



**WE ARE THE PRESBYTERY
OF WESTERN COLORADO**

Pressing News

Holiday 2016

Inside this issue:

Continue: Breath of heaven	2
Reminders	2
Parish Paper: Does Your Congregation suffer from Anxiety	3
Continue: Does Your Congregation Suffer from Anxiety	4
Parish Paper: Can We Wait for God's Spark	5
Continue: Can We Wait for God's Spark	6
PDA: Tennessee Wildfire	7
Writers	7
Christmas Joy Offering	7

“Breath of Heaven”

It is hard to believe, but the season of Advent and Christmas are upon us. Every year I promise myself that ‘this year’ I will be more prepared to enter the season and will not allow the hustle and bustle to distract me from the journey of Advent. As you can guess, I have yet to arrive at the first Sunday of Advent fully ready for the season. In fact, I spend most of December blindly riding the roller coaster of holiday business at break neck speed. On Christmas Eve, I sit in my pew and wonder where all of the time went and I regret not paying more attention in the moments leading up to that night.

I generally refrain from all things Christmas until after Thanksgiving, but this week, I found myself in need of some pre-Christmas cheer. Luckily Christmas music is just a click away on Pandora and I quickly found myself listening to one of my favorite Christmas songs, “Breath of Heaven” by Amy Grant. This song always grabs my by the heart strings and doesn’t let go until the final note has faded away. The song is an open, honest prayer about Mary’s experience of carrying the Christ child. It is a moment of vulnerability that echoes through the ages. I began to wonder about Mary and was once again struck by how little we know about her. Aside from the story found in Luke, the accounts of Mary are minimal and offer very little insight into the girl called by God.

I returned to the Gospel of Luke with a new set of eyes, looking for clues to Mary and her life and faith and I was struck by Mary’s response to the angel Gabriel; “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.”^[b] ²⁹ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.” ³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” ³⁴ Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?”

Here is what I love about this exchange. Mary isn’t prepared for an angel messenger, and she is certainly not prepared for the message he delivers.

(Continued on page 2)

Mary isn't ready. I love that Luke left her very human response in this story. Not only is Mary not ready, she has some questions about the feasibility of this news and she voices them. Gabriel allows Mary the time she needs to be 'perplexed' so she can say to God, "I don't understand."

For those of us who have ever struggled with God tugging at your heart to try something new or to put yourself out there in new and uncomfortable ways, Mary's story is speaks to us. The realization that God gave Mary the room to be perplexed is not only reassuring, it is life giving. Too often we only hear the stories of people who knew immediately that God was calling them and they jumped right on board and got down to business. These are the stories that make the rounds on Facebook, Guideposts and every other inspirational / devotional book we encounter. For years, these stories overwhelmed me and caused this sense of fear that I had somehow failed. But Mary's story has given me a tremendous gift this year. Mary shows us that God's call can be confusing and overwhelming and it is OK if we are perplexed and hesitant.

Mary wasn't expected to be an expert. She wasn't expected to know every detail and have all of her ducks in a row before God could use her. God expected Mary to be exactly who she was; someone who was willing to be honest with God about being confused and uncertain. Mary voiced her fear and confusion and was still willing to say, "let it be with me according to your will'.

But Mary's story doesn't end there. Luke does not tell us what Mary and Joseph go through during the next nine months. Nor do we get any insight into what they must be thinking or feeling as the time for Jesus arrival nears. This is where Amy Grant picks up our story.

"Breath of Heaven" is a prayer offered by Mary as she nears the end of her journey to Bethlehem. *"I am waiting in a silent prayer, I am frightened by the load I bear, in a world as cold as stone, must I walk this path alone? Be with me now. Be with me now. Breath of Heaven, hold me together, be forever near me, Breath of Heaven. Breath of Heaven, lighten my darkness, pour over me your holiness, for you are holy, Breath of Heaven."*

After nine months, Mary is still sharing her fear, confusion and uncertainty with God. If God chose Mary in the midst of uncertainty, surely God does the same for us. We don't have to be prepared, we just have to be willing.

I cannot think of a more fitting prayer than "Breath of Heaven" as we enter the Season of Advent. Are we ready? Are we prepared for the journey we are about to begin. No. But God gives us the space we need to hear the message, to ask questions, to be perplexed and then open our hearts and minds to the calling that God has laid before us.

