour. I can hear the voices of those once silenced now speaking boldly and prophetically. I want to be part of the work building not a kingdom, but a kin-dom. Kin-dom building was the subject of the Bible study at the 223rd General Assembly (2018) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in St. Louis, which focused on reimagining a community in which everyone is a beloved child of God.

And yet there are moments I wonder how near is this new thing God is doing, because there are days I just don't see it.

I recently moderated a meeting at one of the small churches I've been called to walk alongside. The elders got into a conversation about — surprise, surprise — how to grow the church. I didn't engage in the conversation because it's one that hasn't changed in the 11 years I've been ordained. *If only we had a pastor with small children. That will attract families.*

When they were done talking, I shared what I had seen on my drive to their church: three migrant workers on bicycles heading to a local farm and two children of color stepping off a school bus, heading into a house down the block from the church.

If those weren't enough signs that the kingdom of God was near to them in their sleepy rural village, I then told them about a minister in the area who has two transgender teens in his flock. The all-white session stared at me. There were looks of dismay and denial. I then began

CALL TO ACTION

As the new church program year gets underway, look around your neighborhood to see how it has changed. Talk to Chamber of Commerce members, get involved in school activities and take note of what is happening outside of your church building. Bring church members together to discuss changes and opportunities. Then begin exploring ways to build up a community (not just a church community).

sharing with them what I heard in a class in seminary I originally didn't want to take.

"The kingdom of God is near."

I smile as I look at this book on my desk. I need to drop a note to Dr. Blount, who is now president of Union Presbyterian Seminary, thanking him for the impact his class had on me. Little did I know that God was giving me the tools for this kin-dom building moment the church is in right now.

Our communities are changing. What isn't changing is God's love. It's still an all-inclusive love that is inviting us to be part of the work of welcoming all.

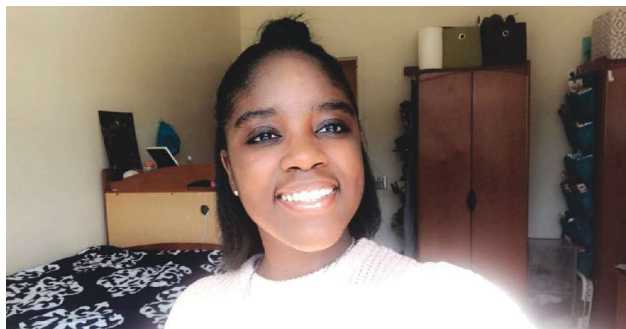
Yes, I am excited about our church today. And yet as excited as I am, I can't help but to think of the old saying that reminds me we are so close, yet still so far.

Donna Frischknecht Jackson is editor of Presbyterians Today and a rural ministry networker in Washington County, New York.

What Presbyterians are saying

In one of the worship services at General Assembly, we were told by the preacher, Floretta Barbee-Watkins, to "distress the comfortable and comfort the distressed." This statement is what I believe the church is moving toward. My hope for our denomination is that we see this statement through to the end.

— Anni-Maxine Quaye, Westminster Presbyterian Church, Albany, New York



PC(USA) Snapshot

85%

of Presbyterians say their church has helped them find and use their spiritual gifts.



Source: PC(USA) Research Services, Presbyterian Panel on Congregational Vitality, 2017.

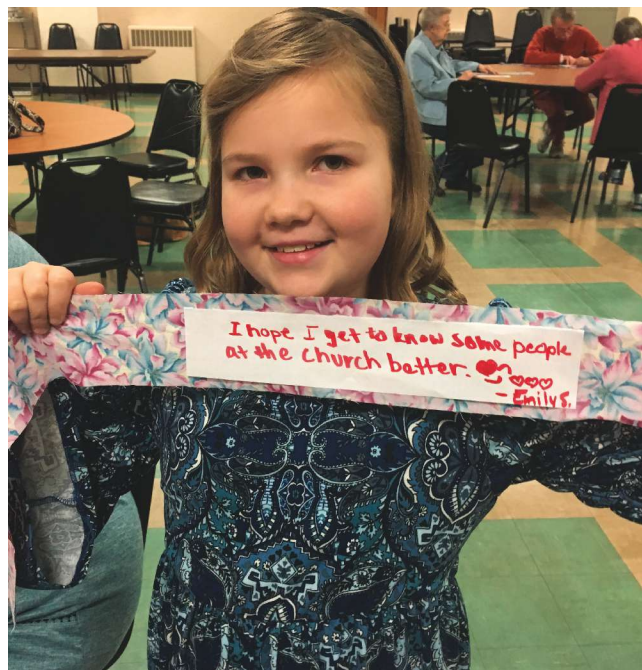
Graphic by Jeffrey Lawrence

Getting to know you

During a midweek supper and prayer gathering at Bardstown Road Presbyterian Church in Louisville, Emily, 10, participated in writing prayer requests on strips of fabric. The fabric was tied to a wooden cross that stood in the fellowship hall.

As the adults hesitantly scribbled a prayer, Emily didn't think very long at all. She wrote: "I hope I get to know some people at the church better." And, of course, she signed off with several hearts.

How can your church bring young and old together this fall? Share your ideas with *Presbyterians Today* at editor@pcusa.org.



Donna Frischknecht Jackson

Do you have news to share as to how God is at work in your community? Send stories, 150–200 words, to editor@pcusa.org.



Let children ‘destroy’ worship

It's time to — really — embrace families

Quickly, kids! We need to get going or we'll miss the service! This was my plea one Easter morning as I ushered my children out the door to make it to church. My husband and I served in different churches, and worshipping together was impossible. However, on this morning he was the guest preacher at a church that had a different worship schedule from ours. We were thrilled. Our family could celebrate together.

As we walked into the church, we heard beautiful singing from the choir, which signaled that the service had started. I turned to my 2- and 4-year-olds and said, “We need to use our indoor voices, OK?” The church had an amazing space in the back for young children. Pews had been removed, and a plush carpet covered the floor. There were bins with books and toys. I felt bliss as my children ran to the area and picked up the toys. Together, we sat on the carpet.

We need to provide space for families to participate in the worshipping community because when we do, a community of faith is enriched. Children and families should not be an afterthought when planning events and programs in the church.

A few minutes later, an usher approached me and another mother to tell us to keep our children quiet. I decided to move my children to the foyer so they could not be a distraction. The foyer had a clear view of the sanctuary. We could stay there and still worship and hear Daddy preach. As soon as we stepped into the foyer, though, the usher closed the French doors and whispered, “Please keep your children quiet because they could destroy the service.”

Astonished, I replied, “I beg your pardon?” He repeated: “Keep the children quiet because they could destroy the service.”

Taking my children by their hands, I looked at the usher and said, “No worries. We’re leaving.” Crying, I

picked up my belongings and walked out. If my children could “destroy” a service, then that service was not an act of worship. It was an act of entertainment. No one has the power to destroy worship, because the gathering of people is a call from God. It is an invitation for all of us to know God more deeply and to have fellowship with one another.

If there is something that needs to be destroyed, it's the misconception of children disrupting our way of worship. I believe that children are the greatest treasure the church has, and therefore we need to take good care of them. We need to provide space for families to participate in the worshipping community because when we do, a community of faith is enriched. Children and families should not be an afterthought when planning events and programs in the church.

That Easter Sunday led me to take the role of an ally in my ministry. Whenever our church staff sits down to plan, I say, “That’s a great idea. Now, what about the children? And how are we going to include families?”

Why do I push for this? Because if a family takes the monumental challenge of waking up early on a Sunday to get the little ones dressed, fed and loaded into the car to go to church, I want them to feel embraced by the community they have chosen to worship with. I want them to know that they belong. God has invited them. It is good that we get to be together.

There’s a story in Acts that I love. Peter and John are going to the Temple, where they find a lame man begging at the door. The man asks for money. Peter offers something better. He offers healing in the name of Jesus. Instantly, the man’s feet and ankles become strong. The man rushes inside the Temple and disrupts the service. Yet, in doing so, he testifies to God’s power and love.

As we work to include our children in the life of our faith communities, let’s look at each of them, take their hand and invite them in. And then let us be witnesses as they testify to God’s power and love among us — even if their testimony “destroys” worship.

Kecelyn Santiago is the coordinator for children’s ministry at Kirk in the Hills in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. She and her husband, the Rev. Fernando Rodriguez, have two children, Matías and Sionely.



We are all ministers

What ‘the priesthood of all believers’ looks like

As we approach the fall kickoff to the church program year, my thoughts keep coming back to the Protestant idea of the priesthood of all believers. This doctrine teaches that because of Jesus Christ, there is no need for someone to act as a mediator between the people and God. Everyone is just as spiritual, just as capable of speaking to God, and just as called to deliver God’s message to the world. Everyone is equally called to do God’s work and to minister to God’s people.

The question, though, that many of the people in the church I serve ask is, “What does ministering look like if you’re not a minister?” The answer is complex, and it looks different for different people, but the short answer is that it looks like you serving others and showing God’s love as you go about your daily life.

The best example I have of this is a story of John and Raul. In 1986, they worked at the corporate headquarters of a retail chain in New York City. They were both supervisors and frequently spent 12-hour shifts working together. They developed a friendship. Eventually, John was promoted to manager. One day, John noticed Raul had a lesion on his right cheek and that he hadn’t been feeling well. Raul went to see a doctor in June and went out on disability. In August, Raul asked if he could come back to work, though he would need some accommodations because of his health. John, John’s boss and the vice president of the human resources department all agreed. However, Raul’s co-workers soon learned that Raul had been diagnosed with AIDS. They were afraid and angry that he was coming back to work.

The first morning when Raul came into work, John walked out of his office, smiled, shook Raul’s hand and told him how glad he was that he was back. As the weeks passed, Raul continued to grow weaker until he went out again on disability in October.

When Raul died that December, John and his boss attended Raul’s funeral, which surprised and touched Raul’s partner. When John recounted this story to me, he said that he still remembers the sound of Raul’s voice and the look of his face. John also mentioned that in retrospect, he’s amazed that he and the company were so willing to stand by Raul to the end, especially given the fears about AIDS at that time.

The story about John and Raul is an example of what

it means to be a priest amid our daily lives. John was just doing what he thought was right. He would never describe what he did as something godly, Christ-like or priestly. Like the lepers in Jesus’ time, Raul was visibly marked as ill by the lesion on his face. People didn’t want to work with Raul, let alone touch him. But John accepted Raul with an outstretched hand.

In that moment, John proclaimed God’s message to Raul loud and clear: You are my beloved child. John’s handshake and smile delivered a more perfect sermon than even the most gifted preacher on her best Sunday.

How we can minister to each other will look different

Everyone is just as spiritual, just as capable of speaking to God, and just as called to deliver God’s message to the world.

in our various contexts. Few stories will be quite like that of John and Raul. In my congregation, we seem to do a good job of taking care of each other. We’ll work out a schedule so that the person whose loved one is ill is never alone at the hospital. We bring meals to those recovering from surgery. We show up and eat cake with someone celebrating his birthday after coming through a major health scare a few months before. We show someone who has lost her spouse how to do the chores that her spouse had always done. We visit those in our community who are lonely, even if they have no direct connection to our congregation. The thing that gives me the most joy as the pastor is, I don’t normally organize these things. They aren’t a planned initiative to live out our faith. We’re just a bunch of people wanting to live out our faith.

When people from my congregation ask what it looks like to minister if you aren’t a minister, I smile and say it looks a lot like what they’re already doing.

Rebecca Lawson Putman is the pastor of Northville United Presbyterian Church in Northville, New York. She also serves as the co-chairperson of Albany Presbytery’s Committee on Ministry.



Mourners' actions reveal great love

God's law in our hearts leads us to care

Las acciones de los enlutados revelan un gran amor

La ley de Dios en nuestros corazones nos conduce al cuidado

My day started with a call alerting me of a death that had occurred at dawn and requesting the presence of a chaplain for comfort. I had met the family the previous week and knew they were accepting of the prognosis and nearing transition.

As I approached the house, I could see that the family had opened the front door: a sign of welcome for mourners. I entered the home, offered condolences and joined the family in the silent circle surrounding the hospital bed in the living room. We sat comfortably in sturdy equipale chairs: handmade rustic leather furniture, crafted from tanned pigskin and cedar strips. They originate in the Mexican state of Jalisco and their name comes from the Aztec Nahuatl word *ikpalli*, which means "chair."

A slow stream of relatives and neighbors flowed in and out of the house, lovingly paying tribute to the deceased as they kissed her forehead and shed an occasional tear. Juanita was a beloved matriarch, admired for her sense of humor, her many talents and her incredible strength. Just a few years before, she had lost two daughters, the oldest and the youngest, in the same month. Everyone spoke proudly of her resilience in the face of such unimaginable grief.

As the stories were shared, one relative rearranged the sheets on the bed, another lit some candles and another wrapped a rosary around Juanita's hands. Then one of the sons went to the back of the house and re-emerged a few minutes later with a bunch of freshly cut yellow tulips. "I planted them for her," he said, and proceeded to place them on the bed, surrounding Juanita's body. Just then, one of the daughters grabbed two red roses from the vase on the nightstand, broke off the petals and sprinkled them all over the bed.

I watched the family freely sharing their stories, tears and floral offerings, and I was amazed at how their own intuition informed their expressions of grief. And I prayed for families and church communities where we might be able to do the same: to act in unison, guided by God's law written upon our hearts, to care, to serve and to love one another in life — not just death.

Magdalena I. García is a hospice chaplain for Vitas Healthcare in Chicago.

My día comenzó con una llamada de alerta sobre una muerte ocurrida al amanecer y la solicitud de la presencia consoladora de un capellán. Yo había conocido a la familia la semana anterior y sabía que estaban conscientes del pronóstico médico y la proximidad de la transición.

