

Report of the General Presbyter January 5, 2023

“What now?”

Dear PWNC,

Happy New Year to you! I hope you and your loved ones had a blessed Advent, Christmas, and New Year!

I read the daily devotionals from Myers Park Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, which are written by members of the church staff. The devotion for Monday, January 2 was focused on the birth of the Messiah from Matthew 1:18-25. In this passage Mary was found to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit when she was engaged to Joseph. In turn, he was planning to leave her quietly but was persuaded by the angel to stay with her because she was going to give birth to the Savior, Jesus. Instead of leaving, the angel confronted Joseph to embrace what is possible through this miraculous birth. The writer of this devotion asks us to ponder in this new year and the joy of Christmastide *“how do the words of the angel challenge us amidst our ‘what now’s?’”*

As Joseph asked the question “what now?” with Mary being pregnant, we ask ourselves the same question. How do we deal with our fears, insecurities, pressures, problems, major decisions, and life-altering situations? This “what now?” question is vitally important as we continue to discern where God is leading us in life and ministry in these times. Do we turn to other things or do we turn toward our faith?

I have seen people turn to their faith in my travels in ministry within and outside the PWNC. Recently, I returned from my first trip to Guatemala! I was a member of a seven-member delegation led by our Guatemala Partnership Coordinator, Marie Palacios, to visit and spend time with our brothers and sisters in Sur Occidente and Suchitepéquez Presbyteries. I met with the leadership of each Presbytery, stayed with a family, preached at Iglesia Presbiteriana Nueva Esperanza (New Hope Presbyterian Church) in the city of San Felipe (the sister church of Burnsville First), visited PWNC-sponsored and other non-profit organizations, spent two nights at the Seminario Evangelio Presbiteriano (Evangelical Presbyterian Seminary) in San Martin Zapotitlan, and so much more. Our delegation also had the opportunity to spend a few days in the city of Antigua and visit Lake Atitlan. I cannot even begin to tell you what a blessing it was to be in community with our Guatemalan partners and I am still processing the trip. I do know that I am SO proud of our 29 congregations that have a sister relationship with churches in these two Presbyteries. It will soon be 30 years since our Presbytery established this partnership and in 2024 we hope to have a great celebration of what God has brought together. I want to give a special thanks to Marie, who will transition from the Coordinator position this month. Our partnership would not be as strong and effective if not for her love and passion for Guatemala. Thank you, Marie!!

We still need more churches to establish a partnership with congregations in Guatemala. If you are interested, please let me know.



We are also turning toward our faith as a Revisioning Task Force, who have sought God's direction in reviewing how we carry out mission and ministry in the Presbytery since October of 2021. Recently, the Task Force, along with members of the General Council, had a two-day strategic planning retreat facilitated by Rev. Ann Philbrick, a retired PCUSA minister and former mid-council leader. The retreat focused on four areas: 1) forming a shared practical vision, 2) naming underlying contradictions, 3) identifying strategic directions, and 4) designing a plan for implementation. I believe all of us can say that it was very helpful. Among my own insights was the discovery that change is not simply changing our structure; it is a deeper exploration into a journey of who is God calling PWNC to *become*. You will hear more about our findings and the way forward soon. In the meantime, please pray for the Task Force as they continue listening for God's voice in their work.

Faith is also evident in other areas of the Presbytery. I have worshipped with Ryburn Memorial, Shiloh, Korean Presbyterian of Asheville, Shelby, and Banner Elk congregations. I also plan to worship with FPC Gastonia, Third Street, and Waldensian churches before this Presbytery meeting. Each of these congregations are seeking to live out the call of the Gospel in these challenging times.

As we move beyond Christmastide into the rest of this year, I hope you will remember to answer the "what now?" question by living your faith. There are many things to be fearful of and worry about. May you hear the voice of the angel and be assured that God is always with us!

Peace,

Byron

[illegible]

Presbytery of Western North Carolina	Strategic Directions			November 29, 2022
REBUILDING CONNECTIONALISM - Engage and educate congregations - Provide cohort programs for pastors and sessions - Educate - Do intentional relationship building - Foster relationships face to face - Increase presbytery awareness - Establish small groups - Provide opportunities for cohesiveness - Conduct town hall meetings	LIVING LEAN ORGANIZATIONALLY - Reduce size of committees - Evaluate, redefine, restructure - Training, training, training - Eliminate the fluff and overlap of committee structure - Revise committee structure	REVITALIZING STAFFING PATTERN - Redefine staff roles - Use current staff as resource in redefining - Increase voluntary presbytery staff - Provide maximum support to staff - Experiment with new staffing patterns	MANAGING RESOURCES - Live within your means - Seek alternate funding sources - Establish and fund priorities - Believe we have more than enough - Determine presbytery's priorities	 Revitalizing Presbytery's Life
	PASSING IT ON - Encourage a mentoring mentality (old to young) - Create sacred spaces (counter cultural) - Teach formation without cultural support - Do nothing - Celebrate aged and reach out to children	REACHING FOR DIVERSITY - Seek diverse leadership - Plan to reach diverse groups - Share resources for ethnic ministries	RECLAIMING MISSION - Involve members in community outreach - Focus on the mission - Publicize mission constantly	 Expanding Christian Community
		FOSTERING ADAPTABILITY - Lift up positive change - Imagine, try! - Share new models of worship - Adapt - Use methods used by the culture - Be transparent about change - Getting people involved in change	SUPPORTING CONGREGATIONS - Develop stronger relationships with pastors and clerks and sessions - Provide intentional support for pastors	 Bolstering Congregations

Presbytery of Western North Carolina		IMPLEMENTATION PLAN -- ONE YEAR				November 29, 2022
Strategic Direction		<i>Quarter 1: January to March</i>	<i>Quarter 2: April to June</i>	<i>Quarter 3: July to September</i>	<i>Quarter 4: October to December</i>	
REVITALIZING PRESBYTERY'S LIFE →→→→→→→→→→		Assess staff needs Identify potential funding sources Break out at presbytery meeting Communication specialist in place *	Use town hall meetings to rely envisioning to congregations Provide more regional opportunities Facilitate break out groups at presbytery meeting	Facilitate break out groups at presbytery meeting Restructure committees Redevelop regional clusters		
		Provide info on property accessibility	Plan / provide adult curriculum workshop Schedule African-American Advisory committee meeting	Plan Hispanic Ministry Consultation Catalogue and share existing mission initiatives Identify consultants to help churches with new mission initiatives	Catalogue and share existing sacred spaces POAM workshop	
BOLSTERING CONGREGATIONS →→→→→→→→→→		Launch pastor cohorts *	Launch CP cohorts Model new forms of worship at presbytery meetings Have Clerks of session gatherings	videos for training of elders and clerks		

* Already in the works