Christmas Blessings,

Keri Shelton, Middle Cluster leader



-Reminders-

1. Reminder that All 2016 Mission Giving must be turned into the Presbytery office no later than Friday January 6, 2017 for it to be credited (hopefully) at the GA for 2016. Any funds received after the January 6th Date will be credited to 2017 Mission giving.
2. If you have any changes to your email, home address, or phone numbers over the last year or so please let Beth in the office know so she can make any changes.
3. If you are willing to receive this newsletter via email please let Beth in the office know to help her be a better steward of Presbytery money. Also know if you want be removed from the mailing list please let Beth know so that she can remove your name.
- 4 The Presbytery Office will be closed from December 19th through December 27th. Beth will be checking email and voice messages through out this time and she does have the presbytery cell phone 970-497-6925.

DOES YOUR CONGREGATION SUFFER FROM ANXIETY?

The church governing board gathered with a consultant for their much-publicized first meeting. They knew the consultant's reputation and were eager to hear his advice. However, the consultant did not begin with recommendations. Rather he introduced a planning method known as SWOT analysis—acronym for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Several church members were familiar with the approach but could not imagine how it applied to their church problems. No one had given much thought to how the congregation's internal dynamics and their external context related to their current crisis.

He first asked: "What are some of the church's strengths?" The room went silent. Finally, one member offered: "Well, we know we need help." After the nervous laughter subsided, the consultant tried again. "What are some of the church's weaknesses?" Many hands went up and he struggled to capture all their answers in his notes. The same response problem came with the next set of questions. The church leaders offered few insights about the congregation's opportunities but a full set of complaints about the threats they faced as a church. Knowing that the SWOT method only worked if members could give meaningful answers, he knew he was dealing with deeper issues. The consultant suspected a collective anxiety that caused the leaders to focus on preventing bad things from happening instead of a "promotion focus"—the tendency to reach for new opportunities and rewards.¹

What Does Church Anxiety Look Like?

We think of anxiety as an emotional state that individuals experience—like feelings of worry and unease. But non-anxious individuals participating in a church organization can produce a collective nervousness—an unhealthy group emotion entirely different from their own. An anxious church tends to:

- Over think any decision before taking action
- Imagine and expect negative outcomes
- Worry about the very worst that could happen

- Respond poorly to any negative feedback from nonmembers
- Be extremely self-critical

Church Anxiety Risk Factors

Anxiety levels can never be reduced to zero but alarms can fire too frequently, disabling a church with paralysis. High anxiety gets churches stuck in unproductive loops that, over time, actually increase anxiety. For both individuals and organizations, this anxiety manifests itself in a variety of symptoms: it shows up in how we *act* (the behavioral component), how we *feel* (the emotional component), and how we *think* (the cognitive component). And when a church gets caught in an anxiety trap, leaders fail to see the big picture and do not take advantage of opportunities for more effective ministries. When faced with these anxiety bottlenecks, leaders must address all three dimensions where anxiety surfaces.

Behavioral traps. The default mode of operation for anxiety-prone congregations is postponing decisions, conducting more research and gathering more information



"...AND YET...
IT SORT OF MAKES ME WANT TO TAKE A LOOK."

than necessary, and waiting for attitudes or opinions to change. This approach often means that congregations are working harder using outdated or failed strategies. The old proverb, “If all you ever do is all you’ve ever done, than all you’ll get is all you ever got” summarizes this truth. This blend of postponing action mixed with all-or-nothing approaches are warning signs that indicate congregations have persisted too long in certain behaviors.

One of the fastest ways to reduce anxiety is to change behavioral patterns first, without waiting for thoughts and attitudes to shift. To get out of no action mode, set deadlines for action and make those deadlines public. Research shows that deciding when and where actions are to be taken increases the odds of follow through. Hold leaders accountable by delivering decisions and actions on time, no matter how difficult. Consistently review plans and keep moving forward on implementation. Do not let the behavior of a few hijack the congregation’s ability to boldly act on core mission goals.

Our church goals are like a mirror that should reflect who we are. If a church fails to act on its mission goals, the church is not who it says it is. Rediscovering our goals and committing to them increases our resilience to anxiety.

Cognitive traps. While behavior in churches reveals *unconscious* intent—we do what we are motivated to do—our *conscious* intent reflects what we *think* we want to do and that intent clearly lines up with our goals. Still, our thinking can be bogged down in cognitive traps. For instance, information and knowledge are essential ingredients for making decisions, but these two alone are insufficient in an imperfect world. To move forward in mission requires faith, the willingness to focus on both the positive and negative, and some ability to tolerate ambiguities.

