# WE ARE THE PRESBYTERY OF WESTERN COLORADO



## Western Colorado Presbytery's "Mission-Shaped Church Development Consultation"

From your Western Colorado Presbytery Consultation Committee

### Some questions from the Consultation Committee:

• How can we help congregations renew their commitment to be the people of Jesus Christ in a world where the church is often a nonexistent part of people's lives?

• How can we help our church families become a caring and loving part of the life of their communities on the Western slope of Colorado?

How can we stop just inviting people to "come to church" and instead invite ourselves into the lives of people in the communities we serve?

# The Western Colorado Presbytery is committed to helping your congregation:

In 2015 the Western Colorado Presbytery (WCP) initiated a five-year Mission-Shaped Church Development consultation to help congregations answer these questions and many more. Additionally, in 2016 WCP voted to become a Missional Presbytery and successfully requested the General Assembly Mission Development Committee for Congregational Transformation Grant.

# What is missional? What is congregational transformation? What is church?

The term "missional" was coined to renew an understanding of

2 Continue: Western Colorado Presbytery's "Mission-Shaped 3 Continue: Western Colorado Presbytery's "Mission-Shaped Upcoming Dates 3 APA invite 4 Parish Paper: Conquering the 5 Cutback Syndrome Cont.: Parish Paper: Conquering 6 the Cutback Syndrome 7 Parish Paper: How Do Congregations Respond to Cont.: Parish Paper: How Do 8 Congregations Respond to Presbytery Prayers and 9 Thank You's 10 **Big Tent** 10 Your Presbytery Needs You 11 Minute for Mission—Presbyterian

**Disaster Service** 

Inside this issue:

mission as an activity centered in God's very nature:

• The Father sent the Son; the Father and Son sent the Holy Spirit

Jesus said "As the Father sent me, so I send you" -- God's mission of calling and sending the church into the world as faithful witnesses (John 17: 18-23).

A short statement of congregational transformation is:

"spiritual renewal will only happen when the 'local congregations renounce an introverted concern for their own life, and recognize that they exist for the sake of those who are not members, as sign, instrument, and foretaste of God's redeeming grace for the whole life of society' "(*The Gospel in a Pluralist Culture*, Lesslie Newbigin, Chapter 9 "The Congregation as Hermeneutic of the Gospel," p.233).

Our Presbyterian Church Book of Order describes the church as:

"the provisional demonstration of what God intends for all humanity...called to be a sign in and for the world of the new reality which God has made available to people in Jesus Christ" (3.0200).

#### What is the Consultation Aim?

The aim is to help Presbytery congregations fulfill their calling and missional vocation of being sent on Christ's mission into their community and beyond, into God's world. The consultation facilitates transformation of congregations as churches decide how to renew existing ministries and develop new engagement as signposts of Christ's kingdom on the Western slope of Colorado. The time span of 4 years will provide opportunity for many churches in the Presbytery to engage the consultancy.

#### What WCP Churches are engaged in Consultation so far?

Approximately one-third of WCP churches are now engaged in some stage of the consultation process. These churches are: Covenant PC, Grand Junction; 1<sup>st</sup> Pres. Durango; Calvary PC, Bayfield; 1<sup>st</sup> Pres. Glenwood Springs; Allison Community PC, Allison; Florida Mesa PC., Durango.

#### What is the Consultation Process?

Mission-shaped church development is fundamentally the work of God's Holy Spirit empowering the church on a journey into Christ's mission for their community, as a "sign" of the Kingdom of God.

Consultancy strategies will normally involve a church in adaptations and changes related to congregational functions and health. This will mean the re-shaping of existing initiatives, as well as new initiatives that the Spirit gives during the consultancy process.

There are three major components to the consultation process:

1. Coaching: meetings with the Pastor on missional leadership;;

2. <u>Congregational Analysis and call to prayer</u>: meetings with the Session to identify past and present congregational history and explore the congregation's ministry area culture;

<u>Clarifying missional identity and prayerful discernment of mission-shaped focus</u>: which include a succinct mission statement, core values, goals, and measurable objectives for the next 12 – 24 months.

