

General Presbyter Report **Bobbi White, General Presbyter**

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he said this, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." John 20:21-22

Being "sent" means we go with God's love and the Holy Spirit, and that the Holy Spirit is often working ahead of us. Jesus breathed on the disciples and said receive the Holy Spirit. Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to us like he did to the disciples. He does not send us out alone. The Holy Spirit is at work - sometimes in "Holy Coincidences." Thanksgiving is coming soon, and it is good for us to reflect on and give thanks for the way the Holy Spirit is at work in our midst.

Ask the four Pastor Nominating Committees who recently called new pastors if they felt the Holy Spirit at work in their search process. They would answer with a resounding yes. Serving on a Pastor Nominating Committee can be a very spiritual experience when you sense the Spirit's guidance. Also, ask the new pastors (Richard Coble to Grace Covenant, Janet DeWater to Mount Holly, Chris Vogado to New Hope (Gastonia) and Jill Isola to Northminster). We welcome these wonderful new pastors to our presbytery!

Montreat Presbyterian Church could see the Spirit at work in their lives as they celebrated their 10 year anniversary of rebirth and commitment to the PCUSA. They have felt the Spirit's guidance, even in the beginning, when they had to worship in a different place every Sunday with a different preacher. One Sunday in cold November, they worshiped in the Montreat barn, which had no heat. They were wrapped in blankets to keep warm. During their first years, they were called the tailgate church, because everything needed for Sunday was kept in the trunks of various people's cars. I am sure some wondered about what the future would bring. Last Wednesday evening, the church had a wonderful anniversary celebration with food, great fun and fellowship. They shared what was and the future they were anticipating. They now worship every Sunday in the renovated Upper Anderson building. Their ministry is both local and global. They gave \$10,000 to a Black Mountain day care in thanks to God for their 10 years. They were thankful for the many ways that God has blessed them over the last ten years, and they look forward to where the Spirit will lead them in the coming years.

This month has been one of several anniversaries. Clinchfield Presbyterian Church in Marion celebrated their 100th anniversary on October 1. Melvin Mears, presbytery moderator-elect, presented them with a certificate and thanked them for the ministry that the church has provided. Growing spiritually is important and they share a weekly Bible study. This summer, Clinchfield served as one of the sites where children were given food so they would not go hungry over the summer.

Newland celebrated their 100th anniversary with a Saturday evening picnic on the greens and Sunday worship. The church was full of wonderful pictures telling the church history. It started with a pastor that walked or rode horseback over the mountain from Banner Elk and purchased the land for \$40. The church has been reaching out in the community and growing in faith and new membership. There was a great spirit in the church and renewed energy to share the gospel of Christ to their community.

Sometimes the Spirit is ahead of us suggesting future things and new ways to reach out. At Sherrill's Ford, they did not have many children. In spite of that, one of the pastors said they wanted to start a children's program during church. They were ready. One Sunday, a family with five children attended. The choir members welcomed them back to the children's program. Another person came to work in the nursery. Now they have that program ready for young families and can visit those that have attended and invite them to come back.

I attended the middle school/high school youth rally at Montreat. There were about 170 youth present. Energizers, music, recreation, and small groups were led by the Presbyterian Youth Council (PYC) made up of youth from all over the Presbytery. Lisle Gwynn gave a wonderful keynote address and then led us in creating an art piece together as we reflected on Christ's love for us. PWNC combined the middle school and high school so churches without many youth could combine their groups. This opened the rally to more small youth groups. I give thanks for Beth Gunn, our Associate for Youth, the Presbytery Youth Committee, the adults that work with the PYC, and the PYC group. Bring your youth to the Middle School Retreat in November at Camp Grier. If you have not been to a Presbytery-sponsored youth event, you are missing out!

The Mayland Fellowship (Mitchell, Avery, and Yancey counties) churches met to hear music of Maggie Lauterer and Zack Allen. They gave scholarships of \$700 each to five students. In addition, they had several churches tell of their ministry. Micaville, Grassy Creek, and Newdale described how their original ministry of taking food to the elderly on weekends had also turned into providing food to 70 to 100 families on Fridays. What excited them most was that members from all three churches work together along with people from the community. This adventure started through a Small Church grant called "Water to Wine," which is available for new ideas of how to reach out in your community.

I also give thanks for our partnership with the Presbyterian Foundation. Several years ago, they sponsored two years of quarterly forums for our small membership churches. Recently, Olanda Carr and Paul Grier led a forum on "who is your neighbor and how do you reach out," "what is the state of the church today?" and "how to foster a culture of generosity." One participant said this was one of most valuable things he had attended.