As noted in the story with the consultant, anxiety-prone congregations, and leaders in particular, are wired to consider any potential negative outcomes. However, with practice, church leaders can routinely put on the table for discussion all the potential positive outcomes and give them an equal hearing. In addition, leaders can recognize the potential harm arising from inaction. Even when the congregation recognizes that a negative outcome is possible, leaders can still believe taking action is worth the risk and that there is value in acting with uncertainty.

Emotional traps. The overall emotional temperature of the congregation determines the likelihood of tsunami-level anxiety. Alice Boyes describes an anxiety-prone individual as someone whose answers start as no and might move to yes. A congregation whose default response is “no” to any proposed action is a church

that uses a lot of emotional energy to process change or even the idea of change. When reducing anxiety becomes the goal, rather than the goals themselves, leaders have taken the bait for an emotional trap. Apprehension and pessimism suggest the congregation does not believe it has the capacity to cope with things that do not go according to plan. Similar to navigating the cognitive traps, members and leaders must make a concerted effort to dig out of the emotional traps. Try starting with a “yes” on a mission goal, setting behavior deadlines for decisions, and making sure to consider as many positive implications as negative ones.

Tackling Anxiety with Better Habits

Church anxiety can cost you in terms of missed opportunities. Fortunately, church anxiety is not genetic. When congregations tackle anxiety with self-knowledge and a conscious intent to change habits, they often achieve dramatically different results.

The ways a church thinks, feels, and acts grow into deep-seated habits. In some congregations, these behavioral, emotional, and cognitive patterns solidify into obsessions. Two acres of undeveloped land went on the market next to a suburban church. Leaders began discussing whether the congregation should purchase the additional acreage. Differences of opinion became arguments and arguments led to warring camps—about whether funds could be used more wisely elsewhere, uncertainty about whether the church would grow enough to ever need the extra space, and others who wanted control over the types of development likely to be adjacent to church property. After six months of debate and delay, they realized that their anxiety and uncertainties had generated familiar bad habits. With renewed commitment to their goals, the church sought out several community partners—a preschool and a local Habitat for Humanity chapter. After purchasing the property, the congregation helped these two nonprofits obtain grants to build a school and new family housing. By consciously moving past their negative thinking, they played a critical role in shaping community resources that fostered their neighbors’ quality of life.

What opportunities has your congregation missed? When has inaction interfered with meeting the church’s mission goals?

1. Material drawn from the analysis of individual anxiety by Alice Boyes, *The Anxiety Toolkit: Strategies for Fine-Tuning Your Mind and Moving Past You Stuck Points* (New York: Penguin, 2015).

A Round of Prayer In the Presbytery of Western Colorado

For 2017-2018

2017 marks the Seventeenth year we've been doing this: it's a simple, biblical, faithful idea that has great power. Many of our congregations have been joining in prayer each week, praying for other congregations, ministries, and people in the Presbytery of Western Colorado. It has been a source of great blessing.

You are invited to join in this "Round of Prayer." It includes each of our congregations and fellowships, pastors (both retired and active), Candidates and Inquirers, and Presbytery and Synod staff. Pray for spouses, too: their names are in parentheses.

There are too many entries to do in one year, but that's okay! You are encouraged to send cards, make phone calls, or send e-mail greetings to those for whom you pray. If you need more information please call Presbytery Office at 970-240-8455 or email at beth@wcpresbytery.org.

Sunday, January 1, 2017: Roger Knapp (Linda), Honorably Retired, Santa Fe, New Mexico

Sunday, January 8: Keri Shelton (Kurtis), Minister at Large, Montrose

Sunday, January 15: Edgell Pyles (Marti Pickett), Honorably Retired, Carbondale

Sunday, January 22: Julianne Fraley-Gilchrist (Jon), validated ministry, Chaplain, Kings College, Alberta, Canada

Sunday, January 29: Roy Altman (Kathy) Honorably Retired, Silt

Sunday, February 5: J. Cyrus Smith, Honorably Retired, Grand Junction

Sunday, February 12: Larry Zirschky (Sharon), validated ministry, Military Chaplain

