



**WE ARE THE PRESBYTERY  
OF WESTERN COLORADO**

# Pressing News

Fall 2013

## MAINTENANCE OR MISSION?

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This was the theme of the Fall Meeting of Presbytery. Actually, it felt more like time of worship, inspiration, teaching, sharing, and equipping than it did a meeting.

In this year of 2013 we began to meet in clusters –having our own regional times of northern, middle, and southern clusters, whereby we would not be traveling over the mountains in the winter. We now meet just twice a year with the full presbytery (all 16 congregations), but gather with our clusters (four, five, or six congregations) another time or two during the year.

These cluster gatherings vary from region to region, but generally are times of more fellowship with meals and time for leadership training. These cluster times have given us a taste of what presbytery can be when we gather all together...less business and reporting and more engaging with one another to further mission and ministry in and through our congregations.

We long to more fully live out the mission statement of our Presbytery...

...to assist

...to support

...to equip

...to challenge congregations within our presbytery bounds

Also, to provide: GUIDANCE, ENCOURAGEMENT, &  
RESOURCES FOR THEIR MINISTRY



*(Continued on page 2)*

After such an uplifting, positive time together, we look forward to have Presbytery carry more focus and direction, choosing not to be distracted by those things that try to divide us, but rather focusing on those things that lead us to bear witness to Christ in the world.

A ministry team of Tom Hansen from the northern cluster, Alan Gibson from the middle cluster, and Beau Smith from the southern cluster, who all ably led us this past meeting and facilitated discussion, are eager to hear from you your ideas as they put together themes for the next three years for each of our “meetings” of Presbytery. They would like your input as to the kinds of training your congregational leaders and members could appreciate, so that others (beyond voting delegates) can come together to be enriched and “poured into” for ministry, as well!

So in this New Year enjoy gathering with your clusters for more times of equipping and sharing, and we will see you at First Presbyterian Church, Glenwood Springs, Wednesday and Thursday, May 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>. Be sure it’s on your calendars now. We are grateful to the Glenwood Church for hosting this time...don’t think you will want to miss. See you in the Springs...that’s Glenwood Springs in May!

Blessings this fall, that we may not only be “gathering in,” but also sending out! In Jesus’ name,

*Mary*

Mary Hammond Atkinson



### Western United States Flooding From Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA)

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance is responding to the western United States flooding, where heavy rain over Recent days has caused severe flooding in Colorado and Adjacent State. PDAA is there with spiritual support and caregivers who understand and are trained for the unique challenges of those going through disaster. PDA works directly with mid councils to ensure community needs are met.

Now is also the when PDA begins coordinating volunteer teams. These teams are vital and make rebuilding possible for those most in need. In the weeks. Months and years that follow, PDA will remain—helping with the long-term recovery even when others have moved onto the next disaster or story

#### **Residents of affected areas need your prayers and financial support**

**GIVE**—Share your financial blessings by designating gifts to DR000015 and specifying western United States Flooding. Individuals may give through their congregation, online, or by mailing a check to Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), PO Box 643700 Pittsburgh, PA 15264-3700

**ACT**—Gift of the Heart Cleanup buckets are often needed following flooding situations, and hygiene kits are often used when people are in shelters. Help ensure that the buckets and kits will be available when needed. To learn how to make the kits, visit [presbyterianmission.org/ministries/pda/making-gift-heart-kits](http://presbyterianmission.org/ministries/pda/making-gift-heart-kits).

**PRAY**—please pray that thought the response of the faith community, the people and communities affected by flooding in the western United States and those offering assistance will be reminded of the faithful hope that is found in Christ

### Time To Order

It is time to place your orders for **The Mission Yearbook of Prayer**. Please let Beth know how many you or your congregation wishes to receive.

We are also placing a **Book of Order 2013-2015** order.

Please remember the higher quantity that we order the lower the cost is for everyone.