Al acercarme a la casa, pude ver que la familia tenía abierta la puerta delantera: una señal de bienvenida para los dolientes. Entré a la casa, ofrecí mis condolencias y me uní a los familiares en el círculo silencioso que rodeaba la cama de hospital en medio de la sala. Nos acomodamos en unas resistentes butacas equipales: muebles rústicos hechos a mano, elaborados con cuero de puerco y tiras de cedro. Son originales del estado mexicano de Jalisco y su nombre proviene del vocablo náhuatl *ikpalli*, que significa <<silla>>.

Un torrente lento de familiares y vecinos fluía dentro y fuera de la casa, rindiendo un cariñoso tributo a la fallecida, a medida que le besaban la frente y derramaban una que otra lágrima. Juanita era una matriarca adorada, admirada por su buen sentido del humor, sus muchos talentos y su increíble fortaleza. Tan solo unos años atrás ella había perdido dos hijas, la mayor y la menor, en el mismo mes. Todos hablaban con orgullo de su resistencia ante un dolor inimaginable.

A medida que se compartían las historias, un familiar reacomodó las sábanas de la cama, otra prendió unas velas y otra enrolló un rosario en las manos de Juanita. Entonces uno de los hijos fue al patio trasero y regresó unos minutos más tarde con un ramo de tulipanes amarillos recién cortados. <<Yo los sembré para ella>>, dijo, y procedió a colocarlos sobre la cama, rodeando el cuerpo de Juanita. Justo entonces una de las hijas tomó dos rosas rojas del jarrón sobre la mesita de noche, arrancó los pétalos y los roció sobre la cama.

Vi a la familia compartir libremente sus memorias, sus lágrimas y sus ofrendas florales, y me sorprendió ver como su propia intuición guió las expresiones de duelo. Y oré porque tengamos familias y comunidades de iglesia donde podamos hacer lo mismo: actuar al unísono, guiados por la ley de Dios escrita en nuestros corazones, para cuidarnos, servirnos y amarnos mutuamente en la vida — y no solo en la muerte.

Magdalena I. García es capellana de hospicio para Vitas Healthcare en Chicago.



One-room worship

Reaching young and old on a Sunday morning

Growing up, one of my favorite shows was *Little House on the Prairie*. The characters were old and young, likable and unlikable. Even though some (like the Olesons!) were petty and others made mistakes, they were always there for each other when it counted. *Little House* had story lines for both kids and adults on the show.

By contrast, today's media programming is narrowly targeted. There are shows for preschoolers with fish and animals as characters. There are shows for elementary-age kids with teenagers as the heroes and adults as the fools. There's Netflix and Hulu and iTunes for young adults to stream. And, of course, there are cable and network stations for generations of people who still use a TV set.

Gone are the days of a family gathering to watch the same screen and, with some exceptions, to watch shows that are intended for multiple generations. Today, dad and daughter can sit side by side while he watches a cooking show and she streams an animated movie — both wearing headphones.

Many churches have followed suit in their approach to worship. There's children's church with separate activities so the adults can actually listen to the sermon while their kids are off crafting and gaming in Jesus' name. There are edgy services with "talks" instead of sermons, as well as traditional Sunday morning gatherings with robes and organs. Differentiation can be a good thing as we seek to reach new generations. But such targeting is beyond the reach of many small churches.

As I begin to plan for the "back-to-church" season, I'm remembering *Little House on the Prairie's* one-room schoolhouse. Small churches are like that schoolhouse, bringing together people from all ages and backgrounds for one hour per week — farmhands, babies, grocery store owners, teenagers, retired professors, toddlers and the mayor can all show up.

No doubt, churches have always tried to reach everyone in the room with mass proclamation and discipleship. What's new, though, is our hyper-segmented society. People expect to be catered to. This is a challenge for congregations who can't afford a variety of programs. We have one, or at best two, hours of community time in which to proclaim, educate and inspire.

And so, as I get ready for fall, here are some things I'll be trying:

Equal time. I realized one day that we expect kids to sit through an hour of adult worship but never expect adults to sit through more than a few minutes of child-centered worship. Yes, there are more adults in the room and there might be a brief children's sermon to make us feel as if we are doing something for them, but for the most part the kids are neglected.

We sing hymns that require reading, sit still through sermons and even spend time in silence. What would change if we expected adults to participate in more child-appropriate worship? Perhaps opening with a kid-friendly hymn ("Jesus Loves Me" or "This Little Light of Mine") and doing motions?

Intentional illustration. Multiple ages mean multiple frames of reference. Just as one-room schoolhouse teachers didn't try to teach kindergartners multiplication, we pastors shouldn't speak one way and assume everyone will get it. A sermon illustration from a trusted commentary can be woefully outdated to a 28-year-old, while one referencing something online will be confusing to an 80-year-old. Bubble Guppies and Captain Kangaroo can be meaningful or meaningless, depending on the age. What if we tried to reach all ages by being intentional and varied with our illustrations? Can we take the object lesson out of the kids' time and into the sermon?

Confidence in the crowd. If you are like me, you probably feel as if you can't reach every person every week, no matter how hard you try. The good news is that you don't have to. Intergenerational worship means grandparents and parents can talk to the kids, or the teens can enlighten the parents, because they were all in the same space, singing the same songs and hearing the same Scriptures.

With the intergenerational experience, we don't have to ask what they did at church in the car ride home. We already know because we were being the church together.

Sue Washburn is the pastor of Reunion Presbyterian Church in Mount Pleasant, Pennsylvania, and a freelance writer. She keeps a few jars of emergency Play-Doh behind the pulpit to illustrate difficult theological concepts.

What does the Lord require of you? Presbyterians are answering that prophetic question, working for justice and seeking to help their neighbors in a variety of ways. *Presbyterians Today* shares their stories.

Talking justice with ...

Trey Hegar on immigration and the local church

When 32 immigrant workers at a concrete plant near Mount Pleasant, Iowa, were arrested last spring, First Presbyterian Church got to work in helping to provide shelter, money and legal assistance for those potentially facing deportation and their families. *Presbyterians Today* caught up with the Rev. Trey Hegar, the church's pastor, to talk about immigration, justice and the local church.

PT: How ready was your congregation to respond to the ICE raid in Mount Pleasant?

Hegar: The church elders had already passed a resolution for our building to be a gathering place for families to reunite if this was to happen. We also had a standing agreement with the school district for children left behind to be brought to the church.

PT: What did you find challenging in addressing immigration issues?

Hegar: One of the most challenging aspects has been treading the controversial topic of helping immigrants. Some people in the congregation admitted to reservations about the role we were playing in this crisis. They had important questions. I addressed the issues both from the pulpit and with personal conversations. We did some sharing about the complexity and length of obtaining citizenship. We also spoke boldly that some families had come illegally and we still chose — and choose — to help. Even those with reservations, though, have felt strongly about being hospitable in a time of need, agreeing to figure out the rest later.

PT: What surprised you?

Hegar: I was surprised by who showed up to help. Many non-churchgoing members of our community have come to be a part of this body of Christ serving our neighbors. They haven't stepped foot in our church on Sunday, but they show up at meetings, dinners and

rallies. Also, many of the families directly affected by the raid, with a loved one detained by ICE, have volunteered and show up to translate, give rides, work the food pantry, watch children and yes, even worship on Sunday morning.

I have been amazed, too, at the help from the Catholic Diocese, the Lutheran Synod and especially the University of Iowa. The university sent bilingual doctoral students from their child psychology program. Their law professors showed up on the first night, with graduate students, to help document the families affected and offer legal advice, and they have been present in the church every week during business hours in some capacity to help the families. Amazing.

PT: What advice would you give other congregations who are seeking to be more faithful in advocating for immigrants?

Hegar: I have three pieces of advice to congregations, and that is to become proactive, be visible/relational and be prepared.

Look into your church's historical DNA. What have you already done in the past concerning social justice? First Presbyterian had adopted refugee families during the Vietnam War. It wasn't a far move for them to become involved in local immigrant and refugee issues, even in Iowa.

Next, become visible and relational. We advertised educational events, rented the local theater to host a documentary and had global potlucks to raise awareness about diversity in our community. We became visible and built relationships with experts and neighbors.

Finally, be prepared in terms of communicating what is going on. Have your website ready with online giving, updated information and helpful links. I cannot emphasize this enough. Our website views leapt from a few thousand a month to more than 10,000 unique views in days. Our online giving platform exploded with donations. Updates were posted and people could be directed

to immigration facts, lawyers, and ways to help and ways to receive help. An active, updated website with online giving is a must. It is cheaper and easier than you think.

PT: Any final words of advice?

Hegar: Be in prayer. Ask Jesus through the Holy Spirit to use you. Empty your wills to fulfill the needs of God's people with the gifts you have to offer. To co-opt Frederick Buechner's words, "Your gifts and the world's need intersect, forming a cross." Pray for that to happen.

What Presbyterians are saying

Baptism is the ultimate anti-separation policy. As members of God's family, we belong, body and soul, to God. Nothing and no one can ever separate us from God's love in Christ.

—Associate Pastor Kaci Clark-Porter, First & Central Presbyterian Church, Wilmington, Delaware



ELLEN OILER

Repurposing a pulpit

Shortly after the Rev. Gusti Linnea Newquist arrived at First United Presbyterian Church in Troy, New York, she realized that major changes were ahead. Among those changes for the congregation was her habit of coming down from behind the pulpit on a Sunday morning and preaching from the floor of the sanctuary. As she continued this preaching style, the ornate wooden pulpit, once the focal point of a preacher's sermon, was gradually pushed to the side.

In 2017, as renovations began in the sanctuary, the congregation wanted to ensure that the pulpit, which was a gift to the church in 1901, was in a home where it would continue to be used. The city of Troy was approached to see if the municipal building could use the pulpit. The answer was "yes."

Project "Repurpose the Pulpit" quickly became a collaborative effort, with the local Commission on Economic Opportunity's YouthBuild program, which provides vocational training for young people, lending a hand. The project involved removing, redesigning and replacing the upper portion of the dais. Added to the newly restored pulpit was a mahogany city seal carved by a local carpenter.

When asked why First United would let go of a still-sturdy pulpit, Newquist said, "Because Jesus is on the loose — and the Sunday sermon is a conversation, not just a proclamation." She added, "Now may all the prophetic sermons that have been preached from this pulpit seep into the fabric of city government."



COURTESY OF FIRST UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Troy, New York, Mayor Patrick Madden welcomes members of First United Presbyterian Church and the YouthBuild program to unveil the new podium at City Hall.

Students envision a healthier community

College coffeehouse provides safe space for race conversation

BY PAUL SEEBECK

When racially insensitive photos surfaced at Cal Poly University in the spring, Front Porch, a coffeehouse and 1001 worshipping community in San Luis Obispo, California, began engaging students — many of whom were disgusted by what they saw.

An Instagram photo showed Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity members flashing gang signs while dressed as gangster stereotypes. In another photo, a student was in blackface. Ten days later, another photo surfaced of Sigma Nu members holding Corona bottles and wearing clothes that apparently were meant to impersonate Hispanics.

Front Porch, which is owned by Santa Barbara Presbytery, is next to the entrance of Cal Poly. Thousands of students walk by Front Porch every day, with some 500 dropping in for free coffee and conversation.

“We became the place for students to process and grieve,” said Front Porch ministries director Joel Drenckpohl.

Those discussions spilled over to Wednesday nights, where more than 250 students came together for a meal. The only requirement was that they get to know each other and discuss hard topics. As the conversations about race deepened, the students began to grasp that

they wouldn’t truly be able to listen and celebrate each other, or their differences, until they recognized each other’s humanity.

According to enrollment data, Cal Poly is the “whitest public university” in the state. Nearly 55 percent of the 20,000 students are white, 16.7 percent are Latino and less than 1 percent are black. For the first time, many Cal Poly students were coming to grips with “white privilege,” which the

African-American community on campus that feels as if they’re not known, or being heard, but also the Latino community — and those in other categories.

With Drenckpohl being invited into a wider university conversation regarding the future of spirituality on Cal Poly’s campus, Front Porch is beginning to dream about how they might further influence the campus to become a healthier community.

The gospel should never be just for Christians. It should benefit everyone — regardless of whether they’re going to build their lives around it or not.

— Joel Drenckpohl

Cambridge Dictionary defines as “the fact of people with white skin having advantages in society that other people do not have.”

“So many people don’t understand how huge this issue is in our country,” Drenckpohl said. “More and more students at Front Porch are saying, ‘I need to care and learn about this.’”

Drenckpohl says it isn’t just the

Opened as a state-of-the-art ministry facility in 2004, it was originally envisioned as a place where students at Cal Poly who identified as Christians could create community with Presbyterians. It even had living quarters — the hope was a Christian worldview would be grown by wrestling with the big ideas of faith. But when Drenckpohl arrived at Front Porch



COURTESY OF FRONT PORCH

Front Porch, a coffeehouse and 1001 worshipping community in San Luis Obispo, California, has encouraged Cal Poly students to recognize each other's humanity first, as a prerequisite for listening to and appreciating their differences.

in 2013, only around 30 people were using it — and fewer than 100 on campus knew it existed.

The first thing Drenckpohl did was push a new vision with the core group of students who were using it.

"The gospel should never be just for Christians," he said. "It should benefit everyone — regardless of whether they're going to build their lives around it or not."

Gradually, Drenckpohl's philosophy of ministry began to reshape Front Porch. Instead of talking about big theological ideas, they started paying attention to those walking past them every day. The goal was to build relationships — not because they had an agenda to convert people, but because they were fellow human beings loved by God.

Five years later Front Porch has a core group of 120 volunteers — of both faith and non-faith backgrounds. Most consider themselves spiritual, but do not necessarily identify as religious. And Front

Porch's donor base is no longer primarily Presbyterian. "Forty percent is from church giving," Drenckpohl said. "The rest is individuals. Parents, students, some of their friends — and people from other faith congregations."

Now, Front Porch more fully represents the journey Drenckpohl has been on — out of the ghetto of Christianity and into a place of awareness that recognizes the humanity of one's neighbors.

"This generation is fed up with religion," he said. "They're tired of how God has been presented to them, which seems to be opposite of who Jesus was."

