

**Anita Bernhardt**  
**Interim Associate Presbyter's Report**  
**October 31, 2015**

By now, you may know that my husband, James, has taken a new pastoral call to serve Wayside Presbyterian Church in Erie, PA and so the Bernhardts are moving. For me, this call brings tangled emotions: the excitement of new beginnings in another part of God's creation, but also considerable grief about leaving a ministry that I love and the beautiful mountains of Western NC. I have truly been blessed to serve as your Interim Associate Presbyter for these past three years and have known great joy in working with the community of Presbyterians in this place. Since a departing pastor can often leave some honest evaluation and, hopefully, helpful perspective for moving the Church forward, I'd like to do that with you from a Presbytery perspective.

First, I am incredibly proud of this Presbytery and believe that you are doing some vitally important ministries here. Though we are a presbytery full of small, sometimes struggling, congregations, the witness of Christ's love for the world thrives here. Churches, both large and small, gather for worship that gives glory and nurtures faith in God's people. This faith is, for the most part, not fickle and weak, but strong, vibrant and enduring. It is the kind of faith that leads Presbyterians in this part of the globe to give of themselves selflessly and to practice extreme acts of generosity. I know of no other Presbytery, for instance, that is engaged in a major fundraising effort like our Building H.O.P.E Campaign that is not designed to build up something for our own benefit but, to be able to support ministries where God is at work changing the lives of others. It is a giving, reaching love that you have nurtured through dozens of cooperative efforts, common vision, and concerted labor. It is a sturdy love that has partnered with people in Guatemala, Malawi, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Taiwan, and others for decades, as well as nearer to home. You know how to express love and compassion in Christ's name.

Secondly, you are, for the most part, a Christian family who can fight without flight. I believe that every time you learn from and struggle with one another over the tough issues of our time, while still holding onto your commitment to one another, God smiles. You are like Jacob, wrestling with the angel at the River Jabbok, when you refuse to let go of one another and demand that God bless you. Being a pastor or church leader in this time is tough. Finding the way into the Promised Land is often confusing, daunting, and exhausting. Yet, you demonstrate patience and endurance in the midst of these difficult times. Do not believe all the pessimism and gloom about the demise of the Church. Instead, believe in Jesus, as you have before, so that Christ's love, stronger than death, can propel you to walk in faithful love – even if you're limping from having wrestled with Almighty God.

Finally, this Presbytery is blessed with great resources – both in property and in people. Though you do not have the big bank account, you have beautiful churches doing beautiful ministry, scattered all over the map of Western NC, the wonderful Montreat Conference Center, Children's Hope Alliance (formerly Grandfather Home for Children), Camp Grier, Camp Little Pisgah, Union Presbyterian Seminary in Charlotte within range, and an outstanding Presbytery staff. Even more, you have many spirit-filled, gifted pastors and elders serving Christ's Church.

It has been a privilege to serve alongside you in this Presbytery. As you continue to follow the call of Christ and engage in ministry in the Presbytery of Western NC, you have little to fear and much to celebrate. I will miss you, but will move to a new place with you lodged solidly in my heart. May God continue to richly bless you.

Enjoy Christ's Love,  
Anita Bernhardt