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Presbytery of the Cascades

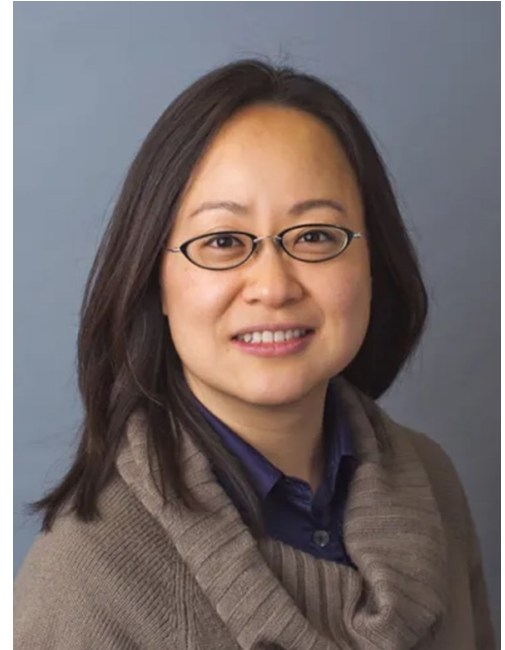
The Stated Clerk and Executive Director wants Presbyterians to know about recent efforts to make civil society less disruptive

Dear Siblings in Christ of the PC(USA),

In recent days, we have seen the disruption of so many norms in our life together as a civil society within the U.S. Among those disruptions are the negation of those places we have thought of as protected spaces, those “sensitive locations,” where children can learn and play and people have their needs met, including needs for food and shelter, and where all can worship God and practice their faith and find community. Many of you have been wondering whether the denomination is doing anything.

The denomination is doing something. Each time you, your committees, your faith communities and congregation, and mid councils do something, the denomination is showing up with and for those who are at risk of harm. And also, the Interim Unified Agency, as an agency of the General Assembly, is working in a variety of ways both domestically and globally.

The [Office of Public Witness](#) (OPW) has sent out several Action Alerts asking Presbyterians to engage with the administration and members of Congress in accordance with our policy. Sign-on letters with coalition partners are being sent out, quite literally, on a daily basis as well as strategic planning meetings. OPW’s advocacy guide, *Holy Discernment* is being updated and will soon be available in a digital format. A monthly advocacy conversation will begin in February for an opportunity to gather, share, and learn ways we can promote the justice of Jesus as a part of the body of Christ.



Reverend Jihyun Oh

The [Office of Immigration Issues](#) (OII) is responding to this situation in a way that considers the sensitive information we are receiving and the fear of those reaching out. We are conferring with individuals, worshiping communities, and mid-counsel as they imagine ministry through this new lens. OII continues to direct people to the [Family Care Plan page](#) of our website so that communities can come together in support of one another and create plans for the worst-case scenarios. Invitations to Know Your Rights training events for individuals at risk and religious communities are being shared through Facebook. The office is engaging in conversations with community partners about what a sanctuary response looks like in these times. We continue to engage in efforts and events with our ecumenical and interfaith partners.

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Omnibus

Omnibus is published six times a year by the Presbytery of the Cascades for distribution to churches and individuals.

Omnibus welcomes news and views of all the churches of Presbytery and all its readers. Send all communications to Kathleen Waugh, *Omnibus* editor, Presbytery of the Cascades, 245 S. Bancroft St., Suite D, Portland, OR 97239-8526. Email: kwaugh8@outlook.com

Omnibus retains permission to modify submissions for clarity and space limitations. The Presbytery "Communications and Technology Team" (CATT) is the editorial board.

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[Presbyterian Disaster Assistance](#) (PDA) is in contact with communities that have been hit with recent ICE raids and continues to be involved in multiple initiatives that contribute to offering a safe and stable environment for refugees and asylum seekers, including funding the development of temporary housing and providing direct assistance for food, rent support, and legal services. In Chicago, PDA supported a coalition of faith communities that housed, on church property, migrants who have disabilities, are LGBTQIA+, or have other reasons why a shelter setting would be difficult for them. PDA is also investing in sustainable infrastructure projects that directly impact migrant communities both domestically and globally, and is collaborating with local Presbyterian churches to mobilize congregations, raise awareness, and provide direct assistance and trauma-informed pastoral care for migrants, who face more legal and logistical barriers than ever before due in part to government support of anti-immigrant legislation and executive actions. The work of PDA is done in partnership with mid councils and congregations and Presbyterians around the country are helping to fund this work.