The Consultant does not bring a preset program or package of seminars for congregational transformation. He functions as a catalyst and coach; relationally connecting with the pastor and congregational leadership in order to discern how Jesus is calling and sending this church on God's mission.

The length of consultation engagement with a church will vary. The Consultation Committee anticipates that a church consultancy will last from 9 months to 1 year and in some cases may last 2 years.

#### Who is the Consultant for the Consultation Process?

The consultant is the Reverend Stan Wood, Ph.D., D.Min. Stan is not a stranger to WCP, having previously ministered in WCP and also in 164 other Presbyteries when on General Assembly Staff, some years ago. He is now a consultant and coach with Sower's Field, a Validated PC(USA) mission and he is an adjunct professor teaching on missional church, church planting and evangelism at 6 North American seminaries, including Columbia and Pittsburgh Seminaries.

# Do you know about MissionInsite? This is a new resource that is available to all WCP congregations during the next 4 years of the consultation process.

MissionInsite (www.missioninsite.com) is now available to all churches in the WCP; this resource provides each church insights into their ministry area context and their congregants. MissionInsite empowers churches by providing the tools they need to visualize and cultivate who their members are and understand the ministry area of a local congregation. At the May 12-13, 2017 Presbytery meeting, to be held at First Presbyterian Church Durango, a workshop will be provided on how to use this resource.

#### Did you know? There are Seed Grants for Congregationally Based Missional Initiatives!

At the May 2016 WCP meeting the Presbytery approved the following recommendation from General Council, to "set aside \$50,000 as seed money for missional efforts for our congregations..., congregations wishing to apply for a missional seed money grant would first present a proposal to their Cluster Group for reflection and input with the desire of seeking the Cluster's concurrence. The congregation would then bring the proposal to Council for its action."

Seed grant guidelines and application are in the final stage of approval. As soon as approved these guidelines and the application will be made available to all the churches of WCP.

#### How Can Your Congregation Request a Consultation?

The session and pastor should communicate the request for a Consultation to the WCP Consultation Committee (CC).

#### Who are the members of the Consultation Committee of WCP?

Mr. Howard Davidson, Chairperson of CC, Central Cluster (<u>howarddson2001@yahoo.com</u>) The Rev. Blake Blakesley, also a member of Committee on Ministry, Southern Cluster (<u>revbanjo1@gmail.com</u>) Mr. John Thompson, Southern Cluster (<u>johnthompson.claimslitigation@gmail.com</u>

The Rev. Mary Hammond Atkinson, Northern Cluster (maryha@q.com

The WCP Consultation Committee (CC) oversees the consultation process and budget.

Upcoming Dates—Mark your calendars.

March 31, 2017 Council meeting in Montrose

April 2017 Newsletter submission Deadline

May 12—13 Presbytery Meeting in Durango

You're Invited! 2017 APA National Conference in Las Vegas, NV Committee Meetings held on May 30 Classes held on May 31—June 2 Post Conference Seminar held on June 3

> Visit <u>pcusa-apa.org</u> for more information!



January 2017-Volume 25, Number 1

Copyright © 2017 by Cynthia Woolever

## CONQUERING THE CUTBACK SYNDROME

"We simply have too many churches in this small town," declared a respected lay leader, Tom McClain, in a longrange planning meeting. "And three are from the same denomination as our church! It makes perfect sense to merge our congregation with the West Main Street Church. And if our other two denominational churches merge, our community would then have two strong congregations. I think two healthy churches better represents our denomination than four struggling congregations."

Although Tom's conclusion seems logical, his approach reveals a textbook example of the cutback syndrome. Across the United States, church leaders use this common planning strategy to "fix" perceived problems and challenges. Other familiar examples in the syndrome include arguments to merge church school classes, reduce the number of worship services, or merge youth groups (typically the junior high or middle school group with the high school group). More than 1,300 congregations annually take the more extreme action of merging with another church. Finally, the ultimate cutback option involves closing the church doors permanently—a choice made by more than 3,500 churches annually.