"Daily, I have students — Christian, Jewish, atheist and Muslim — tell me Front Porch is the most life-giving thing they've ever been a part of."

Paul Seebeck is a communications strategist for the Presbyterian Mission Agency.

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Restructuring committees revive a church

‘Decently and orderly’ can be exciting

BY JEANNIE HUNTER

First Presbyterian Church in Dickson, Tennessee, was in a rut. The pastor of more than 30 years had retired a year before, and the six-member session was keeping the church together. But they were barely surviving. It was all they could do to keep up with their regular tasks, let alone start any new creative ventures.

Throughout this time of transition, there was growing confusion among the congregation about who did what. Who did a member contact to reserve the fellowship hall? Who did a person call to put an event into the newsletter?

Something needed to be done.

The session decided to host a churchwide retreat, beginning on a Friday night and ending Saturday afternoon. Young and old met in the fellowship hall and began discussing First Presbyterian's history and current trends in congregations. On Saturday morning, they began exploring the responsibilities of the church.



COURTESY OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN

After identifying what needed to get done in the church, the First Presbyterian session restructured committees. This led to new energy within the church, especially among the children's programs.

With Post-Its on hand, members identified the various responsibilities found in the *Book of Order* — from the Great Ends of the Church to the jobs of pastors and elders. They then listed their own congregation's jobs that involved tasks that were identified as the traditional domain of the women's group, the men's group and

the deacons. After designating those and sorting through the rest of the Post-Its, they found other categories that needed attention such as administration (finance and personnel), worship, education, property and membership. Recognizing the need for better communication within the congregation as well as with the greater community, a communications category was added, too.

Over the next two months, session members took the Post-Its and organized committees and created committee descriptions based on the needs of the church. They shared those descriptions with the congregation and invited members to join the committees through bulletin inserts and Sunday morning chancel announcements. They made calls and wrote emails to those they wanted to personally invite to serve on committees. Eventually, each committee

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had its first called meeting and discussed goals, responsibilities and opportunities.

It didn't take long for the efforts of the session members to bear fruit. The newly structured committees and members added energy and imagination to the everyday tasks of the church. It was now time to start new ventures.

For example, with the direction of the education committee, a new adult Sunday school class was started. A class that usually saw three to four participants in the past suddenly had up to 20. The children's Sunday school teachers joined the education committee and created a churchwide education calendar. The calendar, says education committee chair Kirk Vandivort, added much-needed organization that paved the way toward getting more accomplished.

"Previously, there was less order. Now, we're better organized and we have a better system for delegation of duties and volunteering," he said.

Education wasn't the only area getting a boost. Other committees were experiencing renewal.

The membership committee, tasked with updating the membership rolls, went a step further. They distributed a form that collected contact information and asked where members had interest in volunteering, creating yet another opportunity to involve congregation members.

The communications committee created a website to reach out to the rapidly growing city of Dickson. They even revamped the church's Facebook page, allowing the children's Sunday school class to post pictures.

The worship committee, invited to think creatively about the service, considered ways to make children and their families feel welcome and connected, creating a note to put in the pew racks that emphasized the church's understanding of wiggles and giggles during worship. They created a welcome bag for first-time visitors. And the property committee

opened some long-closed spaces for the children's Sunday school classes and hosted a work day before Holy Week, tidying up the property inside and out.

As the work of the newly invigorated committees continued, something began to happen.

More members felt connected to the mission and ministry of the church and invested more time in the work of the church. Attendees started attending more regularly because they had been invited to be part of the work.

"Members are becoming better acquainted with other members by working side by side on projects and programs," said Ronny Greer, an elder on session.

Another plus is that session meetings are now shorter.

"Committees report their efforts, seeking approval when needed. The session can focus on other tasks,

like calling a new pastor, instead of agreeing who will call the plumber or who will pick up the graduation gifts for the youth," Greer said.

In taking the time to identify the needs of the church and to create and re-create committees, the session of First Presbyterian has shared the load of running a church with the body of Christ.

This sharing of tasks has not only created energy that was lacking, it has helped the session to no longer look out at the congregation and see a dearth of leadership.

Now, they say, they see many leaders — and potential leaders — sitting in the pews.

Jeannie Hunter is a pastor in the PC(USA) with training in interim ministry. She served as interim minister at First Presbyterian of Dickson, Tennessee, during its committee transformation.

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Synod includes men in #MeToo talks

'We're in This Together' begins healing and brings hope

BY REBECCA LISTER

When the #MeToo hashtag exploded on the social media scene in October 2017, no one could have predicted its continued impact on the treatment of women both in and out of the workplace. For a while, #MeToo seemed to be more about bringing down famous people in big corporations or enterprises, like Harvey Weinstein and Matt Lauer. Hollywood is one thing, but harassment isn't supposed to happen in churches, right?

Unfortunately, churches are not immune to inappropriate speech and behavior toward women, as the popularity of another trending



The #MeToo movement has broadened to a #ChurchToo conversation as the Synod of Lincoln Trails not only seeks to educate, but to also create a safe space, for both men and women to share stories.

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hashtag, #ChurchToo, has indicated. Church leaders who have experienced harassment are now searching for ways to address and prevent it.

The Synod of Lincoln Trails in Indianapolis has taken steps to help women in church speak out about sexual misconduct by hosting two conferences on the subject. The first conference, entitled "Empowerment and Restoration," took place in early spring at St. Luke Union Presbyterian Church in Bloomington, Indiana. It gathered a group of about 25 clergywomen, church employees and certified ruling elders (CREs).

"It was important to include women who work in all areas of the church, whether as clergy or as staff," said the Rev. Sara Dingman, synod executive of Lincoln Trails and one

of the event planners. "As employees, they often 'fall through the cracks' if something happens because they may not belong to the presbytery like CREs and clergy do."

The synod invited two counselors to lead the two-day spring event: Drs. Caroline Burke and Krista Redlinger-Grosse. Both women work for LeaderWise, a Minneapolis-based company that supports nonprofits and clergy professionals on such topics as team building, appropriate leadership, and personal and spiritual development. The workshop, Dingman says, provided the space for intimate discussion, as the limited number of participants provided a safe environment for sharing. The facilitators helped participants openly name their experiences, develop strategies for facing

them and take steps for the future. One conference participant said she would go back to her presbytery and share what she had learned, while another said she planned to include #MeToo in a sermon to spotlight the problem.

Due to the success of the first conference, the Synod of Lincoln Trails

understanding,” she said.

The Synod of Lincoln Trails hopes to continue the strides made by adding a third conference in the near future, this time just for men. This would allow men to delve more deeply into #MeToo and what was communicated to them at the “We’re in This Together” conference.

The event was highly successful, because it was an opportunity for both men and women to vulnerably speak their truth.

— Sara Dingman

decided to host another event. This time, though, an important ingredient was added — the voices of men.

Entitled “We’re in This Together,” the conference lasted for five hours and was held at Indiana Interchurch Center in Indianapolis.

Burke and Redlinger-Grosse were once again on hand to facilitate the discussion, and they were joined by LeaderWise’s Executive Director Dr. Mark Sundby.

The leaders facilitated both large and small group discussion, providing moments for private time and personal reflection.

In the final activity of the event, each small group crafted a statement that included what women need men to know; what men need women to know; and what steps they were willing to take to better become each other’s allies in the process, rather than adversaries. These statements were then presented to the full group.

“At the beginning of the day, the participants seemed hesitant, uncomfortable and perhaps even a bit doubtful,” Dingman said of the mixed gender gathering.

By the end of the day, though, there was “much more forgiveness in the room, much more

Dingman feels that for the #MeToo movement to be sustained, women and men must continue to talk and share together in safe, objective environments, like those


provided at these conferences.

“The event was highly successful, because it was an opportunity for both men and women to vulnerably speak their truth,” she said.

The Rev. Barbara Kenley found the workshop especially meaningful and wrote about it on the Synod of Lincoln Trails’ website.


“This is where the church can help,” she wrote. “When the church dares to stand up with the #MeToo movement, we just might find ourselves relevant to the world around us. What a refreshing discovery that will be.”

Rebecca Lister is an associate professor of music at Lebanon Valley College in Annville, Pennsylvania. Her passion is music and worship in churches. She has had several writings published in the academic field of music. She is currently an inquirer in Carlisle Presbytery.



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The background of the entire page is a photograph of the interior of a Gothic cathedral. The image shows tall, ribbed stone columns on the right side, arching towards a large, ornate stained glass window in the center. The window is filled with colorful glass depicting various religious scenes. Warm light filters through the window, creating a golden glow throughout the scene. The architecture features pointed arches and intricate stonework.

Fall Kickoff

Living out the Church's
'Great Ends'

Ministry candidates talk about them. Moderators share them with session members during meetings. Pastors do sermon series on them. “They” are the Great Ends of the Church — statements crafted in the early 20th century to guide the vision and mission of the Presbyterian Church. But who can recite all six Great Ends? (Be honest.) And what do these Great Ends look like when lived out? *Presbyterians Today* explores how congregations embrace these guiding principles in ways that show their communities the power of love in action.

The proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind

“Don’t go to church. Be the church!” is the motto of the “Church Has Left the Building” movement that has spread like Holy Spirit fire to Woodstown

Presbyterian Church in Woodstown, New Jersey. Every October, the church closes its doors on one Sunday and sends small groups of all ages into the community to proclaim the gospel through hands-on work.

“We have to rethink what church is. Worship isn’t only what we do on a Sunday,” said the Rev. Eryn Mera, the church’s pastor. In the past, teams have been sent out to do community beautification projects like painting lampposts and picking up trash, acts of compassion such as tying comfort blankets for Hearts United Against Cancer, serving at a food pantry or soup kitchen, visiting the elderly at a local health care center and working with Habitat for Humanity. This fall, Woodstown Presbyterian is focusing on ways to feed the poor.

“The ‘Church Has Left the Building’ movement has impacted

both our church and the community with this kind of relational evangelism,” Mera said. “Jesus told us to be salt and light in the world, not in a church building. Through these projects we discover how Jesus wants to launch his people to live on the outside what we believe on the inside.”

The Presbyterian volunteers participate with five other churches from multiple denominations. At the end of the service day the teams gather for community worship as one united church, praising God for what God has done and sharing the stories of the day.

Tip: When holding a “Church Has Left the Building” Sunday, make time to educate the congregation prior to the event. There might be some who don’t see the value of giving up a Sunday sitting in the pew or others who have logistical questions.

The shelter, nurture and spiritual fellowship of the children of God

On the second Sunday of every month, the congregation of Eastridge

Presbyterian Church in Lincoln, Nebraska, gathers at 9 a.m. to participate in GiFT (Growing in Faith Together). GiFT features a

learning activity, followed by a time of fellowship and then a shared meal. According to a brochure publicizing the program, the morning “reclaims God’s intent for faith to be shared in community and across generations.”

The Rev. Thomas Dummermuth, the associate pastor at Eastridge, helped start the intergenerational program in 2016. The idea grew out of several continuing education experiences with Vibrant Faith (vibrantfaith.org).

“What has been practiced in small churches for a long time had fallen aside in many midsize and larger churches, where faith formation often happens solely in ‘age-appropriate’ groups,” said Dummermuth.

Each season of GiFT focuses on different themes. The 2016–17 season was titled “Justice and Service,” addressing themes such as home and shelter and “love thy neighbor.” The 2017–18 season was about “Life-Giving Rhythms,” and focused on how and why the church celebrates holidays and seasons such as Pentecost, All Saints’ Day, Advent and Holy Week. Next season, GiFT will center on creeds and confessions, Dummermuth says.

“What I love about it,” he added, “is that it has us learning together. It gives us a main thread that we follow throughout the year with different activities.”

Tip: Create ways for young and old to learn together by holding a special Sunday educational event such as Eastridge’s GiFT program. Or perhaps create mentoring

GREAT ENDS OF THE CHURCH

- The proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind
- The shelter, nurture and spiritual fellowship of the children of God
- The maintenance of divine worship
- The preservation of the truth
- The promotion of social righteousness
- The exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world

— *Book of Order* (2017–19), F-1.0304



opportunities by teaming older members of the congregation with children. Hold special mentoring activities such as sharing stories over ice cream. Encourage young and old to pray for each other and even write letters to one another. Yes, write — not email.

The maintenance of divine worship

Shortly after the Rev. Karen Ware Jackson came to Faith Presbyterian Church in Greensboro, North Carolina, eight of the church's elderly members passed away. Two pews had to be removed to make space for a casket; the pews were never reinstalled. Instead, Jackson saw an opportunity.

"The Holy Spirit was moving and creating space for a 'prayer-ground' for young children," she said. Re-creating the open space with a table in front of the pulpit became a way to embrace cross-generational worship.

Through Jackson's blogs, one-on-one conversations and sermons that focused on "worship with all ages," the church got the message.

"The little church

made space for God to bring new life out of death," Jackson said.

While she preaches, the children are gathered around the table, guided through the service with prayers and activities. As the Scriptures are being interpreted, the children interpret what they hear with Play-Doh, drawings, Legos, feathers or glitter.

"What we do isn't just for the kids; it's for us all," Jackson said. "The prayerground is making us whole. We are the body of Christ. Kids are a loud and messy part of the body, but when we pull the kids out of worship, it's like we are dismembering the body, like trying to worship blindfolded. Kids are distracting, yes, but

they bring us life and they bring us joy, and they bring surprising depth and mirth. They understand the holy power of prayer and praise. They are hungry for God."

Tip: If a playground is too much, too soon for your congregation, ask session members, worship leaders and/or educational leaders how children can be creatively integrated into worship. Begin the conversation this fall and see where it leads.



The preservation of the truth

Megan and David Collins host a podcast called "Everything Jesus Taught" about exactly that — what Jesus taught

about God, life, forgiveness, money, family and the way his teachings are to inform the way we live out our faith in the 21st century.

As co-pastors of Maitland Presbyterian Church in Orlando, Florida, they take the pulpit to the public by way of the podcast. Through their conversational approach, they work together to discern what is truth and how to find it. Often using real-life humor, the two discuss and sometimes disagree about how to understand a particular teaching.