In addition to these efforts, we are prayerfully and carefully exploring a variety of options that will help us live into the many policies and statements of the General Assembly. These policies and statements that are relevant to what is happening in our country at this time are guiding the ministry of staff as we work with partners and other collaborators in seeking avenues of action that range from statements all the way to legal strategies, up to and including initiating legal action. These efforts continue as new information is received and considered. While we do so, we are working to ensure the protection of all partners involved, but most importantly those who are most vulnerable to harm in this time.

For all those whose ministries, including worship and communal life, are being impacted by these policies and procedures that no longer recognize sensitive and sacred locations, I pray that you will know God's deep and abiding presence with you and the presence of your denomination, your faith community with you. May God bless you and keep you.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.... (Hebrews 12:1-2a)

In faith and perseverance,
Rev. Jihyun Oh

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Candid Conversations

By Rev. Dr. Brian Craker, Transitional Executive

Winter for the American Church

Winter is a critical time in nature. While all signs above ground point to dormancy, below ground, it is a different story. The days of dry winter air cause the ground to crack open, followed by waves of heavy rain or blankets of snow. The leaves that fell in late fall have decayed and each storm pushes those nutrients deep enough into the soil for tree roots to absorb. Perennials even get into the action, deepening their tap roots to prepare for the next Spring. In a season noted for a lack of production, we are given instead a season of quiet, and a vista made for reflection as the leafless forests allow for greater visibility of our surroundings and our neighbors. In Winter, nature does great work “behind the scenes,” with an intentional focus on preparing for the next season.



Photo Credit: Michelle Olson

Many church historians and semioticians (futurists) have debated whether the American Church is entering into a “winter season.” I remember first hearing about this concept of “seasons” in the American Church in my Reformed Theology course, specifically as we were debating the writings of Reinhold Niebuhr against Robert Fogel’s, *The Fourth Great Awakening*. But multiple recent articles by American Political Scientist Ryan Burge highlight the reality we are all aware of: since 2000, nearly every branch of the American Church has seen a partial to significant decline in attendance and adherents. It doesn’t mean the church is dying...quite the opposite.

Church historians would quickly remind us that we have seen this at least four previous times, dating back to the early 1700’s. Each “Great Awakening” in the American church was preceded by a “season” of quiet, typically marked by declining attendance, fewer baptisms, diminished pastoral leadership, and a period where the challenges from political or world events increasingly pulled the attention of society (and even an entire generation) away from religious foundations and norms. It was also a time in which the collective church renewed its collaborative efforts, focusing on active discipleship and raising up new leaders from within their local churches. These have also been times when we’ve seen the forming of collaborative partnerships, the merging of churches, and even the sharing of ministerial resources across denominational lines, all efforts to strengthen the Christian witness in local communities. Lastly, it has been a time of reflection for the church, taking a deeper look at the needs of their community, so the church can be poised and ready for renewed action in the next spiritual wave. With historians pointing out that each wave has come in increments of about 80 years, and the last Great Awakening began in 1960...well, you can do the math.

If we are entering into a “winter season” in the American Church, as I suspect is likely, then the good news is that we are much closer to a new wave of spiritual awakening than we are from the previous one. Just as nature prepares for a winter season and begins to work underground, we should look at this time not with fear or anxiety, but rather with purpose and anticipation of what is to come. Instead of focusing on the harvest of the past, we need to shift our focus to the kingdom work ahead of us. The lessons of the past can help us know how to prepare for our current season. Fewer attendees and fewer pastors mean we are entering a time when strategic partnerships and greater collaboration will be necessary.

We are already seeing this at work within our presbytery, as some churches have begun sharing pastors and Commissioned Ruling Elders, using technology to connect regional churches together for Sunday worship, and starting conversations of strategic mergers to strengthen their witness and mission in their shared communities. I have also been impressed at how many of our churches are using this quieter season to change their focus, to walk in their communities and see the changing needs of those they call their neighbors. The signs are all there. The question is, will we understand and embrace the season we are in?

