



Report of the Executive Presbyter

Written October 7, 2015

Our world is going through great change, which raises the stress level for many people. But God, scripture, and our elders tell us that **Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow (Heb. 13:8)**. We can count on God's grace in all times as God leads us into the future.

One of the great challenges of our time is **to find the people God would call into leadership**, to train them well and to support them well. We need consistent, strong and visionary leadership now if the church is to be effective in proclaiming the gospel during this time of worldwide transition.**

A number of our churches have been seeking new elders, deacons, pastors or lay pastors. The Committee on preparation for Ministry is working hard to find more effective ways of training CREs and others for ministry. What is needed from all of our churches, and from all of us ordained leaders, is a real effort to seek out intelligent, passionate and Spirit-enthused people to answer God's call to ministry. We need our best people in leadership in our churches. **How are we to find them, and how are we to understand the leadership roles they should provide at this time?**

I write this noting that the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation has a very intentional program for recruiting promising leaders in high school and mentoring them through college into leadership positions. The church is neither as *intentional*, nor as effective in our recruitment, and I suspect this is true in all of our regions. One's relationship with God is greatly enhanced when we experience God's purpose for us. **Is there a way for your church, and for this presbytery, to be more intentional in seeking out young leaders and providing the experiences they need to grow into passionate and effective church leaders?**

In the meantime, the Committee on Ministry has been working with many of our churches to find pastoral leadership.

1. Interim pastors have been particularly difficult to find for some reason. Nevertheless, you will meet Cody Ryu at this meeting, who will be serving Fairbanks Korean Presbyterian Church. Trinity Presbyterian Church and Utqiagvik Presbyterian Church are both seeking interim pastors.
2. We are also welcoming two new Teaching Elders to our presbytery. Rev. Jack Cormack is serving a 3-point charge, training and coaching leaders from the Atqasuk Chapel, the Kuukpik Presbyterian Church (Nuiqsut) and the Olgonik Presbyterian Church (Wainwright). The Rev. Neill McKay is the new pastor at University Community Presbyterian Church (Fairbanks).
3. The Rev. Ellen Johnson-Price is already a member of our presbytery, and she is now the new Teaching Elder pastor at Immanuel Presbyterian Church (Anchorage).
4. First Korean Presbyterian Church in Anchorage will be welcoming new pastor Johann Shin, who will be arriving in the country shortly.

God is good to us!

Our current leadership approach reflects our Vision and Strategy Working Paper. For example, in order to strengthen our village churches we are seeking local leaders, who will help maintain and strengthen the indigenous culture of those villages. Rev. Jack Cormack is therefore beginning ministry to train and coach local leaders in three villages. Rev. Leisa Carrick has been doing some of that work on a volunteer basis, working with the leaders of the two churches on St. Lawrence Island. I have also begun working with the leaders in Kaktovik. We still have a lot to learn about how to make these efforts more effective, but we have begun!

We are also seeking to support and encourage the pastoral leaders of the churches along the road system. Both the South Central Region and the Interior Region have formed Pastoral Support groups, gathering the pastors from that region together for mutual fellowship, sharing, prayer and support. It is important to encourage and strengthen all leaders in this day.

We are also seeking to train new pastoral leaders as they come into the presbytery. On October 12-13 the Presbyterians, Lutherans, United Methodists, Episcopalians and the Russian Orthodox will be co-sponsoring **“Cultural Awareness Training” for new leaders**. Larry Mercurieff, an Aleut leader, has pulled together a mostly Native American team to teach Alaskan history, Native American teaching and learning styles and more as a way of helping newcomers to this ministry in this state. The training will be at Central Lutheran Church, beginning at 9 a.m. on Monday and ending at 4 p.m. on Tuesday.



Somewhat related to the leadership theme is **a new, experimental study** I will be hosting on Tuesdays, Oct. 20-Nov. 17. The theme of the study is: *Salvation: Isn't it More Than "Where Do I Go When I Die?"*

This study is in response to some young adults I have talked to in Kaktovik and Anaktuvuk Pass, who are asking how to grow in their own discipleship so that they can raise their children to become disciples of Christ. The study will include info shared via YouTube, blog or Facebook on the Friday before the class, a conference call discussion at 7 p.m. on Tuesday nights, or (for those who can't make the phone time) comments to the blog or to the Facebook site. After 5 weeks we will see if this approach works. If so, we will look for another topic. To see the invitations, check out these web sites:

<http://poyonsalvation.blogspot.com/> or <https://www.facebook.com/pbyukonstudies?> or
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=14Xd0v5q6ls>

**** This is, indeed, a time of transition. There is so much transition under way that it is impossible to describe all of it well. However, four areas of transition jump out at me right now that might serve, at the very least, to make the point that there is much transition at hand that affects the proclamation of the gospel:**

- a. Biodiversity is essential if life on our planet is to thrive, including human life. Only by helping most diverse collection of species to thrive can we expect the most resilient, dynamic set of possibilities for our future. In the same way cultural diversity is essential. Our cultures hold the different ways we understand our world and ourselves as human beings. This provides the variety of ideas and perspectives that the world needs for creatively living into the future. Diversity of species and diversity of peoples need to be understood as the gifts of God that they/we are. **How will we help peoples of different cultures both respond to the grace of Jesus Christ AND to strengthen their culture?**
- b. 87% of Alaska's economy is based on fossil fuel revenues (oil, gas and coal), but oil prices are less than half of what they were. Providing meaningful work that provides a good living is always a moral issue. **How will Alaska face the challenge of transitioning from old economic realities to new ones?**
- c. Climate change has advanced to the point where the world absolutely must respond, and must do it now. Over 97% of the world's climate scientists are calling for rapid response. It makes no sense to give the other 3% the same level of credibility. This is life and death for many people and for many species, which makes it a moral issue. We know that only 20% of the proven oil and gas resources can be developed if we are to avoid the worst consequences. **How are we to be proactive in insisting on the ways of life that reduce emissions, while building good life for the future?**
- d. Technology now connects people across the world. However, the increase of social media is happening at the same time as a decrease in the strength of local community relationships. **How can we understand and use technology, when building cultural, community and family relationships is so important?**