#### What is the Cutback Syndrome?

A syndrome that affects an organization involves a characteristic combination of opinions (thoughts), emotions (feelings), or behavior (actions). In church life, the cutback syndrome reflects the human temptation to over-simplify when complex problems arise. As *feelings* of fear around these problems codify, leaders and members want to find a way to make a situation easier to understand, and the primary *thought* is to solve it with simple solutions. Generally, this prompts leaders to make arguments that place a premium on efficiency and economy. The proposed *actions* take aim at eliminating what appears to be unnecessary, redundant, or inefficient organizational features or groups in the church.

The tragic consequence of the syndrome is how it accelerates downward momentum rather than stabilizing the church or reversing decline. Imagine what happens when you pull the plug on a sink full of water. As the water rushes down the drain, you can see a circular motion similar to a small tornado that gradually pulls any remaining water down with it. Some planners describe a project or effort on the brink of failure as "circling the drain." Because cuts produce a downward force that creates even more momentum, the result is less positive impact and greater negative impact with each new cut.<sup>1</sup>

#### What Creates the Cutback Syndrome?

Sources within the church and larger social trends push congregations into the syndrome. Six causes form the foundation:<sup>2</sup>

1. Members and leaders sense a gap between their perceived ideal and what appears to be a far less efficient reality in church life. The cultural ideal of "bigger is better" affects church models as well. Any congregation or group diminishing in size finds the ideal/reality discrepancy discouraging, which draws them into the syndrome. Another related dimension of the "bigger is better" ideal



PASTOR DOUG TENDED TO IGNORE THE WARNING SIGNS.

is the idea of a community "monopoly" (reflected in Tom's argument). Leaders believe reducing the number of choices strengthens the remaining options.

2. Whether it concerns ministry, programs, outreach, church growth, or problem-solving, leaders make false assumptions. They assume that the best approach will be logical, rational, functional, efficient, or economical. However, in congregations, most people think, feel, and act in terms of relationships. Personal histories—many formed over a long period—are intertwined with the histories of other members and are cemented at the place where their friendships formed: the church itself. Evaluating results by relationships leads to a different perspective and metric.

3. Many churches exhibit a strong orientation toward the past and feel the urge to recreate that past. Cutting back on redundancies and inefficiencies (particularly *new* positions in the church or *new* missions and programs) to recreate that past shows a clear misunderstanding of the true issues facing a congregation.

4. Most churches value unity and avoid conflict. Although this value is understandable, the dark side of unity is conformity. One way to simplify a complex situation is to create greater homogeneity in thought, feelings, and actions among members. Rarely do members hold this conformity belief consciously, but unconscious beliefs can go a long way in feeding the syndrome.

5. Another notion that creates the cutback syndrome is that a narrower focus means "easier to manage." The thinking goes that if we can reduce the scope of the subject somehow, we can more easily deal with the problem.

6. When many members feel pessimistic about the church's future, conditions are ripe for the syndrome to emerge. Pessimism spreads like a virus and infects all planning strategies.

#### Is There a Cure?

First, the congregation must be willing to identify the syndrome's presence. Once this pattern is named and acknowledged, then leaders find it easier to combat the ways it has affected planning and decision-making.

Second, the congregation must recognize the necessity of change for future viability and growth. Looking toward the future with optimism means affirming change no matter how uncomfortable it seems. Affirming change requires openness to new potential alternatives that in the past were not out in the open or were unthinkable.

Third, a congregation must stop placing a premium on economy, simplicity, functionalism, efficiency, and conformity. Instead, pursue alternatives that maximize choices for members and the community, which affirms the values of diversity and pluralism. Develop strategies that maximize ministry to and with people, rather than preserving real estate.

Fourth, a congregation must change their approach to planning. The focus should shift to possibilities rather than problems. Leaders can evaluate decisions and policies by asking: does our current model accomplish the church's mission? Will our actions move us forward in mission? Is our ministry here worth the changes needed? Are we willing to finish the job no matter how long it takes?