Psalm 74:17 reminds us that God, “...set all the boundaries of the earth; you made both summer and winter.” If we believe that the Lord of the Harvest has given every season its purpose, then we must embrace our current season with purpose and anticipation. A winter season doesn’t require us to stop doing the work God has presently called of us, but it does require us to ask if our work and witness can be done better in collaboration. In what ways may God be calling your congregation to reexamine those connectional and collaborative bonds? Could strategic partnerships and shared or merged resources strengthen your community witness and mission? As Presbyterians, we are the Connectional Church, and this season may be just the reminder we need from God to shift our inward focus inside out, with hope and anticipation of the season that is to come.

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Oak Hills Keeps Busy In Transition

By Pat Berger, Northeast Region Reporter



Oak Hills Worships Together

Oak Hills, Milwaukie is committed to remaining faithful to its vision and calling during a time of pastoral transition. After the recent departure of their senior pastor of nine years, Rev. Jeremy Sanderson, they are now being led by Transitional Pastor Rev. Christy Polk. Before taking on the transitional leadership role, Pastor Christy served Oak Hills for 14 years in various positions, most recently as stated supply Associate Pastor for Adult Ministry. Pastor Christy and her congregation are very excited about the ministry work that Oak Hills is doing.

Despite being in a pastoral transition, Oak Hills is keeping busy! They have had a longstanding partnership with Love, INC of Clackamas County, an organization which provides a rich variety of resources to people in need. (INC stands for In the Name of Christ). For years,

Oak Hills has supported Love, INC through a yearly non-food pantry drive (collecting toiletries, paper products, cleaning supplies, etc.) and by collecting back-to-school shoes every fall for the Lace-Up With Love event. Pastor Christy was excited to tell that Oak Hills is now also eagerly participating in Love, INC's new effort to reconnect people in need directly with local churches.

Love, INC is encouraging church members to complete and submit a "gifts inventory" form which lists ways they can directly help someone in need. For example, a person filling out the form might offer help doing yardwork, driving someone to a doctor's appointment, or simple home repairs. With a long list of folks willing to help, Love, INC will soon be able to make more face-to-face help possible, blessing both those who offer and those who receive assistance. Elder Cathy Searles is currently heading up an effort to get lots of gifts inventories filled out and turned in. Oak Hills is also happy to be hosting the Love, INC Healthy Helping class on March 15th.

Global missions has also been a passion of Oak Hills for a long time. They have been blessed through the years with close ties to Wycliff Bible Translators through several members who are current or former Wycliffe employees. They are now happy to be ramping up support for the Rasmussen family, who have recently relocated back to the United States from Cameroon. Kent Rasmussen is better able to complete his crucial translation work with resources available to him in the United States, but relocation has been costly!

Pastor Christy is also excited to be offering the *Practicing the Way* course on Wednesday nights. The video class, based on the book by John Mark Comer, envisions the goal of the Christian life as being apprenticed to Jesus in order to be like him and do what he did. Pastor Christy is hopeful that she and others in the class will grow through the course's encouragement to practice the spiritual disciplines as a means of being with Jesus and becoming more like him.

The leadership of Oak Hills asks that you please pray for them as they are just now completing their Mission Study Report and forming their Pastor Nominating Committee. They are eager to see how God will lead them in this next phase of their pastoral search!

Blessings, Oak Hills, at this stage in your journey!

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A New Thing in the South

By Mike Hubbard, South Region Reporter

By now, we are familiar with the statistics—for every Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) minister seeking a call there are two churches needing a pastor. For congregations undergoing a pastoral transition, the figures are grimmer still—for each qualified interim pastor, there are 12 churches in need of one. Similar numbers haunt our sibling mainline denominations.

Thus, last November, when **First, Medford's** head of staff, Rev. Murray Richmond, announced his mid-January 2025 retirement, there were more than a few anxious moments. And no amount of “we are all in this together; it’s a national trend” conversation was going to soothe those worried minds. Compounding that particular anxiety were thoughts of the contentious election season and a divided nation. Closer to home, water damage to **First's, Sarah Corson Childcare and Learning Center**, resulted in the entire childcare operation moving into much of the church’s downstairs, putting the fellowship hall, kitchen, and several other rooms off-limits for other uses.

However, at the time of this writing, much of the worry has faded. How did that happen?

First, members of the church’s session are a committed and qualified group of individuals. Most, if not all, have been through seasons of change; they are not an easily shaken bunch. By the November 26, session meeting, they had been in conversation with Clark Scalera, Advocate for Congregations and Clergy and their Committee On Ministry-South (COM-S) liaison, Ruling Elder Steve Roe. Both attended the November meeting, Roe in person and Scalera via Zoom.