"Truth isn't something we receive," said David Collins. "We have to interact with it, talk about it, digest it, parse out how it works in our lives, not just give it intellectual ascent. That's how truth bears fruit in our lives."

Discerning between what is cultural in the Scriptures and what is theological is one of the most difficult tasks for the church today. As these two pastors reason together, they invite the wider world into a deeper dialogue with others and within oneself.

"The podcast is unedited. We

wrestle out loud as we work to fully comprehend what Jesus taught. Truth is what he taught, but how can we translate that in the world we live in and the lives we live is the challenge," said Megan Collins. "We start with the Gospels and Scripture and we live into the theology — we make theology live."

Tip: You don't need a podcast to get conversations going. Hold a sermon "talk back" on Sundays, inviting people to delve more deeply into the Scripture lesson and to share what they heard, agreed with or disagreed with.

The promotion of social righteousness

In 2012, as the Church in the Tetons in Driggs, Idaho, was opening its doors, Monica Carrillo was approved to stay in the U.S. through Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). She received a renewable two-year period of deferred action from deportation and got a work permit and a driver's license. She joined the local Family Safety Network, where she met the director of client services and outreach, Emily Bilcher — who is also the wife of the Church in the Tetons' pastor. Through her friendship with Emily Bilcher at work, and then the Rev. Karlin Bilcher, her life opened. And, through Carrillo, the Bilchers gained insight into the lives of undocumented immigrants. They began showing up at community meetings on immigration issues.

When the local Hispanic Resource Center brought in a lawyer from Salt Lake City to help immigrants fill out paperwork right after the 2016 presidential election, the Bilchers noticed that other people from the church were there.

They recruited a few members to help start a new ministry at the church. Based on hospitality and welcoming strangers, the ministry was called "radical neighboring," and the Bilchers invited Carrillo to



the church to tell her story publicly. Hearing Carrillo's story, the congregation held a community forum on immigration to help the town understand the stress and struggles that undocumented immigrants

face while living in this country. The congregation also began to develop a relationship with the primarily Hispanic Good Shepherd Catholic Church.

Karlin Bilcher acknowledges that not everyone at the church, or in the community, is on board with the radical neighboring ministry they have started. But he's OK with that,

because the Church in the Tetons, and the town, is made up of a diverse group of people who don't always think the same way.

Recently, a young couple called Bilcher because they'd heard about this radical neighboring ministry. They'd never been to church, but they wanted to know what it might mean for them to come — and what might be required of them.

"They had absolutely no idea," Bilcher said. "But in a way, they reflect both our community and church, in that we don't know much about the lives of people who are different than us."

Tip: Invite members of your session, outreach team, membership committee or deacons to take

a walk around your neighborhood, noticing the needs and those whom the church is not currently reaching. Then begin talking about what "radical neighboring" would look like in your community.

The exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world

What happens when two women from one Presbyterian church share their concerns for the working poor with another Presbyterian church? A new reformation happens. Nearly 13 years ago on Reformation Sunday, two women from Memorial West United Presbyterian Church in Newark, New Jersey, went to their neighboring church, Livingston Presbyterian, to talk about what



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could be done for those suffering in their community. The conversation quickly led to the creation of the Seventh Street Bistro — a ministry offering a free, hot meal every Saturday.

Today the ministry is a partnership with not just Memorial West and Livingston Presbyterian, but First Presbyterian and Trinity Church and Living Stone Christian Church as well. Approximately 50–60 people show up for a nutritious, home-cooked meal. The Bistro isn't your average soup kitchen, though. The Bistro is also a place where people can receive clothes weekly and hygiene packs monthly.

The Bistro has celebrations throughout the year: a cookout

in July, a back-to-school drive in August, a coat drive in the winter and a Christmas dinner served on Christmas Day.



In conjunction with the traditional Christmas dinner, small gifts are given. In November members plan to offer their first free health fair.

Josephine Jackson, a member of Memorial West who has been involved since the beginning of the ministry, says the Bistro is more than just food — it builds relationships in the community. And Memorial West? The church has become a shared space where community members feel some ownership and responsibility. In fact, one Saturday, she says,

a guest was smoking outside the church and another guest said, “Don’t smoke here — this is holy ground.”

The volunteers are dedicated and always seeking how to help others. Sylvester Brown, head of the Bistro board, says they are always asking how they can assist in bettering someone’s life. They offer prayer and support for the community, exhibiting the realm of God in a hurting world.

Tip: There is strength in numbers. Don’t go it alone. Begin working with other churches on ways to serve the community — together.

Sherry Blackman, Rebecca Lister, Katrina Pekich-Bundy, Donna Frischknecht Jackson and Paul Seebeck contributed to this story.

BECOMING A VITAL CONGREGATION

A new initiative helping congregations live big in terms of mission and ministry is being piloted in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The Vital Congregations Revitalization was recently introduced to Newark and Trinity presbyteries, says Kathryn Threadgill, associate for vital congregations in the Presbyterian Mission Agency. Threadgill, who worked with Theology, Formation & Evangelism ministries’ acting director, Ray Jones, on Vital Congregations for more 10 months, says the initiative builds on the six Great Ends of the Church, identifying seven key characteristics of a vital congregation. Those characteristics are: caring relationships; lifelong discipleship; intentional evangelism; outward incarnational focus (on God coming to be with us in Jesus Christ); empowered servant leadership; Spirit-inspired worship; and ecclesial health.

Congregations in the pilot presbyteries will work for two years on revitalization, spending their first year focusing on authentic relationships and assessing where they are as a congregation in relation to the seven marks of vital congregations. In the second year, congregations will determine a course of direction involving one of these three options:

- **Re-forming churches** — Re-envisioning and changing how to be the church together through the seven marks of congregational vitality.
- **Missional clustering churches** — Revitalizing by clustering congregations into new communities of worship and ministry.
- **Death and resurrection churches** — Revitalizing through the death and legacy of a congregation, in witness to the resurrection.

To date, 13 churches have signed up for the revitalization initiative in Newark Presbytery. An additional 12 pastors signed up to join pastors of those 13 churches in cohort work, in hopes of eventually bringing their congregations into the revitalization process. Another 14 churches have signed up for the initiative in Trinity Presbytery.

The presbyteries of San Jose, Grand Canyon and de Cristo are also embarking on the revitalization initiative, bringing the total of congregations involved to 40.

A Vital Congregations Toolkit is available for congregations who want to begin the revitalization conversation. Go to pcusa.org/vitalcongregations

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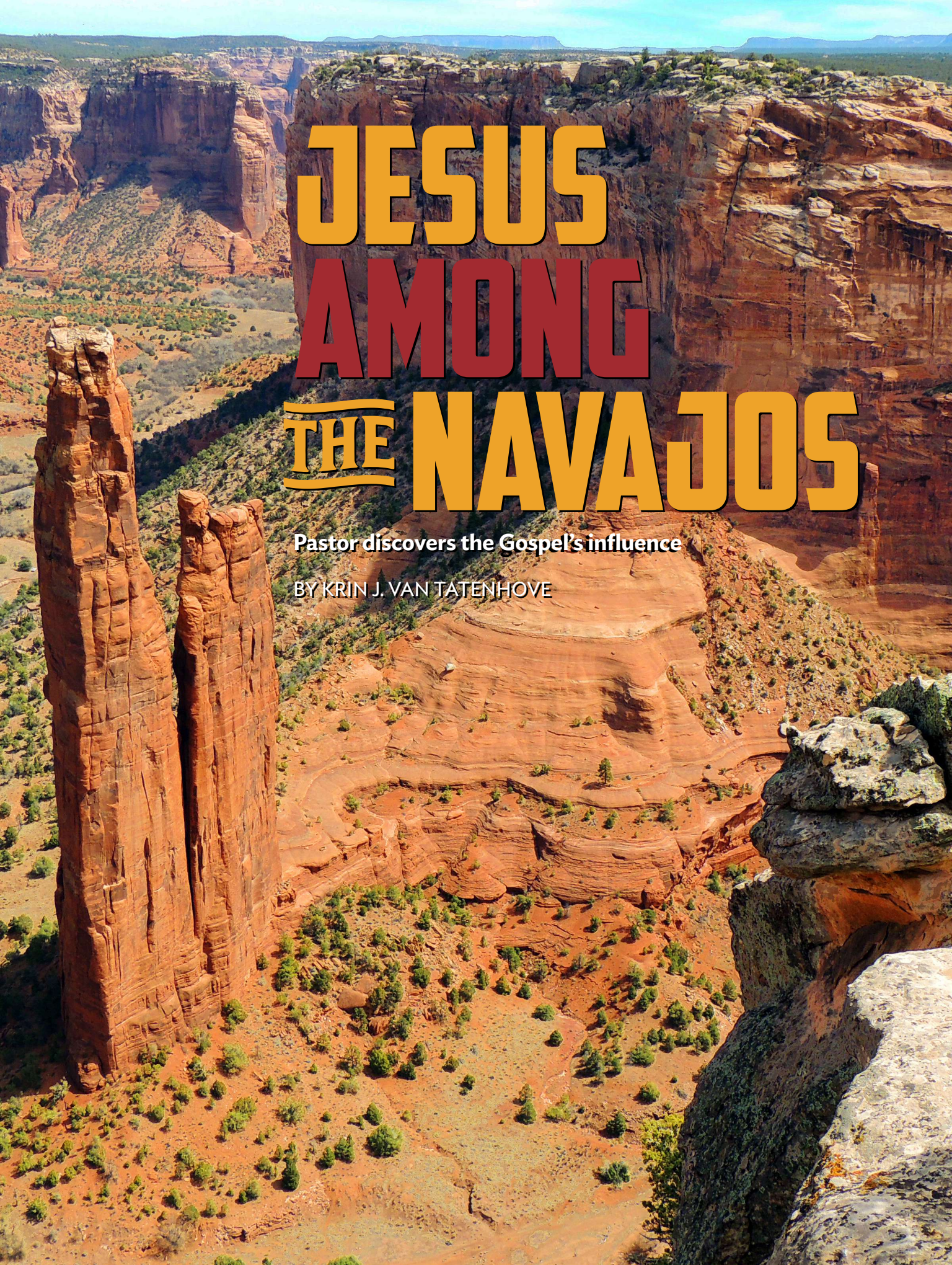
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JESUS AMONG THE NAVAJOS

Pastor discovers the Gospel's influence

BY KRIN J. VAN TATENHOVE



KRIN J. VAN TATENHOVE

Canyon de Chelly's iconic Spider Rock is prominent in many Navajo myths.

It is Easter morning and members of Del Muerto Presbyterian Church assemble around a roaring fire. They gather close to the edge of Canyon de Chelly in northeastern Arizona — an ancient home of the Anasazi Indians and a historic hideout for Navajos resisting Spanish and American invaders. The morning gathering is the culmination of “SingSpiration,” the congregation’s three-day tent revival, which has been so successful that they ran out of mutton stew at Saturday’s lunch.

Now near dawn at the canyon rim, one of the worshippers plays “Amazing Grace” on the flute. The instrument’s breathy notes mingle with the desert breeze. Danny Halwood, a commissioned ruling elder of the church, reads the resurrection narrative from the Gospel of Matthew. His voice emphasizes the words of the angel, “He is not here, for he has been raised.”

Francis Draper, a patriarch of the church, then gives a homily. His face in the firelight is deeply weathered, his eyes shining with fierce brightness. Holding back tears, he says that

though he is uneducated, God gives him words to preach, much like the prophet Jeremiah. He shares a simple message centered on John 3:16.

“Those who believe,” he summarizes, “will receive eternal reward, but unbelievers are thrown into a place of never-ending flames.”

I have taken this four-day pilgrimage not only to worship with my Navajo brothers and sisters, but also to experience how the good news of Jesus Christ is influencing their sovereign nation. As I journey, a central question guides me. It’s one that Jesus asked his disciples: “Who do you say that I am?” Who is this Christ that Presbyterians proclaim among a people whose roots go back thousands of years?

Tragic legacy

The answer to my question is critical, considering historic Christian aggression toward Native American cultures. On my way to the Navajo Nation, I recalled this tragic legacy through a visit to the Bosque Redondo Memorial site in New Mexico.



KRIN J. VAN TATENHOVE

Danny Halwood, commissioned ruling elder of Del Muerto Presbyterian Church, served as a translator for four Presbyterian pastors before heeding the call to ministry.

Beginning in 1864, the U.S. government — with a goal of ethnic cleansing — rounded up the Navajo people and forced them to march more than 400 miles from northeastern Arizona to a new home in eastern New Mexico. Commonly called “the Long Walk,” Navajos have another name for the march, *hwéeldi*, which means “suffering.”

After four years of near starvation and lack of shelter, resulting in thousands of deaths, the exile ended with a treaty that returned 3.5 million acres of land inside the Navajos’ four sacred mountains — Mount Blanca to the east, Mount Taylor to the south, the San Francisco Peaks to the west and Mount Hesperus to the north.

Surely, these painful lessons have taught us the need for humility and respect. Surely, doing ministry amid the Navajos is a partnership that embraces their history and ancient culture. Then again, perhaps not.

At the Canyon de Chelly Visitor Center, I spoke with a young Navajo

park ranger. She has Christians in her extended family, but her parents raised her with traditional Navajo beliefs. When she gives tours of the White House Ruin — an archaeological site believed to have been built by ancestral Puebloans in A.D. 1060 — she believes she encounters the spirits of the dead. To bring her back into *hózhó* —or harmony — her grandfather performs a “sing” for her called “The Blessing Way,” in which he chants: “With beauty before me may I walk. With beauty behind me may I walk. With beauty above me may I walk. With beauty all around me, may I walk.”

This same young woman has encountered much of what she considers “ugly” among Christians in the Navajo Nation.

“I have attended their memorial services where the message is loud and clear: Unless I follow this Jesus, I have no salvation on this earth and I’m not going to heaven. I cannot accept this kind of thinking,” she said.