As is the case with most syndromes, the presenting traits fall along a spectrum of mild to most severe. One factor—church stability—plays a key role. Is the church stable, experiencing gradual decline, or desperate? Intervention is possible, but fast action is required if the congregation is desperate. These signs indicate how quickly leaders need to act:

- · has fewer than 50 worshipers;
- · 25 or fewer giving households or people;
- · fewer than one lay leader for every ten worshipers;
- the average membership tenure exceeds 10 years;
- the average age of a member vs. community residents' average age exceeds 10 years; and
- the racial/ethnic or income status of members differs significantly from people in the community.<sup>3</sup>

Rapid response is needed if the congregation exhibits four or more of these signs.

#### The Silent Killer

"There are no hopeless situations; there are only people who have grown hopeless about them."<sup>4</sup>

Many diseases—hypertension, colon cancer, and diabetes—disguise their warning signs. The absence of symptoms or subtle symptoms means that, as time passes, the disease progresses and becomes a "silent killer." What are the warning signs in church life that we ignore or do not see? For many congregations, a lack of hope is the silent killer. Do you agree with this assertion?

COPYRIGHT © 2017 BY CYNTHIA WOOLEVER-WWW.THEPARISHPAPER.COM

Gary L. McIntosh, There's Hope for Your Church: First Steps to Restoring Health and Growth (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 42.

Lyle Schaller, "The Cutback Syndrome," The Parish Paper, Volume 8, Number 2 (1978).

<sup>3.</sup> McIntosh, 48-52.

<sup>4.</sup> Quote of Clare Booth Luce, McIntosh, 17.



February 2017—Volume 25, Number 2

Copyright © 2017 by David Lewellen

### How Do Congregations Respond to Interfaith Couples?

Beth Parab is an Episcopal priest. Her husband, Sameer, is an observant Hindu. Their first date lasted eight hours, stretching from coffee to dinner to a walk on the beach. And very soon afterward, she had to start thinking seriously about whether interfaith marriage was a possibility for her.

As the world becomes more interconnected and more people's religious identities are in flux, couples who hold different beliefs are becoming common in the pews of almost every religious institution. And pastors and members need to adjust to those realities. "The issue now is for churches to acknowledge that there are interfaith couples in their midst," said Susan Katz Miller, author of *Being Both.*<sup>1</sup> "You want to be as welcoming as possible if you want families to stay." Miller has seen an institutional shift toward understanding that interfaith marriage is happening, with or without the participation of churches, and she asserts "it's not a problem to be overcome."

While Christian-Jewish may be most people's first association for "interfaith," as the population of "nones" grows, the most common pairing is actually a Christian and a nonbeliever—and the clash between belief and unbelief can be more difficult than the clash of belief in different things. However, people with different beliefs can be happily married if their values are closely aligned, said Dale McGowan, author of *In Faith and in Doubt*,<sup>2</sup> a book about marriage between believers and nonbelievers. The reverse is much harder; a conservative and a liberal from the same denomination are more likely to have problems, because theological questions tend to be less of an issue than everyday values.

#### Issues Interfaith Couples Face

While there are often struggles regarding faith traditions and practices faced within an interfaith marriage, the greater struggles come from outside the relationship. Judgmental family members. Often, more than the couple or the congregation, extended family proves to be the sticking point. When Libby Yoskowitz of Huntington, NY, got engaged to a Jewish man, her conservative Presbyterian parents "definitely went through a process to get to the point where they were OK with it." Over time, Jack Yoskowitz has become more of a cultural than religious Jew. All three of their children were confirmed as teens, and none expressed interest in a bar or bat mitzvah. But the family celebrates all Jewish holidays, and Libby Yoskowitz said that the exposure has enriched her own faith. Particularly at Maundy Thursday and Passover services, she thinks about the common roots of Christianity and Judaism.

Unwelcoming congregations. McGowan, an atheist, used to go with his wife to her Baptist church until one Sunday when the pastor specifically attacked marriage to unbelievers; basically he felt that "[the pastor] was asking my wife to leave me." Similarly,



"I'M A NON-PARTICIPATING SPOUSE... I WAS PROMISED OPEN CONVERSATIONS, SIMPLE FRIENDSHIP, AND LEMON SQUARES."