Second, the church already had a second pastor. Mike Hubbard, a certified Commissioned Ruling Elder, had been filling a part-time pastoral care assistant role for a little over six years. At the same November session meeting he was asked and consented to be the congregation’s full-time Bridge Pastor. During Pastor Murray’s vacations and recent sabbatical, he moderated session meetings, as well as preached. The church could “keep on keeping on.”

It was also at that November meeting that Clark Scalera first presented the possibility of utilizing an interim consultant. He would determine who might be available in the Presbytery and would supply names of companies that specialized in transitional consulting. Little did Medford’s elders know how fruitful his efforts would turn out to be.



Rev. Robin Garvin

In mid-January, Clark supplied the session with a candidate for consideration—Rev. Robin Garvin. With Robin’s considerable interim experience and training, the Ad Hoc Search committee recommended that she be retained as Medford’s Transitional Consulting Pastor. On January 21, the church’s session voted to enter into a covenant with Rev. Garvin. Pastor Hubbard’s covenant was approved that night as well. With COM-S meeting the very next morning, there was a late-night flurry of document scanning and emailing. The next day, COM-S approved both covenants.

On February 9, Robin met with the church’s session for the purpose of electing a Transition Team. After three hours of training, prayer and discernment, an initial list of over twenty names had been reduced to ten—seven members and three alternates. Afterward, people were assigned to invite those team members who were not present to consider being a part of transition. By mid-morning, February 11, all seven had agreed to serve. Less than a month had elapsed between Pastor Murray’s retirement and the formation of Medford’s Transition Team.

Certainly, there is much hard work still to be done. And before a Pastor Nominating Committee can begin its task, the Transition Team’s final report will need session and COM-S approval. Yet, everyone involved believes that God’s hand has been extended to us in grace. Hope is high, “and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

Hope for a new thing in the South.

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The Holy Spirit Leads Multnomah to New Adventures

By Dianna Weston, Northwest Region Reporter

“You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns or figs from thistles?” (Matthew 7:16: New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition)

When **Multnomah, Portland’s** pastor left recently, their Session faced a common dilemma these days – there were few transitional or pulpit supply pastor options. So, the session asked Heather Hellman, who had both educational and pastoral experience in youth ministries, to become a Commissioned Ruling Elder, and Head of Staff. She agreed and asked the Reverend Dr. Jennifer Ackerman to partner with her on a part-time basis.



Multnomah Members share a snack with Community Friends

Multnomah’s leadership was inspired in this direction after reading the book, *Sailboat Church*, by Joan S. Grey. Grey’s theory is that you can either be a rowboat church or a sailboat church. A rowboat church depends on human effort and frantically rows harder when things are uncertain. Sailboat churches instead rely on the Holy Spirit to guide them as they hoist the sails to allow that movement of the Spirit to power them.

This decision has led the church to some new adventures. They opened their building and parking lot to community groups and declared themselves to be a “welcoming church.”

“But just declaring that did not establish trust amongst our neighbors,” she noted. “We also joined the local neighborhood association, participated in its planning committee, and hosted a community Grinch event for Christmas. There was no preaching – we were just doing what Jesus wants us to do.”

“We did it all while overcoming a funding deficit when 20 people left and took 1/3 of our pledged giving, over our decision to be fully inclusive of the LGBTQIA community.

According to Heather, since Multnomah opened its doors wider and became a welcoming congregation, it has had more opportunities to partner with organizations in the local community and become a resource for their neighbors, both housed and unhoused. They have had community recycling and garbage events in their parking lot and participated in Multnomah Village events.

“God has been so faithful through it all and it’s been fun getting to be known as ‘the fun church’ while getting to put Jesus’s love in action in creative ways that our neighbors actually appreciate.”

“As we’ve opened our doors wider, we’ve seen more opportunities, and we’ve been able to be a light of the love of Jesus in our community.”

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Nestucca Valley: A Community Haven in Pacific City

By Dennis Smith, Central Region Reporter

Friday morning in Pacific City at **Nestucca Valley Church**. Ten of us gather in a circle.

We begin by sharing a poem. Shelly Stolle, who serves as Clerk of Session, starts with Mary Oliver’s popular “Wild Geese.” The evocative image of geese “heading home again” leads to comments about nostalgia. We agree that all creatures have roots, a sense of place that gives life’s journey meaning.