To contact Beth in the Presbytery Office  
970-240-8455, or 877-927-7372 or  
[beth@wcpresbytery.org](mailto:beth@wcpresbytery.org)

# THE PARISH PAPER

## IDEAS AND INSIGHTS FOR ACTIVE CONGREGATIONS

Coeditors: Herb Miller and Cynthia Woolever - [www.TheParishPaper.com](http://www.TheParishPaper.com)

September 2013 - Volume 21, Number 9

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### Disaster Relief: Congregations in the Eye of the Storm

An EF level-5 tornado ripped through Joplin, Missouri, killing 158 people, injuring 1,150 others, and causing nearly \$3 billion in damage. The storm leveled St. Paul's United Methodist Church worship center and severely damaged their family life center. Two of their members were among the dead and three members from another area congregation lost their lives. Hurricane Irene caused major destruction along the East Coast of the U.S. and record flooding took many inland communities by surprise. When the Schoharie Creek rose to historic levels, Prattsville and Schoharie, New York were among the most affected—90 percent of the village structures sustained major damage, including local churches.

Congregations in the eye of the storm suffer in multiple ways—church buildings may be damaged or destroyed, lives may be lost, members and neighbors may become homeless, and the community and its residents are never the same again. Still, the disaster is not the event—it is what happens afterward.

#### Immediate Relief vs. Long-Term Recovery

When a community disaster occurs, many agencies and groups swing into action. In the chaotic first few days, inaccurate information flows and media coverage can be intense. People around the country begin to contribute to relief organizations. In fact, 95 percent of all contributed funds are given during this first relief stage. However, the most difficult and expensive aspect of stitching the community back together comes from hard work in the following three to five years. After five years, work groups are *still* traveling to assist in areas affected by Hurricane Katrina. Both immediate relief and long-term assistance are needed after a natural disaster. Below are ways that your congregation can provide security and hope for a future beyond the storm's effects.

#### Immediate Relief Efforts by Churches

People of faith have great potential to lead and minister when the healing work begins.

**Donate smart.** Make a cash donation to a local church, long-term recovery group, or faith-based organization that already has relationships in the community. Consider giving to those doing the work of recovery because they need more funds and are less likely to receive them after public attention wanes. Look for opportunities to take part in matching grants where every gift is matched dollar for dollar. Above all, donate to an organization that you trust.

**Do not send supplies.** When disaster strikes, people want to *do* something! Yet sending desperately needed supplies is simply not practical. Someone in the community has to be set up to receive, organize, store, and then distribute these goods to victims. Often charities partner with companies to acquire what they need in donations such as bottled water, cleaning supplies, new clothing, and gift cards. Have a fund-raising event and then donate those funds to a trusted charity.

**Provide information and open your doors.** Church buildings and parking lots make good locations for the distribution of water, food, and supplies. Congregations can be a clearinghouse for information and



NEXT TIME, LET'S INSIST ON JUST THE CHURCH NAME.

space for volunteers and agency staff to meet with affected individuals and families. Church volunteers can gather information about food pantries and about households willing to provide temporary lodging, rentals or hotels with space, and other affordable housing. The church might have facilities to serve as a temporary shelter (this possibility becomes more realistic when mobile units with showers and washing machines are available). Congregations often coordinate community meals with other churches and nonprofits to host multiple feeding sites across the affected area. Finally, churches live out their core mission through opening their building for prayer and by participating in interfaith worship services.

### **Long-Term Recovery Efforts by Churches**

While the short-term efforts matter, what's more vital is the work toward long-term recovery.

**Organize volunteers.** Before traveling to a disaster site, make prior arrangements with a local church or agency so they can be ready to put your volunteers to work. All volunteers should arrive prepared to do the work that the local group asks them to do. This includes being appropriately dressed (wearing gloves, long sleeves, work clothes that can be ruined, masks) and bringing their own tools. If possible, volunteers should bring their own food/water. Car pooling or group transportation helps get the group in and out when there is limited road access. Affected areas always benefit from skilled labor but most jobs simply involve removing debris and cleaning up sites. If the disaster is local, congregations can host work groups by providing shelter, meals, or transportation.