Sameer Parab no longer attends church after a toxic experience—the congregation of his wife's liberal Episcopal church refused to allow an interfaith group to rent a meeting room on Saturdays.

Fear of confusing the children. A common worry about exposing children to two faiths is that they will feel confused, but Miller discounts that. "To give them as much information as possible is a gift," she said. In the extensive interviews she did for her book, adults never wished they'd had less information as children, but often spoke of wishing they'd had more.

#### How Faith Communities Can Respond

In shrinking mainline churches, interfaith families might easily be seen as a prize in a competition, or as a resource that might be lost. But Miller suggests that pastors talk to the other religious leaders in an interfaith couple's life, with the goal of strengthening all relationships, within the family and outside.

Indeed, some churches are being proactive. Last year, St. Elisabeth's Episcopal Church in Glencoe, IL, a Chicago suburb with a large Jewish population, ran a program for interfaith families in conjunction with a synagogue and learned that they needed a meeting space that was neither Christian nor Jewish, plus some kind of shared worship element. "I can't guarantee that everyone's going to be comfortable with me," said pastor Daphne Cody, "I've had to come to peace with that." Every week at Communion, Cody specifies that "all are welcome, regardless of religious background," but even that receives varying responses. Some Jewish spouses feel they need permission to take it; some feel they need permission not to take it. Her congregation has added some elements, such as a psalm that they have learned to say in Hebrew. But "Jesus is the cornerstone of Christianity," she said. "We want people to participate as they're comfortable, but we're not going to take Jesus out."

If a pastor tells a nonreligious spouse that they're always welcome at church, "it will almost always be heard as an attempt to proselytize," McGowan said. Pastors need language that explicitly assures people that's not the case. "You've got to be clear, or it will be assumed to be something else," McGowan said. Some nonreligious people come with memories of bad experiences. That is particularly true of conservative churches, he said, where "for a lot of people, it's a reminder of something they left." Thomas Beaudoin, an associate professor of theology at Fordham University, agreed that in a conservative congregation, interfaith relationships can produce more anxiety. Non-judgmental sharing of experiences, on both sides, is a path forward, but "you can't get there cheaply." He suggested that church members "try to tell the story of how you came to understand the center of your faith the way you do." Beaudoin speculates that people who have loose affiliations to their faith are more likely to marry outside it—but as it is, churches are "having a hard enough time holding Christian-Christian couples."

"You should always be open to conversation," said Jeren Rowell, Kansas City district superintendent for the Church of the Nazarene. Many interfaith conversations, he said, find "quite a bit that would connect us, more than what would divide us." In fact, in most Nazarene families, a child chooses to be baptized when he or she is ready, which can lead to constructive dialogue. The non-participating spouse, Rowell said, needs to reach "a place of comfort, that [the church] has the best interest of the child in mind."

Welcoming a spouse from another tradition or no tradition succeeds "because we don't make a big deal out of it," Rowell said. "You begin at the point of just offering friendship."

For Miller, who grew up in and married into an interfaith family, "it has inspired creativity, the idea of bridge-building and peace-making." Even without the marriage factor, people do frequently change denominational identities and move from one faith or church to another. "Some people would say that every marriage is an interfaith marriage," she said.

#### Embracing One Family of Different Faiths

How does our congregation respond to interfaith couples and families consistent with our theology and values as well as respect for people who hold different beliefs? What would true acceptance look like? What are the benefits or rewards for our congregation when we interact with other faith communities?

Susan Katz Miller, Being Both: Embracing Two Religions in One Interfaith Family (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2013).

Dale McGowan, In Faith and In Doubt: How Religious Believers and Nonbelievers Can Create Strong Marriages and Loving Families (American Management Association, 2014; www amacombooks.org).

## Prayers



We have several families to keep in our prayers.

Mary Hammond Atkinson lost her brother James Hammond on January 7, 2017. Prayers for comfort for the Hammond family.