The evangelizing begins

Presbyterians began their work among the Navajos in the mid-1800s. The goal was to evangelize, convert and instruct in the Christian faith, perfectly in sync with U.S. policy. Admirably, Presbyterians also engaged in ministries of healing like the medical clinic founded as part of our mission at Ganado, Arizona, now called Sage Memorial Hospital. Today, there are eight chartered PC(USA) churches and two chapels among the Navajo, existing under the umbrella of Grand Canyon Presbytery.

Documents from those earliest years use lamentable language. One speaks of the “persistent primitivism of the Navajos.” Another speaks of training young girls to “make their own clothes after the latest American style.”

In 2016, though, the 222nd General Assembly called on the

Church to confess its complicity and repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery, a legal principle that for centuries paved the way for the subjugation of indigenous peoples. Incorporated into U.S. law in the 1800s, the Doctrine of Discovery was expressed as “manifest destiny” in the oppression of Native Americans. A report issued in conjunction with the 2016 General Assembly action says that for 200 years of American history, “the Presbyterian church was active in the formation and implementation of government policies affecting Native American peoples.”

But the question remains: Is the Jesus we preach among the Navajos a blessing or a vestige of missionary myopia?

Today’s living witness

Del Muerto Presbyterian Church (*Tseyi Bidáá*, as it is known in the Navajo language) was founded in 1954 by Presbyterian missionary Joseph Gray and his Navajo assistant, Jimmie Draper. The church recently discovered its founding documents in a metal box beneath the floorboards while installing a wood-burning stove. Among the papers was a list of charter members, including Danny Halwood’s parents.

Halwood is an energetic, winsome man, wholly dedicated to his small congregation. His personal testimony includes how the fervent, intercessory prayer of his Christian parents helped heal his sick brother. It also includes how his own recommitment to Christ helped him overcome alcoholism, a scourge on the Navajo Nation.

“I told my family I was going back to church,” he said with a smile, “then I said goodbye to my drinking buddies.”

Halwood served as translator for four Presbyterian pastors, all of them Anglo. The final one, the Rev. Robert Burdett, encouraged him to assume leadership of the flock. Halwood pursued his education by attending



KRIN J. VAN TATENHOVE

Keeping Navajo traditions alive is challenging as many youth leave their homes to find jobs.

classes in Phoenix. He was commissioned by Grand Canyon Presbytery in 1999. He and his wife receive no pay for their tireless service. Rather, they survive on pensions from the Navajo government.

Halwood is known to speak of traditional Navajo practices as “the work of the devil,” and he is unequivocal when asked about the church’s relationship to this aspect of its culture.

“We are separate from those traditions,” he said. “We believe that Jesus is the only way to salvation. After all, this is scriptural, with Jesus himself saying in the Gospel of John, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”

The Rev. Norma McCabe has a more moderate stance. McCabe is stated supply pastor at First Presbyterian in Kayenta, Arizona, and the only Navajo woman ordained as a Presbyterian minister of Word and sacrament. She also serves as a consultant for Northern Native American Ministries of the Presbytery of Grand Canyon, overseer of Navajo congregations.

Though McCabe’s father, a medicine man, raised her and 13 siblings in traditional ways, she also endured the “re-education” of the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ Tolani Lake Indian School. They forced her to cut her hair and to cease speaking Navajo, with discipline enforced by spankings. Once a week, a Presbyterian missionary named Charles Smith provided obligatory lessons in Christianity.

Later, after her mother’s death, McCabe’s sister became a Christian through the influence of the Cook School for American Indians in Tempe, Arizona, a Presbyterian-affiliated institution. She convinced McCabe to convert to the faith.

From the beginning, McCabe was devoted to her church, but her call to ordained ministry came while she was working as chief clerk for a Navajo judge.

“I saw so much hardship among the people who came to court,” she said. “I felt that somebody needed to pray for them, minister to them, show them compassion.”

Responding to that need, McCabe began a long, arduous education, ultimately graduating from Dubuque Theological Seminary. Grand Canyon Presbytery ordained her in 2002.

Recently, despite the warnings of others that it was not befitting her faith, she attended a healing ceremony for an extended family member who holds to traditional ways.

“We need to go beyond ourselves into whatever culture we find ourselves as Christians,” she explained. “There is good and bad everywhere, and we must reach out to people who are hurting. This is what Christ meant when he called us to recognize him in the hungry, the naked and the sick.”

Keeping to the gospel

There is no scarcity of need in the Navajo Nation. Unemployment is seven times higher than the U.S. average, and per capita income is far below the U.S. poverty level. Many family members leave the reservation simply for economic survival.

Adequate housing is scarce, and homes often lack sufficient plumbing and electricity. Though progress has been made in health care, Navajo rates of diabetes, tuberculosis, alcoholism and heart disease exceed national averages. Water is critically precious; moreover, uranium mining threatens a people who endured the tragic breach of the Church Rock uranium mill’s disposal pond in 1979, an event that released more radiation than the Three Mile Island disaster.

McCabe says the Navajo congregations do what they can to help, but they have limited resources. Many of them offer hospitality through meals, showers, used clothing and newborn baby packages when people find themselves stranded or in dire need.

Even with her tolerant viewpoint, McCabe believes it is vital that the Christian message stay away from traditional Navajo beliefs. Otherwise, she says, there is danger of blending and losing the true gospel. She points to the Native American Church, which mixes a belief in the Great Spirit, peyote usage (a hallucinogenic common in Native American ceremonies) and the affirmation of “Brother Jesus.” It is the largest indigenous religious movement in America.

Christ is risen

As Francis Draper finishes his Easter homily, Halwood asks those gathered to kneel in the red dirt and pray. Alternating between Navajo and English, he pleads for God’s blessings upon the leaders of our world, the United States and the Navajo people. The newly risen sun greets the communal “Amen.”

Afterward, a young member of the congregation who no longer lives on the reservation lingers, taking in the view of Fortress Rock — an island in the canyon where a brave and ingenious band of Navajos resisted the Long Walk for weeks, baffling the U.S. cavalry. It is still a source of pride among the Navajos.

“There are many stories to be told here,” the young man said.

I, too, linger for a few moments, soaking in the view, the wind on my face. I think of the oft-quoted verse from Hebrews: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” I say a final prayer that we will incarnate Jesus’ purposes through the abundance of his love and the extravagance of his grace. I turn to leave with a final word on my lips. A Navajo word. *Hózhó*. Harmony.

Krin Van Tatenhove, an ordained PC(USA) minister for more than 30 years, is now enjoying his time writing and traveling. He is co-author of a book on congregational renewal due out from Westminster John Knox Press in the spring of 2019. He lives and works in San Antonio.



FINDING HOMES FOR THE HOMELESS

Churches tire of quick fixes and seek solutions

BY HEIDI WORTHEN GAMBLE

Mark lived on the streets of Hollywood, well known by social service providers as one of the toughest homeless cases in the city. He was often found standing on a street corner, looking disheveled, staring into space. His looks scared most people away.

Mark arrived at First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood's winter shelter program, called The Refuge, after a desperate referral from a social service provider. He arrived with a blank expression on his face and was unable to speak. Through tears and a warm embrace, Amie Quigley, director of urban outreach at First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood, mumbled to him, "God loves you and we love you too." Mark was given a clean bed with a comforter and pillows in

a quiet fellowship hall. Later, he sat down with several other guests to a warm meal served with love, laughter and kindness by church volunteers.

"Our mission at The Refuge is to care for our most vulnerable friends," said Quigley.

Over time, Mark not only moved into permanent supportive housing and became stabilized on medication, he took his first Communion and was baptized at First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood. He is now involved in church activities and helping others.

In partnership with the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health, permanent supportive housing providers and the police department, The Refuge receives up to 25 homeless guests identified

as gravely disabled each year. They are the most difficult cases to move into housing. During the winter, the guests gain strength, heal and connect with housing providers.

Now in its sixth year, The Refuge has become a model for how churches and agencies can partner to move people off the streets and into housing. When asked how the ministry works, Quigley said, "We love on them in the name of Jesus. We find that when you care for people well, we all share in the mutual blessing of healing."

Walking alongside the homeless

The ministry of The Refuge didn't happen overnight, however. First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood has been a light to the city for decades, beginning with the Lord's

Lighthouse in the 1990s. The Lord's Lighthouse continues serving lunch to a few hundred people after church each Sunday, sharing the gospel and building relationships, walking alongside their homeless guests with prayer, friendship and helpful resources. In 2003, First Hollywood added a weekday meal and program called the Hollywood Healthcare Partnership, bringing together the department of mental health and social service providers to more fully help homeless guests. The partnership has allowed the church to develop relationships with social service providers in the area to work together to move people into housing.

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Redondo Beach, California, has also been serving hot lunches twice a week for more than 20 years and offering clothing, resources, a sermon and caring relationships with people experiencing homelessness. Over the past several years, St. Andrew's has also been moving people into permanent supportive housing, in partnership with a social service provider.

Worship on a Sunday morning at St. Andrew's now consists of praise reports of how many people have been housed, in addition to a list of current needs for the food ministry.

The Rev. Peter Dunn, co-pastor, also emphasizes the many discipleship opportunities in this ministry.

"Work with a youth to disciple them in this way; maybe they can become inspired to become a case manager for the homeless one day," Dunn said.

Homeless crisis grows

Church ministries that focus on housing are urgently needed in Los Angeles County, which has long been labeled the "Homeless Capital of the United States." In 2017, roughly 58,000 people experienced homelessness in the county, an increase of 75 percent since 2012.

A severe housing shortage has driven up rental costs to extreme



COURTESY OF ST. ANDREW'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Rev. Peter Dunn, right, co-pastor of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, sees lives being changed by The Refuge, a ministry that not only provides a place to rest, but also seeks to secure permanent housing for those like Michael, left.

levels, pushing increasing numbers of people in poverty onto the streets. The average rent has increased 32 percent, while average household incomes have fallen by 3 percent in the past two decades.

To address this crisis, service providers, city and county officials and faith leaders have successfully advocated for the passage of Measures H and HHH, voter-approved taxes that will provide \$4.6 billion for permanent supportive housing units. Permanent supportive housing combines supportive services with affordable rental housing.

Because of this, there is a new appreciation for the role of the faith community as a key partner in moving people off the streets into housing in the city and county of Los Angeles. Nancy Wilcox, an elder at St. Peter's by the Sea Presbyterian Church in Rancho Palos Verdes, California, co-chairs one of the eight regional homeless coalitions in Los Angeles County and describes a renewed acknowledgment among civic leaders.

"On the streets, you can ask any homeless outreach specialist and they will tell you the key to ending

homelessness is building trusting relationships with those you are trying to help. The faith community has long been doing this, walking non-judgmentally along with the society's marginalized," Wilcox said.

To equip churches in this *kairos* moment, the Presbytery of the Pacific, in partnership with Quigley, Dunn and Wilcox, is gathering churches monthly to train others in how to connect people who are living on the streets with housing and supportive services. The effort is called the Homelessness and Housing Task Force.

Dunn describes the task force as "a place for the local church to band together and challenge one another to thoughtfully and courageously join the fight to end homelessness."

"Our goal is to increase the number of church leaders who can holistically care for and tangibly love the homeless," he said. "The city and county of Los Angeles are resourcing programs designed to house the homeless at an unprecedented level, and as the people of God, we are called to seek the good of our cities, learn what is already working in this fight and mobilize our congregations

to seize this moment.”

Wilcox agrees.

“Homelessness is such a complex problem that it is easy to get overwhelmed with any aspect of it. The growing list of programs with the unprecedented funding here in L.A., while welcomed, is also daunting to understand. By having task force members who can help make sense of it all and keep us focused is invaluable. Collectively, we can hear about and be inspired by the groundbreaking work being done at Hollywood Presbyterian, which is the faith model for the entire county,” she said.

The Presbytery of the Pacific consists of 53 churches in the metro area of Los Angeles and Hawaii, and they all have daily encounters with the reality of homelessness. The task force includes church administrators, mission team leaders, deacons, clergy — anyone who is on the front lines of homeless ministries in their church. The group has been gathering monthly for the past six months at the presbytery office to share best practices and frustrations; learn how to navigate social services; strategize, set goals and celebrate successes; and pray for one another.

Each call is unique

“Finding the call God has placed on your heart and for your church” is what Quigley teaches in task force meetings.

“Every church is in a different place and it’s exciting to see how God is moving each church in its own unique way,” she said. “We increase our capacity to serve our neighbors when we share resources and best practices, in addition to praying together.”

Quigley also advises churches to do their research.

“We want to create a ‘balanced ecosystem’ of social services in our part of the county. We want to share resources. Make sure the ministry you want to do isn’t already being done down the street on the same

day,” she said.

Research also includes attending homeless coalition meetings, connecting with outreach workers, meeting with local police and service providers. And then listening to what is said.

“If this problem were easy to fix, we would have already done it by now,” Dunn said. “There are many factors that may cause individuals or families to be living on the street. The solutions we offer need to consider the very real, very serious, problems that people are struggling with. The best way to begin is to find people with experience and learn from them. Some of our best guides are people who were formerly homeless who have now decided to turn around and help the next person in line.”

With housing as the focus, churches are getting creative and considering the use of church parking lots and vacant property to build permanent supportive housing units. Others are considering opening their parking lots for campers. Churches with food ministries are learning how to offer more than a meal, and to connect people with local service providers and housing.

“We are learning that the church can play a vital role in ending

homelessness,” said Quigley. “When we include our (homeless) friends into our communities, it creates a sense of belonging. And when they live in their true identity as beloved, they have courage to take steps toward restoring their lives.”

While steps are being taken to address the root causes of homelessness, there is still more to do, and Wilcox summons the church to see its power, potential and responsibility in this moment.

“The faith voice carries tremendous weight in each of the 88 cities in L.A. County, both within the community and with our elected officials. The church must be strong, visible and knowledgeable advocates for those living on the fringes of our society to push housing solutions in every part of L.A. County.”

Dunn challenges the church to a deeper missional identity in Christ.