Sunday, February 19: Montezuma Valley Presbyterian Church, Cortez,

Sunday, February 26: Cluster Leaders Blake Blakesley (Lynn), Lou Ray Wright (Don DeWitt), Thelma Starnier, Keri Shelton (Kurtis), Brigitte Evenson (Larry), Mary Hammond Atkinson (Clark Atkinson)

Sunday, March 5: Bill Forbes (Gloria), Honorably Retired, Whitewater

Sunday, March 12: Monument Presbyterian Church, Grand Junction, Interim Pastor Stephen Gutridge (Paula)

Sunday, March 19: William Postler (Jan), Honorably Retired, Durango

Sunday, March 26: Gary Hendrix (Dorothy) Presbytery Accountant

Sunday, April 2: Presbyterian Church of Delta, Interim Pastor Cathy Hamrick (Don)

Sunday, April 9: Candidate: Joshua Rodriquez (Abby)

Sunday, April 16: **EASTER: Celebrate our Lord's Resurrection! Christ is Risen Indeed!**

Sunday, April 23: First Presbyterian Church, Grand Junction, Pastor Tom Hansen (Shelly), Assistant Pastor Jason Emberger (Tina)

Sunday April 30: William Mangrum (Valerie), Validated Ministry, Adjunct professor, Fort Lewis College, Durango

Sunday, May 7: Inquirers: Rebecca Branton, Garrett Mostowski (Paige)

Sunday, May 14: First Presbyterian Church, Glenwood Springs, Pastor Charis Caldwell (Mike Bucchum),

Sunday, May 21: Charlene Patton (widow of deceased Minister, Jim), Alaska

Sunday, May 28: Betty Kendrick (Max), Widow of deceased minister, Eckert

Sunday, May 29: First Presbyterian Church of Durango, Pastor Beau Smith (Kristin)

Sunday, June 4: **PENTECOST: Rejoice in the Power of the Holy Spirit!**

Sunday, June 11: Beth Gilleece (Jim), Communications and Office Administrator, Presbytery of Western Colorado

Sunday, June 18: Christ Presbyterian Church, Telluride, Pastor Pat Bailey (Debbie)

Sunday, June 25: Jennifer McKenzie (Andy) Validated Ministry, Hope West. Grand Junction

A Round of Prayer – Page 2

Sunday, July 2: Chuck Robison (Karen), Honorably Retired, Austin, Texas
Sunday, July 9: United Church of the San Juan's, Ridgway, Pastor Leslie Wood
Sunday, July 16: Mary Mayhew (widow of deceased minister, Glenn), Montrose
Sunday, July 23: Gary Hixson (Kathleen), missionary in Spain and other countries
Sunday July 30: Lake City Community Presbyterian Church, Pastor BL Jordan (Ray)
Sunday, August 6: Marilyn Ruth (widow of deceased minister, Al), Colorado Springs
Sunday, August 13: Jim Cory (Cappy), Honorably Retired, Montrose
Sunday, August 20: Florida Mesa Presbyterian Church, Pastor Dan Straw (Kathy)
Sunday, August 27: Jeff Harmeling (Mary), Stated Clerk, Presbytery of Western Colorado
Sunday, September 3: Eckert Presbyterian Church, Pastor Jo DeVinny (David)
Sunday, September 10: George Miller, Honorably Retired, Montrose
Sunday, September 17: Covenant Presbyterian Church, Grand Junction, Pastor Chuck Jerome (Sue)
Sunday, September 24: Jim Petersen (Janet), Honorably Retired, Ridgway
Sunday, October 1: First Presbyterian Church, Montrose, Pastor Alan Gibson (Teri)
Sunday, October 8: Synod of the Rocky Mountains David Ezekiel, Interim Synod Exec., Lynn A. Smit, Stated Clerk;
Bobbie Hoffman Administrative Assistant
Sunday, October 15: Fran Ferguson (widow of deceased minister, Bob), Knoxville, TN
Sunday, October 22: Rico Community Presbyterian Church, Suzy Meyer, Supply CLP
Sunday, October 29: Mary Hammond Atkinson (Clark) Minister at Large, Grand Junction
Sunday, November 5: Bill Young (Pat), Honorably Retired, Grand Junction
Sunday, November 12: Allison Community Presbyterian Church, Pastor Alan TeBrink (Brenda)
Sunday, November 19: X Lazy F Ranch, Justin Smith Manager
Sunday, November 26: Emrys Tyler (Sara) Validated Ministry, Sonlight Camp, Pagosa Springs
Sunday, December 3: Pine River Calvary Presbyterian Church, Bayfield; Pastor Brian Caselles (Sherry)
Sunday, December 10: Blake Blakesley (Lynn) Honorably Retired, Ignacio
Sunday, December 17: Andy Konigsmark (Dodie) Validated Ministry, Alpine Chapel, Telluride
Sunday December 24: Sandy Cox (widow of deceased minister, Bill), Santa Barbara California
December 25: CHRISTMAS! Celebrate the Lord's Birth!
Sunday, January 7 2018: Dorothy Loyer (Widow of deceased minister, Robert) Eckert
Sunday, January 14: Sandy Newman (Clark Lagow), Honorably Retired, Durango
Sunday January 21: Richard Engdahl (Brenda), Honorably Retired, Ridgway
Sunday January 28 Rick Underwood (Faye), Minister at Large,
Sunday February 4: Harry Strong (Anna) Honorably Retired, Arizona
Sunday February 11: Kim Nofel (Steve) Minister at Large, Colorado Springs