We also give thanks to the Foundation for partnering with us on a pilot project with PneuMatrix to work with eight of our churches. This will give eight churches a chance to look at their gifts and to reflect on where God is leading them in the future. This will focus on spiritual, financial, energy capabilities and strengthening. Come find out more at lunch at the presbytery meeting. Perhaps your church will be interested. A second opportunity is for people to serve as apprentices and walk alongside a church. You can also find out more about that at the presbytery meeting.

Several weeks ago, we celebrated World Communion Sunday. I give thanks for the ministry God has called us to do and the impact that it is having in the world. God calls us to be involved in the world and the Spirit goes before us.

In Malawi, the Holy Spirit has expanded our ministry such that when Barbara Nagy came back to the states, our relationship continued to be strong with the school, hospital and its rural clinics. This past two

years, we have sent a vehicle to be used as a mobile health clinic and helped to update two rural clinics. We have also added other ministries, like the seminary.

In Malawi, we are making a difference in the lives of children and adults through our work at the hospital and school. If we doubt our call there, the Spirit continues to speak through Holy coincidence. Last year on a Friday, we got a panic email from the hospital. The government check for \$60,000 had bounced and the hospital did not have money to pay its staff for the next month, beginning that Monday. They would need \$25,000. Thanks to the gifts from the churches, we were able to wire \$17,000 that day. On Monday, we received \$5,000 from an estate designated for Malawi. We also got \$3,000 from a couple in Montreat that said God had told them to send the money to the Presbytery for Malawi. The remaining money sent totaled \$25,000. A Holy coincidence.

Something similar also happened last month. Between Building HOPE and money from churches, we were able to send down the \$27,000 needed. We don't know the number of lives saved or children that were able to regain their health because of the medicine, the updated rural clinics, and the mobile health unit. God knows and God cares, and we are privileged to be a part of God's work.

The Spirit continues to work among us. We thought there was no doctor to replace Dr. Barbara Nagy, and now, Dr. Martha Sommers, an experienced doctor who had earlier worked at the other Presbyterian hospitals in Malawi, will be going to Nkhoma Hospital in early 2018. Another answered prayer!

In Guatemala, we see the Spirit working in many places. Each year, this Presbytery sends about \$100,000 to Guatemala for elementary and secondary scholarships. Now, thanks to you and gifts to Building HOPE, we have college scholarships and support for seminarians and books in the schools. Also as a part of Presbyterian Women, there are women getting loans and learning about their self-worth. Imagine the difference it makes in a woman's life when she can earn enough money to send her children to school and have food for them to eat. The Spirit is making a difference and allowing us to participate. You are reaching out from your church as a part of our work together in Guatemala.

Several months ago, I was in Taiwan with John McCall a mission coworker from this presbytery, traveling with pastors and elders, including some from Shelby and Newton. In Taiwan, only about 4% are Christian and about a third of those are Presbyterian. Over and over again, we were thanked for how the Presbyterians had supported the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan and for the positive impact the PCUSA is having now. Until you are traveling through the world, you do not realize the positive impact of our denomination.

John McCall is working with the pastors for spiritual development across Taiwan. He is teaching in the seminaries, speaking at youth events, and creating support groups for pastors. He is even teaching in mainline China at a seminary several weeks a year.

We met Libunu, an openly Christian aboriginal principal of a large elementary school in Taipei. Having a Christian principal is rare. He is a witness to his faith in Christ at his school, and he is bringing the values of God's love for all people into the school. He was emphasizing that each child was precious and no child is to be put aside. The teachers and head of the PTA spoke of how he has changed the atmosphere of the school. Another Christian principal of a high school of several thousand students told

how the pastors in her neighborhood had walked the streets around the school and prayed that a Christian principal would be hired for that school.

Being sent means that we trust and give thanks that the Holy Spirit is leading us, even when we cannot know the outcome. We might not know about your church's witness and the difference it makes in the life of a child or adult, or the difference a youth rally may make. We might not hear about the pastor, who committed her life to Christ at Camp Grier. We will never hear the stories about children that survived and grew to become adults because of the Nkhoma Hospital or the updated rural clinics. We might not know that a future leader will come from the Ebenezer School that we started in Malawi or from a child with a scholarship in Guatemala. We won't know about the parents or teachers that became Christian because of Libunu's witness in Taiwan. We may also not tell the story of how we were changed because of the people we meet and the work the Spirit calls us to do. We might not know about this church's witness and the difference it make in the life or a child or youth. The Holy Spirit goes ahead of us. Sometimes we can see the result, and at others times, we are called to simply follow and only God will know the results or see the harvest.

We give thanks that God sends each of us, our churches, and this Presbytery to our unique ministries with our unique gifts for God's work and that the Spirit goes with us each day. Christ calls each of us and this church, and sends us out to do ministry and witness in his name.

Peace,

Bobbi