“Being missional isn’t just the next church trend to discuss in staff meetings,” he said. “It is learning the issues your city is faced with and saying how we can bring the light of Christ into that darkness.”

For people like Mark, that light is the light of life.

Heidi Worthen Gamble is the mission catalyst for the Presbytery of the Pacific.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Amie Quigley, director of urban outreach at First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood, offers these tips for helping the homeless:

- » **Foster** authentic, caring relationships with people sleeping on church property or other areas of the community.
- » **Connect** with local service providers and homeless coalitions to learn how to be effective and find the gaps in your community.
- » **Create** a resource guide for homeless guests who visit your church.
- » **Develop** a short list of outreach workers and service providers for office staff, deacons and/or other church volunteers to call on for help.



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Help Wanted: Seeking Pastors

Mentoring today fills tomorrow's
pulpits

BY LEE HINSON-HASTY

IC ASSOCIATE

Growing up in South Africa, Bobby Musengwa couldn't imagine coming to America to attend seminary. The path simply wasn't visible to him — and he couldn't imagine serving as a pastor. But it was his uncle's friendship with Heath Rada, who later served as moderator of the 221st General Assembly (2014), that brought this possibility to light for him — and the mentoring community of professors, pastors, family and friends reinforced Musengwa's call.

Musengwa soon found himself in the U.S., encouraged by his family to leave South Africa amid growing concerns about his safety in apartheid South Africa. He attended and graduated from St. Andrews Presbyterian College (now St. Andrews University) in Laurinburg, North Carolina, and worked at Montreat Conference Center each summer. That's where he reconnected with Rada, who then invited him to attend the Presbyterian School of Christian Education (now part of Union Presbyterian Seminary). Although Musengwa initially rejected the idea, he decided to try it out.

"He became a mentor that allowed me to safely explore the journey or the call into ministry," Musengwa recalled. "I had in my mind that I'm just an educator."

Musengwa did serve as a Christian educator, but Rada and others encouraged him to pursue ordination as a pastor. "Heath taught me that I could be an educator, a teaching elder even, as a pastor." Musengwa earned degrees from Princeton Theological Seminary. He now serves as the "Rev." of Maximo Presbyterian Church in St. Petersburg, Florida. This is the third church he has served.

Mentoring for ministry needed now

Mentoring for ministry has an increasingly important role in today's Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Over

the past decade, there have been about 500 pastor retirements each year and only 200 ordinations. That trend will continue until mentoring those called to pastoral ministry becomes a priority for Presbyterians.

Will we have enough pastors to fill the needs of Christ's future church? The answer is up to us. And although some geographical regions have enough pastors now, there are not

adults, to discover their vocation. In her book *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith*, Parks writes that mentoring environments provide a "network of belonging ... [and] promise a place of nurture for the potential self."

Families, churches and even work-sites can be mentoring environments, networks of belonging or mentoring

She didn't believe she could go to seminary, didn't believe she was smart enough. God kept calling her.

— Bobby Musengwa

nearly enough to meet the needs in many other areas.

Sharon Daloz Parks, a faith development expert and director of Leadership for the New Commons, an organization in Clinton, Washington, that provides consulting services in the areas of leadership and ethics, believes that a mentoring environment and culture are essential for anyone, and especially young

communities. A whole community of mentors may already exist with the potential to nurture Christian vocational discernment. That potential is realized when gifts are identified and intentional discernment of gifts begins. That can start with the mentor or the mentee.

Mentoring communities matter

We are not alone in the church as

HOW TO MENTOR

Be intentionally available to others. Show up early for a gathering at church or stay late.

Be active in your faith, authentic, transparent and trustworthy. Others will seek you out.

Be observant of others. Notice their gifts and passions.

Be courageous with comments and questions. Indirect comments and questions work well too, like, "You are one of the best leaders or teachers our church has!" or "Have you ever considered being a minister? I think you would be great and here is why."



COURTESY OF LEE HINSON-HASTY

As the Rev. Bobby Musengwa leads his flock, he keeps his eyes open to those who are being called to ministry. He takes notice of the gifts in others and nurtures those gifts, just as he was once nurtured.

we discern what God wants us to do with our lives. All that we have, including our lives, is entrusted to the care of the community most often embodied in congregations.

I'll never forget a college student in the first congregation I served. He began the process of discerning a call to ministry as what we call an "inquirer" by meeting with me and then our session. Later he would meet with the presbytery. The new inquirer asked the session for their support in finding out how to use his gifts best as a person of faith to make a positive difference in the church and the world. He trusted me, and he trusted them.

After the meeting, the newly recommended inquirer and I privately debriefed the session meeting in the church parking lot. Feeling truly supported, the inquirer suggested, "Wouldn't it be great if every youth at our church had the support I am getting?" With a lump in my throat, I managed to whisper back, "Wouldn't it be great."

Seminaries are partners, too

Our seminaries stand ready to prepare those with gifts for ministry for service in the church. We don't

have to wait to enroll or send someone to seminary to partner with them. The admissions staff serve as gifted members of a discernment team. Don't wait until you or someone you know is called to seminary to contact one or more admission officers. I wonder who in your congregation will play a role in encouraging someone called to heed the still, small voice they may hear, much as Heath Rada did with Musengwa years ago.

In fact, maybe the boy Samuel wasn't mistaken when he heard a voice calling his name three times, the voice that he believed to be elder priest Eli in 1 Samuel 3. Maybe God was speaking through Eli. The text tells us that Eli's eyes and ears were

declining, but maybe not his mind and tongue. Eli clearly recognizes, in the end, that God was doing a new thing with a new leader for a new time and a new generation embodied by this boy under his care, Samuel.

Musengwa planned to become a Christian educator with no plans to become a pastor. He accepted a call to Vernon Presbyterian Church in Big Bend, Wisconsin, where the late Rev. Dr. Roger Patton encouraged him to finish his seminary education and become a pastor. Patton was the pastor of the church, and Musengwa was the director of Christian education.

"My excuse was I didn't finish my Hebrew," Musengwa said. "Roger

A MENTORING EXERCISE

Ask youth, "How would the people who know you best describe you?" After everyone has shared, give thanks for the ways each of them is contributing to the world. As a closing, ask the group, "Who would be the best person to offer our closing prayer?" Invite them to pray. Afterward, take a few moments to check in with that person who prayed. Ask them if they've ever thought they might be called to ministry. In many cases, their eyes light up and they say yes. Engage them in a deeper conversation. By starting the conversation, the gifts for ministry are being seen and affirmed.

said, 'Oh, we have a professor here who teaches Hebrew.' He was able to connect my deficiencies with the resources to fill that."

In his service in St. Petersburg, Musengwa extends the loving hands of Christ to the community around the church. He has created new programs and ministries that draw in the neighborhoods around the church, changing the nature of the congregation.

Musengwa, too, has had the opportunity to mentor others. He encouraged the worship leader at his church to go to seminary.

"She didn't believe she could go to seminary, didn't believe she was smart enough," Musengwa said. "God kept calling her. She posted on Facebook, 'I knew there was a call there, but Pastor Bobby called me out.'"

Lee Hinson-Hasty is, at heart, a sailor who knows how to catch the wind of the Spirit and teach others to do the same. An ordained minister with his doctorate, he has worked for the PC(USA) for more than a decade. He enjoys preaching and

leading conferences and retreats in congregations and supporting future ministers through the Theological Education Fund as senior director of theological education funds development at the Presbyterian Foundation.

LEARN MORE

Recommended reading on mentoring

Mentoring: Biblical, Theological, and Practical Perspectives, edited by the Rev. Dean K. Thompson, president emeritus of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, and the Rev. D. Cameron Murchison, dean of the faculty emeritus of Columbia Theological Seminary, brings together a roundtable of mentors who share stories from Scripture, schools and communities of faith inside and outside the church that expand our vision and imagination for nurturing the next generation of Christian leaders.

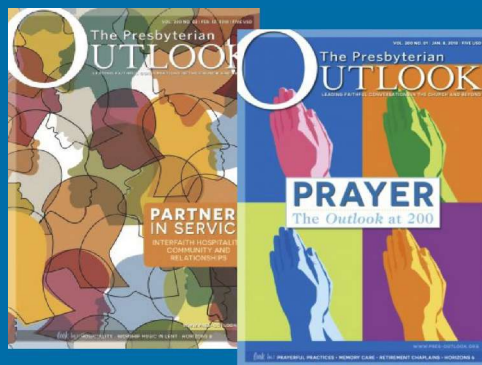
Greenhouses of Hope: Congregations Growing Young Leaders Who Will Change the World is a preachable collection of stories edited by the Rev. Dori Grinenko Baker, a researcher for the Forum for Theological Exploration and minister in the United Methodist Church. The book is a primer on growing leaders and the church from real-life stories.

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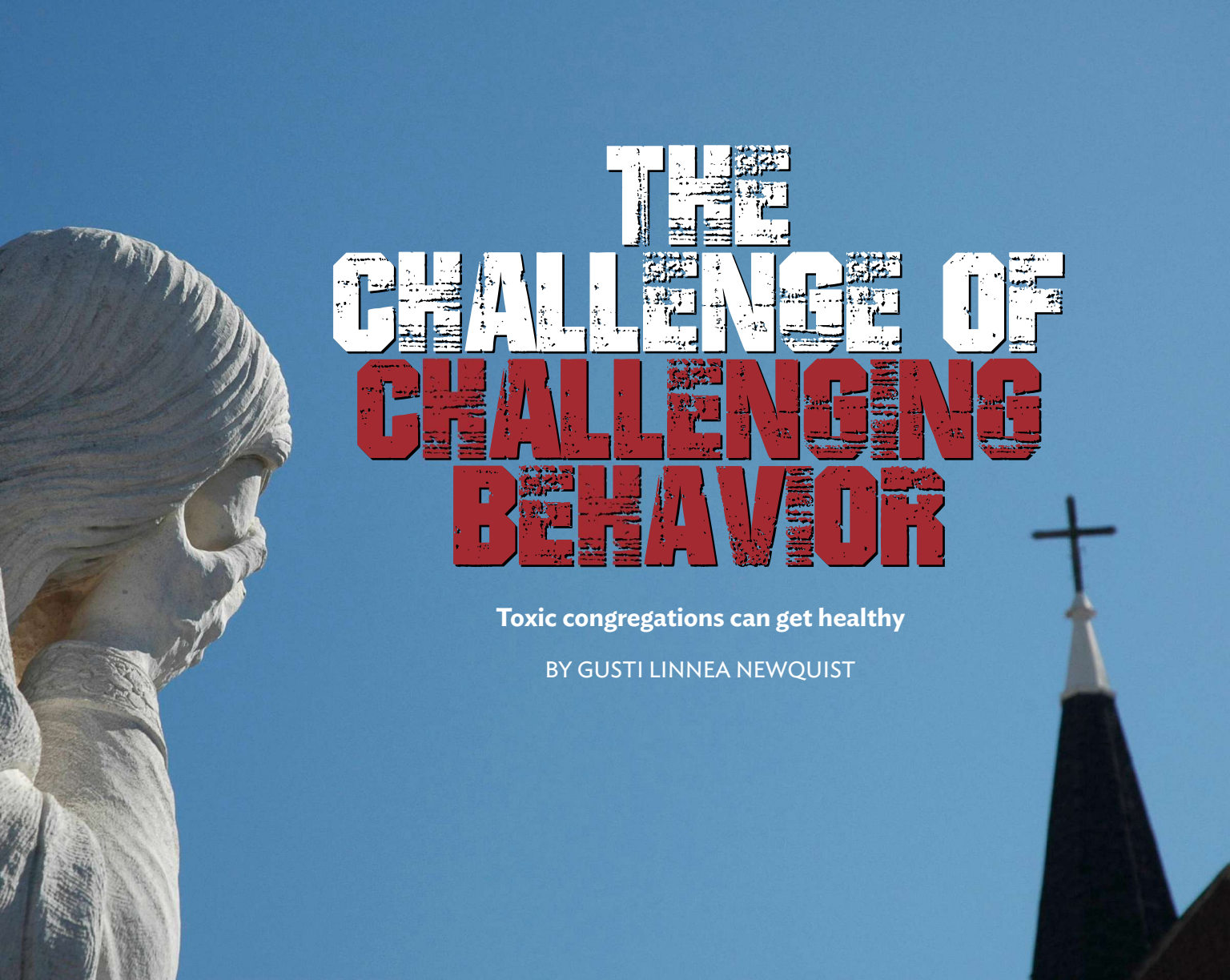
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THE CHALLENGE OF CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR

Toxic congregations can get healthy

BY GUSTI LINNEA NEWQUIST

A freshly ordained, energetic new pastor arrives to the resounding “Alleluia!” of a grateful congregation. Two years later, she leaves in fury, blaming a toxic environment, with her health in tatters.

The perfect call finally appears for the seasoned pastor hoping to ease his way into retirement. Within a month, the pillar of the church leaves the denomination altogether, taking his closest friends and their large financial gifts with them.

All too often, the call of God can get mired in dysfunction, disillusionment and disappointment with God’s people. Said in jest, the Rev. Dwight McCormick of Northminster Presbyterian Church of Springfield,

Ohio, noted, “Ministry would be so much easier if it weren’t for all those people.”

For nearly 20 years, McCormick has balanced the difficulties of ministry with the delight of laughter in his avocation as a stand-up comedian.

“A strong dose of humor and humility make it possible to not take ourselves too seriously and work to not internalize real or perceived hurts,” he said. McCormick’s dual identity as a preacher-comic helps him keep his pastoral ego in check.

“I’ve learned through the years that when everything is about me, I get caught up in resentment, and that is a recipe for unhealthy

ministry,” he said.

Still, even the strongest sense of self in a leader needs more than the ability to laugh off destructive behaviors in a congregation.

“For pastors, there needs to be some hope someplace,” said the honorably retired Rev. Lynne Myers. It is possible, she believes, to confront toxic behavior in a congregation and lay the foundation for a healthy future. She has done so on multiple occasions.