Now, start at the top, make appropriate adjustments, and keep praying!

CAN WE WAIT FOR GOD'S SPARK?

God sparks innovations, but only on God's terms, and those terms usually involve disruption. From burning bushes to wood that burns even when soaked, God's sparks manifest themselves in unusual ways. We can choose to ignore the spark or even squelch the spark. But, if we take notice of it, the spark soon becomes a roaring fire. What are the conditions for God's spark? And, does the spark look different if people rather than God initiate the encounter?

How Business Views Disruption

The average life of a shopping mall or center built today is fifteen years. And if the shopping venue does not make a radical change at least half-way through their expected fifteen-year tenure, it may not even last that long! Geoff Colvin recently wrote that the most innovative companies today, "see their business as disrupters would see it." They never stop self-disrupting their own companies.¹ For example, Amazon disrupted bookstores twenty years ago with their online selling model. Then disrupted itself with Kindle e-readers, replacing its own books-by-mail model.² They have continued this disruption by opening and successfully operating brick-and-mortar bookstores, even while the traditional bookstore model continues to fail.³

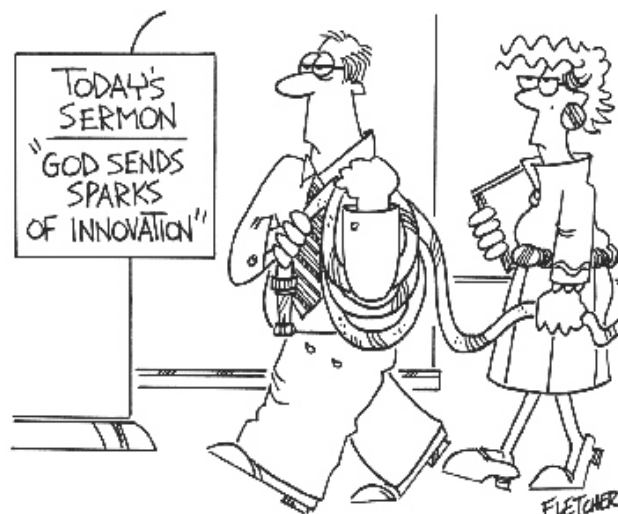
Fortunately, congregations do not have to self-disrupt. God is here to do that for us! Sometimes congregations forget how often they have had to respond to disruptions in order to faithfully minister in their present location. A church that has existed for one hundred years has probably had six or seven make-overs resulting from neighborhood swivels and societal swings. Congregations are indeed resilient. But, God must sponsor their transformations.

For instance, through a discernment process, a Milwaukee congregation challenges its members to draw from three equal sources whenever the church

launches a new ministry. Equal shares of the start-up cost must come from: (1) those launching the ministry; (2) other congregational members; and (3) nonmembers or community partners. Asking nonmembers to support new ministry ideas can be disruptive and involving community stakeholders can make the ministry launch much more messy and problematic. However, this church believes the community's involvement confirms that this is the direction in which God has encouraged them to go and have accepted the disruption proposed by God.