More poems, more life lessons shared.

We move on to a time of sharing our joys and concerns. We take time to listen to one another. We affirm that joys felt are deeply felt, that pain experienced is not an illusion. In this time, in this place, we agree, we need each other, and, in that need, we sense the presence of God.

Then the book study.

Ken Hood, the pastor, is leading the group through *Journey to Eloheh: How Indigenous Values Lead Us to Harmony and Wellbeing* by Randy & Edith Woodley. This week’s chapter is on “looking back.” The authors emphasize how in Native American culture, events and one’s relationships, are more important than the clock.

The group agrees that, if we are to sense how and where God is working in our midst, we need to make space for different rhythms, and other ways of being in this world. Someone remembers the time when a key relative was late arriving for a memorial service. Stuff happens. So, respectfully, patiently, all those present just waited. And that was OK.

In our lives, too, Ken noted, we need to learn to give ourselves a bit of grace. We can be so task-driven that we forget to take time to just be present, to check in with ourselves, body and spirit, and know that God loves us as we are. If we slow down a bit, we can make room for the other. Often, those are the times when we sense God’s presence.

This group has been meeting for about 15 years. They usually go through two books a year, on issues ranging from culture and theology to social justice and current events. On Sundays, in addition to worship, Ken also leads a class on meditation that draws in several members of the community.

I sense that people are comfortable here. Today there are about ten of us. Some Fridays there are 15. This is a community space imbued with a sense of the sacred. For more than 100 years, Nestucca Valley

has been a place where the larger community – not just Presbyterians – has gathered to address local concerns, to feed the hungry, to prepare food-filled backpacks for kids facing food insecurity, to dirty their hands in the community garden, to celebrate local culture, to listen to good music, to bask

in the beauty of well-crafted liturgy. As we debrief over lunch, Ken emphasizes how much this church belongs to and is led by this community. He’s only here Friday through Sunday. Over the years, the good folks at Nestucca Valley have understood the role of their congregation as being an integral part of the larger Pacific City community.

As such, Nestucca Valley members value both ethics and aesthetics. The celebration of beauty, truth, and justice in community offers paths for encountering the living God. They have learned that faithful discipleship means accompanying your neighbors in times of grief and hardship, mutual accountability in times of challenge, and unbridled joy in response to the breath of the Spirit.



Ken Hood leads a book study on *Journey to Eloheh*



Connie Chandler describes the care used in designing their worship



Shelley Stolle practicing for worship).

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~ Transitions ~

New Pastors:

- The Rev. Rob Hagan has transferred his membership from Northwest Coast Presbytery and is now honorably retired.

Installations & Commissioning:

- Tannor Stradley was commissioned at **Community, Malin**, on February 16
- The Rev. Paul Davidson will be installed at **First, Astoria**, on March 16 at 3 p.m.
- The Rev. Amanda Golbeck was installed at **Mt. Tabor, Portland** on November 17
- The Rev. Debbie Garber was installed at **Springwater, Estacada** on November 10
- The Rev. Susan Tindall was installed at **Valley Community, Portland** on October 27

Pastoral Changes:

- The Rev. Murray Richmond has retired from **First, Medford** effective January 12, and CRE Mike Hubbard is now filling the pulpit.
- The Rev. Bill Davis has completed his service at **Community, Lakeside**
- The Rev. Paulette Mixon-Weller is now the pastor of **Reedville, Aloha**
- The Rev. Jerry O'Neill has completed his service to **Pioneer, Warrenton**
- The Rev. Jim Vickery has completed his service to **First, Bandon**.
- The Rev. Kally Elliott has completed her service to **First, Bend**, and is now serving beyond the bounds at Sunriver Christian Fellowship

Memoria:

- The Rev. John Neal passed away on October 31



One Great Hour of Sharing

March 5-April 20, 2025

Ending hunger, repairing after disasters, and promoting the self-development of all people.

Typically received during the season of Lent, each gift to One Great Hour of Sharing supports efforts to relieve hunger through the Presbyterian Hunger Program, promote development through the Presbyterian Committee on the Self-Development of People, and assist in areas of disaster through Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. All three programs work in different ways to serve individuals and communities in need. From initial disaster response to ongoing community development, their work fits together to provide people with safety, sustenance, and hope.