What volunteers *do* is important but showing up and building relationships are equally important. Talking helps traumatized victims who have lost so much rediscover what brings their life meaning and dignity. When volunteers listen, they remind survivors that they are not alone and others care. Unfortunately, volunteers can believe they know what is best. A Schoharie pastor advises: "Come with a servant's heart." This means that volunteers should refrain from judging lifestyles or community methods. The volunteer's purpose is to assist, serve, and bring relief.

**Adopt a sister congregation.** Congregations can become long-term recovery partners with a disaster-affected church. Through prayer, sending work groups, and meeting specific requests for assistance, the adopted church feels supported and encouraged. Faith communities show strength in their regional and national community-based network of other denominational churches. Most denominations offer opportunities for service, such as Episcopal Relief

and Development, United Methodist Committee on Relief, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, Southern Baptist Disaster Relief, Mennonite Disaster Service, Lutheran Disaster Response, and World Renew/Christian Reformed Church.

**Participate in a long-term recovery group.** Communities affected by disaster eventually organize one or more nonprofit group(s) to coordinate the rebuilding challenge. Homeowners, businesses, and agencies are typically represented. Congregations should be represented in these efforts as well because people of faith bring a commitment to justice and equitable assistance. Pastors and individual members can attend meetings, serve on committees and governing boards, and share information with the congregation.

**Prepare a church disaster plan.** Gather a team of four to six members and craft a comprehensive but short summary of what the church would need if (1) a local disaster caused damage to church facilities or to the homes of members, or (2) a disaster happened in the county or state. Encourage interested members to get disaster training offered by many denominations and relief organizations.<sup>1</sup>

### **A Ministry of Hope**

The most recognized work of Japanese art, a woodblock print, depicts a huge wave threatening three small boats. Why has this dramatic scene become an iconic image of impending disaster? At first glance, the fishermen seem doomed. Yet they do not look panicked. Instead, they grasp their oars with determined discipline and use their experience to cope with the flow of life. Although the wave exemplifies the violence of nature, the sun still shines, pointing to resiliency and hope.

Floods, fires, hurricanes, and tornadoes rip apart communities and present congregations with the opportunity to be a part of God's story of hope. In this turmoil, churches can do their best ministry—offer hope, form long-term partnerships, and build communities.

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1. Guides for churches ministering in disaster are available online. For examples see these websites: National Disaster Interfaith Network, *Be a Ready Congregation* and tip sheets about disaster ministry (n-din.org), North American Mission Board (www.namb.net), *Church Preparedness for Disaster Relief* and *Disaster Preparedness and Response Plan*, Peace River Presbytery (www.peacriverpresbytery.org).



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### Growth or Decline? 10 Key Questions about Worship Attendance

Three out of four congregations attract the same number of or even fewer worshipers than they did five years ago. Review the following questions to determine if your church could take steps to attract and retain more newcomers.

**1. Does your newcomer rate exceed your departure rate?** Churches lose members each year—through death, transfers to other churches, members moving out of town, or people becoming less active participants. To maintain a stable and active membership, churches must offset any losses by welcoming new members. The average congregation loses 7 percent of its members each year. Therefore, for every 100 members, a church must add 7 newcomers annually for the church to remain the same size.

**2. In any given year, what percent of your worshipers are visiting for the first time?** On average, 2 percent of attendees in any given worship service are attending that congregation for the first time. Without first-time visitors, congregations shrink in membership over time.

**3. What prompts someone to visit your congregation for the first time?** Half of new members say they found out about the church they eventually joined because someone they knew mentioned the church or invited them to attend worship. More new members in conservative Protestant churches—two out of three—say they visited a church for the first time because of this personal invitation.

One out of four first-time visitors said they decided to attend services because they noticed the church building when they passed by. A small number—one in ten—said they were actively looking for a church associated with a particular denomination.<sup>1</sup>

What other factors increase the number of first-time visitors? Visible signage informs potential visitors about the kind of congregation it is and when services are held. Additional signage should designate directions if the church is set away from major

roads, building entrances, parking, the nursery, and other important areas of the church. Adequate signage signals to visitors that you are expecting them.