Prayers for peace and comfort for Jan Gammill and family at the loss of Steve. We all will miss him.

Prayers for peace and comfort for Margaret Sutton and Vicki Sutton-Gallegos at the loss of Jim. Jim will also be missed by all.

Prayers for Jeff Harmeling for healing after surgery.



DEAR Presbytery of Western Colorado,

Thank you for all your care and support of me, and for your prayers for my brother, Jim. After a long-fought battle with cancer (he was to live only three years, and he lived five), his body finally succumbed. We were grateful to have been given a couple of extra precious years to be all together for some very special occasions. We will miss him so much!

It was especially meaningful for someone to point out the flowers you had sent to the Memorial Service, as well as the memorial gift to their church in Clearwater, Florida. Jim's wife, Polly, wanted me to thank you, on her behalf. She was very touched by the large glass cross in the flower arrangement, and already has a special place to keep that long after the flowers are gone.

Grateful for your remembrances of me and my family at such a difficult time. In Christ, Mary Hammond Atkinson

Northern Cluster friends,

When I woke up this morning all I was thinking about besides Steve was the beautiful plants and flowers at his memorial service. Thank you for the peace lily and the message that accompanied it! I am just blown away with how people have shown their love and honored Steve in such beautiful ways! All of those "God Sightings" mean so much to me right now! Blessings to all our Northern Cluster Friends!

Much love, Jan



## July 6-8, 2017 Washington University St. Louis, MO

Be inspired ... Become equipped ... Get connected!



Presbytery needs you!!!!

Do you like to write little devotions, prayers, or just have some thoughts? Is there something exciting happening in your congregation, Community or in the Presbytery that you would love to share? Then the Presbytery Blog, Newsletter is waiting for you!!! Pleas consider sharing devotions, prayers, concerns or happy memories or current events with your presbytery family. Send all possible submissions to Beth@wcopresbytery.org and she will gladly post and share them.

## MINUTE FOR MISSION

### Presbyterian Disaster Assistance Program

RESTORING STREETS IN SYRIA

In 2012, civil war broke out in Syria, where ISIL's presence continues to create violence and fear. More than 250,000 people have been killed, and 13.5 million others have had to leave their homes to seek safety in Lebanon, Europe, and the United States.

Thanks to our gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) was able to respond to this refugee crisis soon after it began. Working with churches in the region, primarily the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon, PDA helps Syrian refugee children in Lebanon continue their education and provides refugee families food, shelter, and heating oil. Across the denomination, PDA assists efforts by congregations to resettle Syrian refugees. Their welcoming hands bear witness to our biblical imperative to extend hospitality to the stranger and the foreigner.

But One Great Hour of Sharing gifts do more than help refugees build new lives in a new country—they enable PDA to assist displaced Syrians seeking to return to the country they love. Though the threat of ISIL remains and the civil war still rages, a number of Syrians are replanting their lives in their homeland. Some live in Homs, where more than 40 houses and apartments have been rebuilt through a partnership between PDA and the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon. This project allows families to begin the long process of building new lives.

PDA's director, Laurie Kraus, recently met with a displaced couple—an engineer and pediatrician—whose apartment was rebuilt. "Their block is dark at night. There is no one else in their building or on their street," Kraus says. "The wife goes out at 3:00 in the morning to make house calls on children. They're living like pioneers at a frontier outpost, because they believe it's the only way to bring back their city." Our gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing played a part in bringing hope to this family in Syria. With our contributions to this important offering, more homes will be rebuilt, and the streets of that dark city block will again be filled with light, with people living in peace. Our gifts support this continuing work and the many other essential ministries made possible by our support of One Great Hour of Sharing.

#### Please give generously.

Let us Pray: God of restoration, you call us to support the world's most vulnerable. Help us provide assistance to those who have become refugees through violence and war, so your restoring love would be made known to all. Amen.



01

### Presbytery of Western Colorado

101 N. Uncompahyre Ave. #9 Montrose, CO 81401-3763

970-240-8455 fax 240-1318

Return Service Requested