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Kathy Waugh to Step Down as Omnibus Editor After 20 Years of Service

by Danny Peters, Communications Manager

Over the past two decades, The Rev. Kathy Waugh has been serving Cascades Presbytery as the editor of the *Omnibus* newsletter. In such a geographically vast presbytery like Cascades, resources like the *Omnibus* help us to remain connected to one another. Our presbytery is deeply grateful for Kathy's stewardship of our newsletter for so many years.

Ordained in 1987 in the Presbytery of the Twin Cities (MN), Kathy came to Cascades in 2001 when she was called as the Associate Pastor for Christian Education and Family Ministries at First, Medford. Throughout her pastorate, she had a particular passion for working with children and their families. This passion was initially cultivated in her prior career as a Social Worker. Prior to attending seminary, Kathy worked 17 years for Child Protective Services in San Diego County. "God always had a way of putting me in the right place," Kathy states. After ten years at First, Medford, she retired in 2011. "That was my first retirement," she said with a smile. Kathy remained in southern Oregon, spending several years serving in a pastoral capacity at the First, Phoenix congregation.

A few years after Kathy arrived in Medford, she noticed a job posting from the presbytery, indicating that Cascades was looking for an *Omnibus* editor, preferably someone with a background in journalism. Given her extensive training in communications, Kathy expressed interest and interviewed for the position. She has been grateful for how this position has allowed her to access her creative side. "When I was a Pastor, I loved doing bulletin boards," she said, "so doing the *Omnibus* gave me the chance to do something similar. I like the process of making something look nice. We hear a lot about the numbers, membership numbers going down – but there are so many good things happening in the presbytery, all across the region." The role of *Omnibus* Editor has also given Kathy a deep appreciation for the creative ministry happening all across the presbytery.

Also, ending their service to the *Omnibus* are the two proofers that have walked this journey with Kathy throughout the years. Randa Blanding and Carol Mooney have read every article that has come in each issue, showing needed edits. After Kathy does the layout work, she sends both of them that final draft which they go over once again. Offering their set of eyes has been an invaluable resource for the *Omnibus*.

Kathy, Randa, and Carol concluded their service on February 28, 2025. On behalf of all of Cascades Presbytery—thank you, Kathy, Randa, and Carol, for sharing your gifts with us!



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ViewPoints

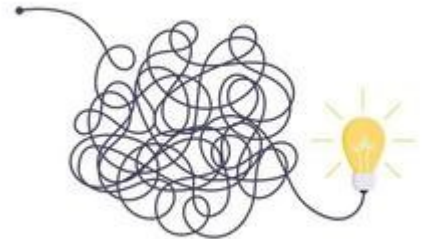
By Kathy Waugh, *Omnibus* Editor

As I consider how to say goodbye as Editor of the *Omnibus*, it's been hard to not consider that the times we live in these days are often chaotic and disturbing. I'm one that doesn't easily lose hope, even when things can look hopeless. When I end up in such a situation, I find a way to be alone in a place that invites me to ponder how to take next steps.

I recently moved back to San Diego, and it reminds me of a column I wrote some time ago that speaks to today's situation. It states:

“One of the things I love to do in San Diego is to take a trip down to the ocean and walk the sands without my shoes. I always go down onto the beach just to the point where the fingers of water from the waves crashing offshore come sliding towards me. The water laps over my feet so they are free of the gritty sand for just a moment. I love the smell of the salt air and the sound of the far-off crashing waves, the shrieks of the seagulls as they swoop down towards me. If I happened to have an apple or some other tidbit, they sometimes got very friendly with me.

This year I couldn't help thinking of the phrase from Genesis, "and a wind from God swept over the face of the water." No place on earth can model that image as clearly as ocean waves crashing, foaming and swirling on a gray, cloudy morning. When the wind comes, the breakers are no longer rhythmic; they are no longer a soothing, muted sound of comfort. One can almost feel the power of the water as it charges forth towards shore. The spray of the saltwater surrounds you, and soon your whole body is damp and ready to find shelter.



This is the image of God beginning to bring the elements of earth to order — bringing order out of chaos. It isn't a particularly soothing moment, but God would eventually call each task "good." For me, walking the beach on a cloudy, windy, gray day is actually quite breathtaking, invigorating, awe-inspiring. Is this just a tiny glimpse of the energy it took to create the beauty we call earth, bringing it to its cosmic order?