Ordained in 1985 by Blackhawk Presbytery, Myers spent the next 30 years serving in congregations and on presbytery staffs throughout the country. Her ability to assess the general health of a congregational

system, long before systems theory became common conversation in church circles, led Myers to develop an expertise in interim ministry. By the time she retired, Myers had trained hundreds of other pastors to adopt a similar approach through the interim ministry training program of the Synods of Mid-America and Lincoln Trails.

"The truth is, just one or three or four people can destroy a church with their controlling behavior," Myers said. All too often, though, the default of most congregations is to accept the behavior rather than challenge it.

"It's far easier to say, 'Oh, that's just so-and-so,'" Myers said.

But when pastors prefer people-pleasing and parishioners prefer keeping the peace, what might be dismissed as someone's challenging personal characteristic creates a toxic environment for the entire congregation.

In his book *The Toxic Congregation: How to Heal the Soul of Your Church*, the late Presbyterian minister G. Lloyd Rediger wrote: "Where toxin is intentionally allowed to remain, it will contaminate, sicken, impair, and generate lethal consequences." He calls this "the law of toxicity."

A case study

In her formative years of ministry, a small, struggling, Midwestern congregation teetering on the edge of this kind of toxicity hired Myers as their interim pastor. The toxic situation had snuck up on the well-meaning community with a commitment to inclusivity.

Like many aging, exhausted communities, the congregation had embraced the energy and enthusiasm of a 20-something young man eager to serve wherever necessary. He had painted the kitchen. He had volunteered his services when the church secretary resigned. He had become moderator of the worship committee.

He had agreed to serve on session.

By the time Myers arrived, however, the relief and gratitude of the congregation for his service had turned to fear and panic. Within a year and a half, the newcomer had taken over nearly every committee. He had ordered costly worship supplies without permission. He had "borrowed" thousands of dollars from several parishioners. He had used his volunteer position in the church office to present himself as an ecclesiastical leader. Something had to be done. But what?

As Myers considered her options, she came to a powerful realization:

The truth is, just
one or three or four
people can destroy
a church with their
controlling behavior.

— Lynne Myers

tion: Presbyterian polity offers an inherent antidote to unhealthy behavior.

"No one person in the PC(USA) system is ever allowed unchecked authority," said the Rev. Jan DeVries, general presbyter of Grace Presbytery. "The foundations of the faith simply do not allow it. Instead, Presbyterians govern as a group, discerning the mind of Christ in community, rather than individually."

To confront the toxic behavior, Myers needed to remind her congregation "how to be Presbyterian." This was easier said than done.

As a first step in a long process of "Presbyterian 101" re-education, Myers was determined not to allow the parishioner to continue to

manipulate his committees. When he failed to appear for a worship meeting, for example, she declined his invitation to make the decisions just between the two of them.

When he bragged about his leadership in multiple other congregations, she politely noted his young age and questioned his longevity in any one of those congregations. When the church officers informed her that they had not received training in 14 years, she established consistent elder education and supported the empowerment of leaders across the board. Over time, committee members began to articulate their own perspective in meetings, rather than simply going along with what was expected of them.

Myers also did her best to maintain a loving, compassionate presence amid establishing these healthy boundaries. Rather than blaming the newcomer and stoking a sense of victimhood within the congregation or within herself, she stressed the well-being of the congregation as a whole.

She encouraged the leaders to focus on the goals of the interim period, rather than dwell on the dilemma of "how we got here." She cultivated the hope of a more vibrant future, even as she acknowledged the ongoing pain of the situation.

Over time, the congregation settled into a more Presbyterian way of functioning. Ruling elders became more confident in their calling to govern the congregation as a team. Parishioners became more comfortable in relationship with one another as appropriate boundaries became established.

Myers determined they were ready for a direct intervention with the parishioner whose behavior had caused such difficulty. Again, she relied upon Presbyterian polity to undergird the process. She reached out to the presbytery for the support of the moderator. She secured professional services for any in the

congregation who might need assistance in processing their pain. She gathered a backup team and set up a meeting with the parishioner.

He never appeared. He never returned. The people moved on.

Presbyterian ‘tough love’

Throughout the remainder of her interim ministry with the congregation, Myers continued to emphasize the strength of Presbyterian polity in supporting their movement toward greater health.

“How we do things really matters. It’s how we maintain healthy boundaries,” Myers said, in reference to Presbyterian polity. “It’s our version of tough love.”

There is regret, however, as she considers the disappearance of the individual involved. What could have been, she wonders.

“If he had been able to go through

the intervention, he would have been loved,” Myers said.

In the absence of reconciliation, Myers focused instead on what Rediger calls “the law of goodness.” “Where goodness is identified and nurtured,” Rediger said, “the soul of a healthy congregation will bless all it touches.”

Several months later, in a sermon during Eastertide, Myers compared the ongoing potential of the congregation to the raising of Tabitha in Acts.

“The new thing you do in mission,” Myers preached as she concluded her ministry with the congregation, “may end up healing you.”

And it did.

Little by little, as the installed pastor stepped in, the congregation improved upon the foundation Myers’ interim ministry had laid. Slowly but surely, the building began to look a little nicer. The people began

to sit a little closer. Hearts that once felt haggard began to surge with hospitality.

Neighbors noticed the good things happening as the congregation embraced their new way of being. Many came to visit. The congregation, now fully empowered to live up to the potential of their calling, welcomed them in.

Twenty years later, what was once a struggling, bordering-on-dysfunction congregation of 50 members has grown to a healthy 350-plus community. A thriving mission propels the people onward. The intervention Myers led has faded into memory. The congregation has truly moved on.

Gusti Linnea Newquist is the pastor of First United Presbyterian Church in Troy, New York.

HOW NOT TO BE ‘THAT GUY’

In a 2016 article for *Psychology Today*, Harvard-trained psychiatrist Dr. Ralph Ryback discusses what he calls “the five faces of toxic relationships.”

Ruling Elder Richard Baldwin of New Castle Presbytery and a member of Elkton Presbyterian Church in Elkton, Maryland, who supports congregations confronting challenging issues, offers tools for self-awareness for each of these “five faces” of toxicity.

1. The Critic judges and criticizes you as a person — as opposed to your behavior — no matter what you do.

RB: Criticism of an idea is acceptable if we limit the criticism to the idea and do it in a kind, thoughtful manner and do not criticize the individual.

2. The Passive Aggressor speaks sarcastically and offers backhanded compliments.

RB: Sarcasm, as a passive-aggressive response to ideas and opinions and people we do not like or agree with, can come across like a slap in the face. Christ values a kind, considerate and honest response to our brothers and sisters.

3. The Narcissist must always be the center of attention, the best at everything and is unwilling to compromise.

RB: As soon as we demand that we be the primary resource and depository of all wisdom and knowledge — that is, to be the very center of attention in the group — we effectively shut down the collective wisdom of the group, and a huge treasure of insights and direction is lost.

Keep Christ as the center of attention and draw upon the ideas and thoughts of the entire group to accomplish your purposes.

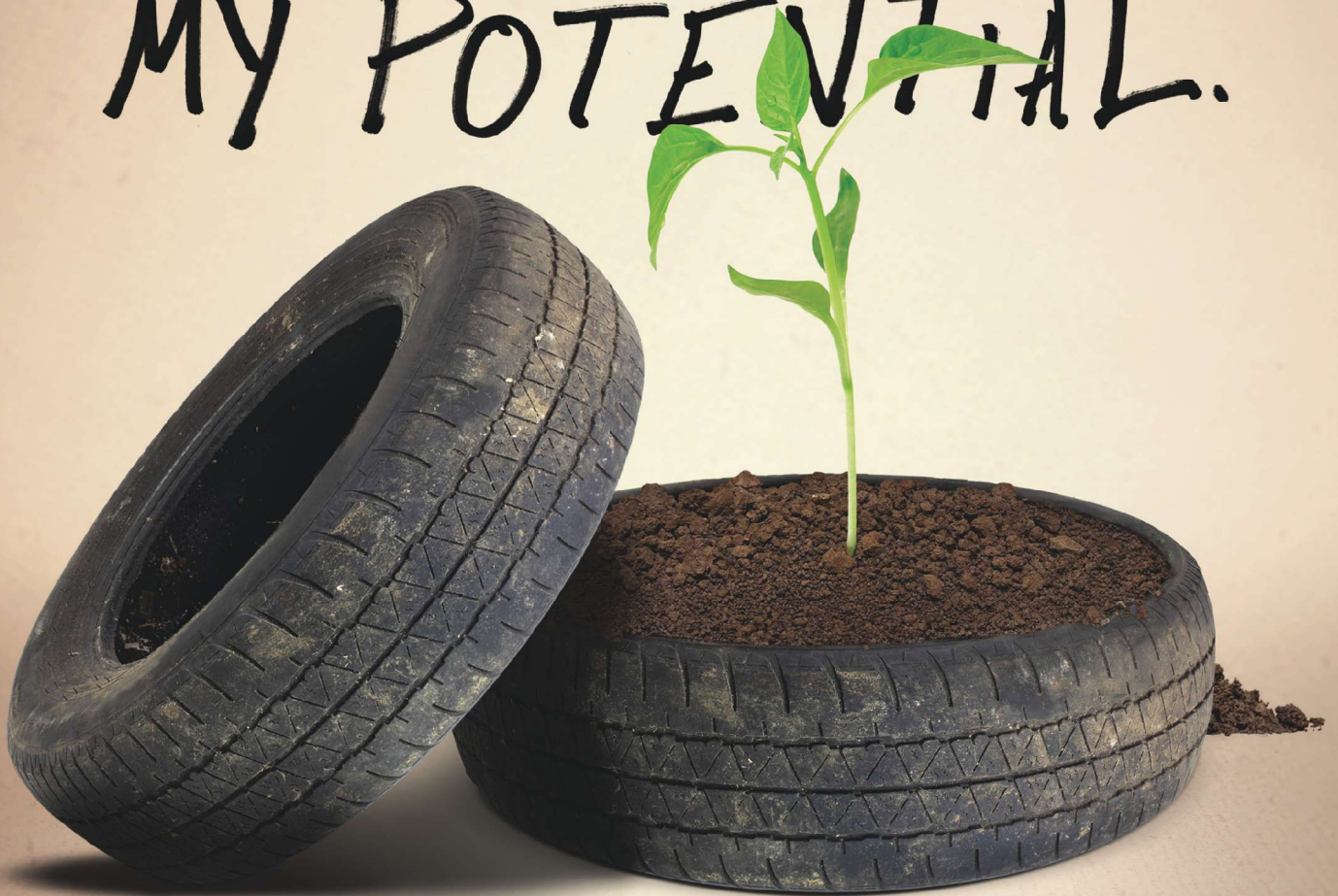
4. The Stonewaller refuses to communicate to evade difficult issues.

RB: Remember that the leader of the group is Christ himself. Ask for wisdom and direction from the Holy Spirit. You will, in fact, have something positive to contribute.

5. The Antisocial Personality explodes emotionally and sometimes physically and/or takes advantage of others without remorse.

RB: It is so easy to become a bully, sometimes without even knowing we are doing it. If we are dominating another person intellectually, emotionally or physically, we are taking advantage of them. Ask yourself: Am I being unfairly critical, aggressive, unresponsive? How much more effective and productive would a gentle, loving attitude be?

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Ministry in the **HALLS OF POWER**

PC(USA) provides 'witness to our faith' in D.C. and at the U.N.



COURTESY OF THE OFFICE OF PUBLIC WITNESS

Jimmie Hawkins, director of the Office of Public Witness, believes it is 'our job to witness our faith' in public and to work to better the lives of all.

BY SUE WASHBURN

Faith is not just personal; it's political.

Our leaders pass laws about how we treat one another, laws about money and finances, laws about how our resources are allocated and more. The Bible addresses these issues as well in Scriptures like the Ten Commandments, the parable of the sheep and the goats, Sabbath rules and Jesus' advice to the rich young ruler to sell his possessions and give to the poor. To say the Bible and Jesus are not political is to deny their influence and relevance to our lives in the 21st century.

While some Presbyterians prefer to keep their political views private, the PC(USA) Office of Public Witness and the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations are outward expressions of how the Presbyterian faith interacts with power. The offices take decisions made at General Assemblies and advocate on behalf of the denomination in two of the most influential cities on the planet — Washington, D.C., and New York City.

As the director of the Office of Public Witness in Washington, D.C., Jimmie Hawkins gets on a train at 6 a.m. each weekday and heads into the nation's capital. On the way, he catches up on the latest news and

updates his calendar accordingly. Some days his work involves being arrested for protesting policies that hurt people, some days he meets with elected officials about gun control or other issues, and other days he trains church members on how to be advocates for God's justice with their local leaders.

Hawkins and the other staff in Washington, D.C., are part of a coalition of 65 faith-based organizations that work together to witness to their faith in the halls of power.

Together, when their theology aligns, ecumenical groups work to lobby members of Congress, plan events and suggest policies in line with Jesus' teachings. And, as a Christian, Hawkins has no reservations about being politically active.

"God is sovereign and God is over all, including politics," Hawkins said. "There is a disconnect if we separate what is happening in the world from what is happening in the church. Our job is to witness to our faith in the public square to help create a more just world."

Two hundred miles away in New York City, Ryan Smith heads the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations. Smith, director of the office and the PC(USA)'s representative to the United Nations, says Presbyterians have a history of participating in politics.

"We trace our history to John Calvin advocating for the improvement of sewer systems in Geneva in the 16th century. In Jesus' ministry, he flipped the tables in the Temple. We carry on these traditions of challenging an unjust status quo as exemplified by Jesus and Calvin," Smith said.

Diversity of opinions

The challenge of ecumenical and interfaith political work is that although many Christians agree on the biblical principles to love one another and to care for the poor, they may not agree on how it should be



COURTESY OF THE OFFICE OF PUBLIC WITNESS

Nora Leccese, associate for domestic poverty and environmental issues in the Office of Public Witness, works with organizations like Bread for the World to end systemic poverty.

done. Some believe it should be done at the individual level with neighbors helping neighbors. Others think churches or other nonprofits should care for the poor, while others believe it is the government's responsibility to ensure each person's well-being.