Additionally, an increasing number of people now “see” your church for the first time through the church’s website. Your website should be designed to meet the needs of both visitors and current members. On the home page, give visitors the essential information they need—the times of worship services, the church’s street address, a map showing the location, and how to contact the pastor and other church staff. Don’t make your potential first-time worshipers click through your site searching for basic information.<sup>2</sup>

**4. What percent of your first-time visitors return for a second time, and again and again, until they become members?** About one in three new members say they visited *one* other congregation before attending their current church for the first time. An equal percentage visited *two or more* churches before attending the present one. On average, congregations can expect about 10 percent of their first-time visitors to become future members.



ACCORDING TO YOUR WEBSITE, THIS CHURCH IS CURRENTLY “UNDER CONSTRUCTION.”

In a few fast-growing churches, as high as 30 percent of first-time visitors eventually join. Increasing both the number of first-time visitors *and* the percent that return is essential.

#### **5. Why do first-time visitors decide to return?**

Research shows that newcomers name three factors that most impressed them as worship visitors and made them want to come back again: the friendliness of the people (40% mentioned it), the overall worship experience (36% gave this reason), and the quality of the sermon or homily (34% said this played a role in their decision to return).

Visitors often report that they were only greeted by the official greeters posted at the door and the pastor as they exited. Divide the sanctuary seating area into sections and station additional undercover greeters to look for visitors. If a fellowship time or study group follows services, ask the pew greeters to invite visitors to go with them. Having someone show the way is another demonstration of generous hospitality.

**6. How does your church follow up with first-time worship visitors?** Surprisingly, one in three new members said they were *not* contacted after their first visit to the church. Asking visitors to complete a visitor card is the first step in gaining the information for a later contact. Design a strategy that involves multiple methods (letters, postcards, emails, phone calls, or personal visits) based on the number of times someone has visited. A first-time worship visitor would receive a different kind of follow-up than on subsequent visits.

**7. What percent of your attendees are between 18 to 29 years of age?** The aging profile of current members strikes many young people when they visit for the first time. That is because the average worshiper is 54 years old, 10 years older than the average American. Often the largest age group among attendees is worshipers over 65 years of age. In the average congregation, one in three worshipers is 65 years of age or older. Attracting 18 to 29 year-old visitors is not impossible. Congregations with a high concentration of emerging adults offer multiple points of entry into the life of the congregation such as non-traditional worship times and formats, study groups and age-specific adult education, opportunities to volunteer in community service, and social gatherings. An expert on best practices for young adult ministry argues that congregations should pay more attention to the church's identity, not less.<sup>3</sup> Even congregations

with small numbers of emerging adults can provide opportunities for worship leadership and ministry in the church or community.

**8. What percent of your current attendees are not yet members?** On average, one in ten worshipers regularly participate in a congregation but are not yet members. Most of these nonmembers are not involved in any church programs or activities beyond attending worship services. Nonmembers tend to be younger than 45 years of age. How does your church construct a bridge that helps attendees cross over into membership? Are new-member or adult programs aimed at explaining tenets of the faith and a call to discipleship?

**9. How is your congregation known in the community?** If a dozen random people in your area were approached and asked, "What do you know about [fill in the name of your church]?" How many would say they have never heard of it or that they know nothing? Every community is different and every congregation has the opportunity for unique ministry that fits their location such as quality children's ministry or school-age programs, senior services, outstanding music or promotion of the arts, or advocacy for marginalized groups of people. Identify and build on your congregation's distinctive strengths to better serve God and others.

**10. Do the worship services help people connect to God?** Long-time members grow accustomed to the liturgy, music, and pace and find meaning in the familiar. Ask the last 10 people who joined the church how they experienced the services when they first began attending. Also contact recent visitors and ask them about their reactions to the service. Listen carefully to these reflections and share them with worship leaders. Newcomers often provide good insights into the ways services can be more effective in meeting attendees' spiritual needs.