God's Disruptive Spark in the Bible

Sparks from God are indications that God has heard us or wants to reveal something to us. What happens when God initiates the contact? The book of Matthew reminds us that God's initiative contact is usually disruptive. God's encounter with the mother of Jesus was certainly disruptive. When God visited the shepherds and asked them to go to King Herod to inquire about a new king, that news was not received warmly by



the current king. Jesus rocks John the Baptist's world by asking John to baptize Jesus and presenting standards for an utterly new lifestyle in the Sermon on the Mount. The disruptions continue and become more personal as Jesus eats at a sinner's home and shatters Sabbath protocols. Walking with Jesus means living a constantly unsettled life.

Can We Seek God's Spark?

The book of Matthew also reveals instances in which humans initiate contact with God, and we quickly discover the importance of faith in such encounters. When Jesus calmed the storm, he asked his disciples, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" (Matthew 8:26). However, when a man brought his daughter to Jesus for healing, the man openly expressed his faith, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live" (Matthew 9:18). Likewise, when two blind men came to Jesus, he asked, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" (Matthew 9:28).

No matter who initiates the contact, it is clear that God must sponsor the change in order for the spark to grow into a fire. We see this communication breakdown with God in a community where the owner of a local diner purposely hires and trains former prison inmates and other persons who have difficulty finding work. When the owner was asked if he had contacted local clergy to invite them to be part of his community ministry, his response was surprising. "Yes," he said, "And it was a disaster. The clergy kept asking the employees uncomfortable questions about their background. They made it clear that they would want them to attend their congregations if they helped." The clergy wanted to be a part of the spark, but could not handle the flame.

What if today's burning bushes are far away from the Sunday morning crowds? What if God is sending us sparks of innovation on a regular basis, but they are more dangerous and disruptive than they are comforting and successful by our standards? A congregation in Nebraska recently witnessed God's spark by walking their neighborhood. Some nearby apartment dwellers became concerned about these strangers who were regularly walking their neighborhood and asked what they were doing. The neighborhood inquirers were quite surprised to

learn that church members were simply trying to better understand their neighborhood and the people in it.

As it turned out, the apartment residents welcomed their intruders, as they had spiritual questions that they were too intimidated to ask anyone else. The entire group explored these spiritual questions together. The people in the apartments have not come to the church but the church members have learned as much about God as the apartment residents. God's spark is being fanned, but not in ways that we could predict.

Perhaps many of our requests for sparks from God are seemingly ignored because we are seeking a specific outcome, such as congregational growth, our own comfort and safety, or retaining our leadership status. Congregational change does not happen unless God sparks it, and not only must we have enough faith to oxygenate the spark once it appears, but we must also be prepared to accept God's end result.

Are You Ready for Congregational Change?

"A small green apple cannot ripen one night by tightening all its muscles, squinting its eyes and tightening its jaw in order to find itself the next morning miraculously large, red, ripe, and juicy beside its small green counterparts. . . . We must wait for God."⁴

Look for God's pre-emptive spark and once you find it, block it from distractions, and fan it with flames of trust.

1. *Fortune*, August 1, 2016, 22.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Ryan Bort, "Amazon Is Opening More Brick-and-Mortar Bookstores," www.newsweek.com/amazon-opening-brick-and-mortar-bookstores-494216.

4. James Finley, *Merton's Palace of Nowhere* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2003), 114.

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance

Tennessee Wildfire



— FEMA/Jana Baldwin

Situation

Starting in late November, wildfires roared through eastern Tennessee resulting in 13 fatalities and over 80 injuries, according to a FEMA report on December 4th. A mandatory evacuation was issued for Gatlinburg.

PDA Response

PDA has been in touch with the Presbytery of East Tennessee to coordinate assistance. Two National Response Team members deployed on December 1st to provide emotional and spiritual support and to assess the needs of the areas. We are using our U.S. Wildfires account for this response, you can designate gifts to DR000165.

Writers

Do you like to write ? Feel as though you have many things to share with the member of Presbytery? Well the Presbytery Blog and Facebook page is waiting for you. Please consider sharing devotions, prayers, concerns or just something that is being done in your church or ministry. Send all possible submissions to beth@wcopresbytery.org

Christmas Joy Offering is December 18

By giving to the **Christmas Joy Offering**, we can share in the hope of Christ by providing support to our church workers, racial ethnic young people, and their families.

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Return Service Requested

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!
From the Presbytery of Western Colorado

Jeff

Blake

Beth

Mary

Thelma

Keri

Lou Ray

Brigitte