Nora Leccese, associate for domestic poverty and environmental issues in the Office of Public Witness, says the office's advocacy work involves people they agree with and people they don't.

At times the denomination works independently; at other times, it works in partnership among many. The work occurs in front of cameras and behind the scenes.

"Advocacy isn't just about going to

protests. Just having conversations with people who think differently is advocacy, too," she said.

Leccese came to the Office of Public Witness after working with a food nonprofit. Through government policies, she hopes to help change the way people live.

"Charity is important, but we don't want to just provide charity. We work to change policies so that people don't need charity," Leccese said.

Partnerships work

Working partnerships are important at both the Office of Public Witness and the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations. Much of the work done at the United Nations is done in

coalition with other denominations and groups. Although members of the PC(USA) make up just .02 percent of the world's population, working with other denominations and nongovernmental organizations broadens the global influence the denomination can have.

"There is an African proverb that says, 'If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together,'" Smith said.

The Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations allows the Presbyterian voice to be heard by a world audience and contributes to the global agenda. Smith's ministry includes attending conferences, making statements and taking part in advocacy and networking.

"We work on some of the world's most complex challenges," Smith said. And the work is global in scope, addressing such issues as migrants and refugees, Middle East peace, climate change and human trafficking.

Keeping children out of armed conflicts is one of the issues the ministry has addressed in the Red Hand Campaign. UNICEF estimates as many as 300,000 children are involved in armed conflicts around the world.

The Red Hand Campaign encouraged PC(USA) congregations to send cutouts of red hands to the Ministry at the United Nations, which then delivered them to the U.N. offices of countries that have not signed and/or ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. The red hands came with a letter urging those leaders to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol and reminded them that "Children should be children, not soldiers."

"One of the best things about the red hands campaign is that it allowed ordinary Presbyterians to be directly involved in our work at the U.N.," said Simon Doong, a Young Adult Volunteer at the Ministry at the



SUE WASHBURN

Ryan Smith, director of the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations and the PC(USA)'s representative to the U.N., works with ecumenical partners to advocate for God's justice.

United Nations.

The Ministry at the United Nations also hosts a monthly open house for Presbyterians to learn more about the different topics the ministry addresses.

Doong says that while it's best to work for God's justice in person, Christians have new ways of working for justice — online tools.

"Advocacy can be as simple as sharing a hashtag or coordinating gatherings with people on social media," Doong said. "With the rise of social media, we all have more of a voice."

Sue Washburn is the pastor of Reunion Presbyterian Church in Mount Pleasant, Pennsylvania, and a freelance writer.

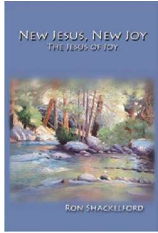
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Each spring, hundreds of members of the PC(USA) learn how to take their faith into the world of politics. Compassion, Peace & Justice Training Day brings Presbyterians together in Washington, D.C., to engage in issues of national and international interest, encouraging faithful responses to political challenges like migration, gender and sexuality issues, racial divisions, human trafficking, poverty and climate change. The training day is sponsored by the PC(USA) and is followed by Ecumenical Advocacy Days, a yearly gathering of the ecumenical Christian community that culminates in a visit to Capitol Hill to meet with lawmakers. In addition to the yearly training, both the Office of Public Witness and the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations partner with local churches year-round on a variety of issues. Here are some ways you can participate:

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- » Sign up for email newsletters and alerts on justice and peace ministries
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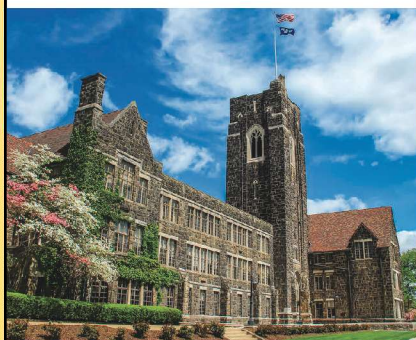
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The perfect mission statement for carrying out mission

It's time to revisit 'The Great Ends of the Church'

In 47 years of ordained ministry, I have served on more Presbyterian committees than I can or want to remember. Because Presbyterians believe that the will of God is better discerned in groups of believers than individually, I concede the necessity of committee service if we are to be the church God wants us to be.

But I draw the line at serving on committees whose charge it is to come up with a new mission statement. I despise it. I won't do it.

Not because I don't think congregations and other church bodies don't need a mission statement. They do.

I won't be part of a mission statement committee because we Presbyterians already have one that cannot be improved upon. There it is in F-1.0304 of the *Book of Order*. It's called "The Great Ends of the Church."

There are six of them and together they express in complete and unsurpassed form the mission of the PC(USA). They are:

- The proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind
- The shelter, nurture and spiritual fellowship of the children of God
- The maintenance of divine worship
- The preservation of the truth
- The promotion of social righteousness
- The exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.

That's all that Presbyterians need to be the faithful body of Christ that we have been called to be. It's all there: proclamation of the gospel, spiritual fellowship, divine worship, keepers of truth, practicing what we preach and living out God's intention for the world in the world.

What else do we need, mission statement committees? Language that is a little more contemporary? Maybe.

Enhancements that reflect particular contexts for ministry? Perhaps.

Greater emphasis on those Great Ends that are the specific focus of particular ministries? Sure, why not?

"Mission Statements for Dummies" (it's a real thing

I won't be part of a mission statement committee because we Presbyterians already have one that cannot be improved upon. It's called 'The Great Ends of the Church.'

— I found it on Google!) lists the six elements that are essential for a good mission statement:

- Focuses on satisfying customer needs
- Based on core competencies
- Motivates and inspires commitment
- Realistic and clear
- Specific, short, sharply focused and memorable
- Says what you want to be remembered for.

In my more headstrong days (which some still claim are now) when I did serve on mission statement committees, I would say, "Why can't we just say 'Jesus!'" That response was always dismissed as facetious. Then I discovered the Great Ends of the Church and my search for the perfect mission statement ended.

The General Assembly generally agrees. For six consecutive Assemblies in the 1990s (back when they met every year), we all studied and discussed one Great End of the Church at each Assembly.

As recently as the 2014 General Assembly, the six Great Ends — one each day — were the subject of commissioners' and advisory delegates' daily study together. The introduction to the study guide prepared by PC(USA) theologian Joe Small stated, "The great ends provide guidance for the church as faithful expressions of the Christian gospel and as what God calls the church to be and do."

Any church mission statement should start there.

Jerry Van Marter is the retired director of Presbyterian News Service and stated clerk for the Presbytery of Mid-Kentucky.



The many sides of Jesus

Truly human and truly divine — Jesus offers us so much

John 6:35, 41–51 is a lectionary text for Aug. 12.

Which version of Jesus do we settle for? A wise philosopher? A meek and mild but constant caregiver? A macho conqueror? A divine butler?

It's challenging to resist the impulse to settle for a Jesus who does not fully represent the Lord and Savior presented in the New Testament. Challenging, of course, but not new. Looking at John 6:35, 41–51, we see Jesus' followers missing the boat as they long to settle for a miraculous baker rather than the Bread of Life.

In John 6, Jesus has fed 5,000 before he goes with his disciples to another town. Jesus calls out the crowd who follow: "You're looking for me ... because you ate your fill of the loaves." They must have woken up hungry and realized that in this pre-Panera world, Jesus was their best bet for a good breakfast.

Jesus knows about our tendency to settle for less. He wants to feed us with the bread of life; we're happy to just grab some bread and fish while we head out to our day.

But Jesus knows they're settling. Yes, he can transform five loaves and two fish into a meal for 5,000, but he is so much more than an on-demand food provider. Connecting with, but moving beyond, their immediate desire, he tells them: "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry." Jesus wants them to see that there is something much more eternal to him than they realize.

The crowd begins to complain. After all, they know his father Joseph's family. How can he be the bread of life who came down from heaven? Jesus stretches their understanding once again, stating that anyone who believes in him has eternal life. The manna of their ancestors didn't grant eternal life (and by implication, neither did the loaves and fishes) — but anyone who eats the living, heavenly bread will live forever.

Making sure that they understand just what he means, Jesus closes the passage with "The bread that I

will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

Jesus knows about our tendency to settle for less. He wants to feed us with the bread of life; we're happy to just grab some bread and fish while we head out to our day. He wants eternal life for us; we're fine with some manna that fills us up for the next few hours. Jesus gives his flesh for the life of the world; we settle for satisfying our own day-to-day needs without caring so much for others.

I recently had dinner with a delightful octogenarian who had spent years settling. Dorothy (not her real name) explained to me that she grew up in a church that focused on Jesus as friend and companion, and that this prevented her from seeing Jesus as the Son of God. In fact, when Dorothy was asked to serve as deacon, she told the pastor that she couldn't because she wasn't sure Jesus was divine.

But a week before our dinner, she had gone to an adult Sunday school class on how the Gospel writers told the story of Jesus drawing on the Old Testament prophecies, particularly the suffering servant passages in Isaiah such as Isaiah 52:13–53:12. Dorothy told me that for the first time she saw Jesus as the Son of God, who had chosen to die on the cross for us.

I'm excited to see how Dorothy's new understanding of Jesus' identity is changing her life. Walking humbly with the Bread of Life, given for her so that she can live forever, is so much richer than settling for Jesus as friend — nothing more and nothing less.

Chip Hardwick is interim pastor at First Presbyterian Church of Lake Forest, Illinois.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- » What is your favorite image of Jesus?
- » What other aspects of Jesus' fuller identity are you neglecting?
- » What do we lose when we settle for an image of Jesus that excludes his self-sacrifice?



JUSTICE AND ONLY JUSTICE, YOU SHALL PURSUE (DEUT. 16:20)

Is Israel an apartheid state?

Christians face choices

When you cross the Jordan to go in to occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and when you occupy it and live in it, you must diligently observe all the statutes and ordinances that I am setting before you today. — Deuteronomy 11:31–32

Is Israel an apartheid state? Some say, “Yes!” Others say, “Absolutely not!” As children of both the Old Testament and the New Testament, we Christians are faced with fundamental choices as we watch the growing Israeli occupation of land declared by the international community to be the province of the Palestinian people. There’s the fundamental issue for us as Christians of justice for those who are oppressed. That’s enhanced by the fact that many of our closest Christian partners are Palestinian, and they suffer the same indignities as their fellow Palestinians.

Palestinians living in Gaza are essentially in an Israeli-enforced prison, unable, for the most part, to cross into Israel and blocked from access to the Mediterranean. Moreover, they are victims of the Hamas/Fatah political struggle and of the violent actions by Israel against Hamas.

The Palestinians who live in Israel and the West Bank suffer daily at the hands of Israeli military. They’re forced to stand for hours at checkpoints just to get to their jobs; suffer unjust rationing of water, even from nearby aquifers cordoned off for primary use by Israeli settlers; find their crops destroyed by roving settlers; must petition Israeli soldiers to get to the crops they have grown because they are separated from their fields by the

“separation barrier”; suffer the demolition of their houses, ostensibly for “lack of a permit”; and mourn the death of their children at the hands of security forces.

Allan Brownfeld, publications editor for the American Council for Judaism, says, “While Israel proclaims itself a ‘Jewish’ state, more and more Jewish voices are being heard in Israel, the U.S. and throughout the world saying that its treatment of Palestinians violates Jewish moral and ethical values. Hebrew University’s David Shulman put it this way: ‘In the end, it is the ongoing moral failure of the country as a whole that is most consequential, most dangerous, and most unacceptable. . . . We are, so we claim, the children of the prophets. Once, they say, we were slaves in Egypt. We know all that can be known about slavery, suffering, prejudice, ghettos, hate, expulsion, exile. I still find it astonishing that we, of all people, have reinvented apartheid in the West Bank.’ ”

As for whether it is apartheid or not, when the Rev. Dr. Allan Boesak, a hero of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, recently was asked that question, he answered saying the Palestinian experience of apartheid is “in its practical manifestation even worse than South African apartheid.” He added, “Not in the sense that apartheid was not an absolutely terrifying system in South Africa, but in the ways in which the Israelis have taken the apartheid system and perfected it.”

Israel’s chief enabler is our own government. How can we stand idle when this is done in our name?

Vernon S. Broyles III is a volunteer for public witness in the PC(USA)’s Office of the General Assembly.

Coming in October

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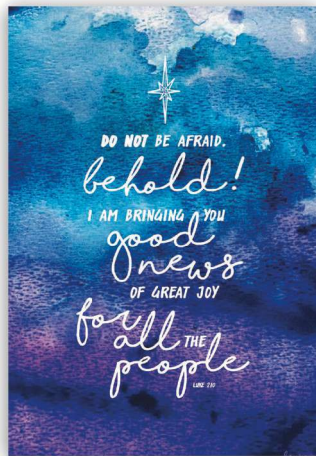
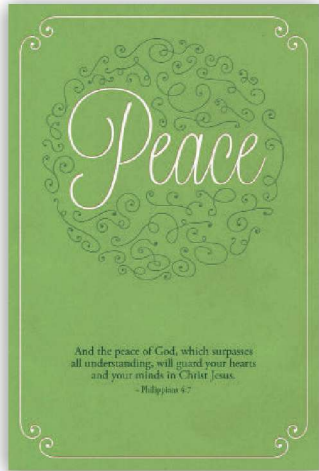
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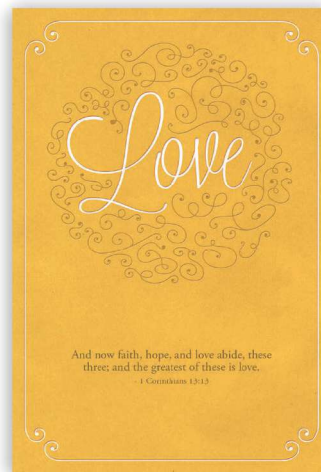
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