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1. Statistics in this issue come from the U.S. Congregational Life Survey ([www.USCongregations.org](http://www.USCongregations.org)).

2. See the free download, *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 8, How to Attract First-Time Worship Visitors* ([www.TheParishPaper.com](http://www.TheParishPaper.com)).

3. J. Roberto and M. Hayes, "Best Practices in Young Adult Faith Formation," Lifelong Faith Associates (2007).

## Presbytery in Brief

At our Sept. 27 & 28 meeting at the First Presbyterian Church in Durango:

✚ The Presbytery considered and talked about the difference “maintenance” and “ministry.” While no specific actions were taken the Presbytery seemed to endorse a more ministry and mission-oriented agenda for future Presbytery meetings. (With less time and energy devoted to lengthy reports on matters of business and more time devoted to energizing and equipping for ministry those who attend.) A ministry team will hopefully coalesce around Teaching Elders (TE’s) Tom Hansen, Alan Gibson, and Beau Smith to make recommendations to the Council.

✚ The Presbytery approved the First Presbyterian Church of Grand Junction securing a construction loan of up to \$2.5 million for their building expansion project.

✚ RE (Ruling Elder) Thelma Starner presented the Al Ruth Award to the Montezuma Valley Presbyterian Church for their work with the nearby Manaugh Elementary School. The award included a \$4500 check to honor and continue that ministry.

✚ The Presbytery approved a motion to help the Delta Presbyterian Church pay “vacancy dues” to the Board of Pensions for the next four months.

✚ The Presbytery authorized Council to investigate the possibility of moving the Presbytery office to the First Presbyterian Church of Montrose and granted them the authority (through the acting moderator) to direct such a move should it be deemed appropriate.

✚ The Presbytery set an Ecclesiastical Budget of \$73,160 and a Mission Budget of \$86,523 (with \$14,373 coming from prior year carryover) for 2014. The Ecclesiastical Budget is based on a per capita request of \$39.27 for 2014.

✚ The Presbytery concurred with the Presbytery of Detroit’s overture to the 2014 General Assembly to allow presbyteries to forward to Synod and GA only that portion of per capita payments which they actually receive.

✚ The Presbytery elected TE Steve Gammill to be vice-moderator of Presbytery in 2014 and moderator in 2015. They also elected TE Alan Gibson and RE Pat Crooks to be our commissioners to the 2014 General Assembly (with TE Jo DeVinny as alternate). Presbytery confirmed the appointment of TE Blake Blakesly to replace TE Steve Nofel as co-leader of the Southern Cluster.

✚ The Presbytery heard a report from the Presbyterian Women’s moderator, Vicki Sutton, on her trip to Appalachia as part of the 2013 PW Mission Experience. The Presbytery also heard a report from Mallorye Duran (our 2012 Young Adult Advisory Delegate to General Assembly) on a YAAD Reunion held in Nashville.

✚ The Presbytery conducted an examination of Candidate Alan TeBrink for ordination. Alan was approved for ordination. To our knowledge Alan is the first Commissioned Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church USA to be called as an installed minister to the church that he had been serving as CRE. Alan will be ordained and installed in Allison on Nov. 10.

✚ The Presbytery learned that the X Lazy F Camp has purchased a new solar power system to generate electricity.

The next Presbytery meeting is scheduled for May 14 & 15 (Wednesday and Thursday), 2014, at the FPC in Glenwood Springs.



Rev. Steve Nofel and Elder Commissioners from Montezuma Valley Presbyterian Church Receive Al Ruth Memorial Award for their Mission work at Manaugh Elementary School



CRE and Candidate Alan TeBrink and Brenda TeBrink along with members from Allison Church and Durango Church after Presbytery approved him for ordination.

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*You are Invited*

*To the Ordination of*

*Alan TeBrink*

*Sunday November 10, 2013*

*At 4:00 P M*

*This will be Held at the Allison Community Presbyterian Church*