And then God entrusted it to our care? Wow! How wonderful and mysterious is our God!”

We are in the midst of chaos today. I remember clearly that walk I took on a cloudy windy day on the beach, reminding me that there is a power far more than anything I can understand and yet still calls to me, Kathy Waugh, to take care of what God has created for us. That call reminds me that it went out to all humanity. I won't be alone if I choose to open myself to the power given to me to respond - that if we stand together we will break through the chaos we are facing, and bring back the beauty of a community where we can trust and care for one another – not the fairy-tale kind of peace, but the kind of peace where we know there are challenges on a regular basis, where hope is never lost and such challenges can be overcome.

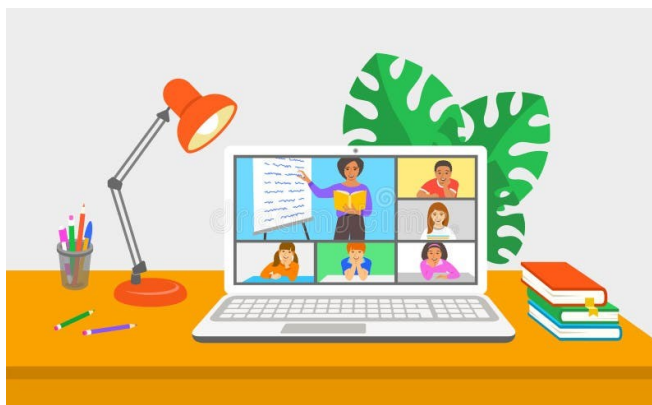
My prayer for you, dear friends, is that you can find a special place where you, too, hear the God of love and creation remind you of the trust God has in you. In every *Omnibus*, in every story sharing the mission story of each church I will be reminded that together, we can, indeed, overcome the chaos we are facing.

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Ministry Spotlight: soma.digital

By Mark McIlraith, M.Div., Ph.D., Pastor/Founder/CEO. soma.digital
“spiritual discovery in the digital space” www.somadigital.org 509-768-1746

The pandemic accelerated the already existing mainline denominational trajectory of decline, driving people to seek spirituality online. Sadly, the Presbyterian denomination is the fastest in decline by several reports. Many who left the in-person church during the pandemic have found that worshipping online is preferable – especially when “consumed” at one’s convenience (and in pajamas). But the online venue cannot replace in-person church experiences. Nevertheless, online is where people spend a significant portion of their lives – whether seeking God or otherwise.



However...

Perhaps we are framing this predicament all wrong. Should we be viewing this clash, not as a slow death, but as a new opportunity for birth? Could these realities mean that the digital space is a mission field to reach others for Christ?

The team at soma.digital (www.somadigital.org) has answered, “Yes!” Consequently, we began asking a series of questions:

- How can we reach those living online who seek spiritual formation?
- How can digital ministry go beyond passively watching others worship on YouTube or inertly playing a podcast sermon?
- On which platforms are people already immersing themselves in digital environments, building genuine relationships?

The answer? In the robust and very lively world of the online gaming community.

In his book, *How We Got to Now: Six Innovations That Made the Modern World*, Steven Jonson writes, “Ideas and innovation emerge from collaborative networks at the intersection of different domains.” For this reason, soma.digital is orchestrating the intersection of several worlds: digital technology, entrepreneurial generators, academia, media, and ministry for the purpose of spiritual formation.

Using the interactive and immersive tools of gaming technology for spiritual discovery is powerful. That’s why, in our mission statement, soma.digital is “an online community, partnering with Christ who transforms lives in the digital space, so individuals can flourish.”

Behavioral science research indicates that the immersive space of virtual reality (VR) has a visceral impact on its audience, improving well-being and raising cognitive retention. In addition, VR experiences create greater increases in empathy for those we deem different than ourselves. These findings have captured the imagination of soma.digital’s team to leverage this innovation for the spiritual flourishing of others.

How will soma.digital do this? By using VR to “transport” individuals to real locations around the world and witness Christ’s activity there by means of 3D 360 video experiences. It is like experiencing an immersive docuseries, finding ourselves in far-flung locations, connecting us to scripture, faith, and brothers and sisters in Christ, while being surrounded by God’s work in the world. This, in turn, tunes our own hearts and minds to see God at work in our own lives. (The content can also be experienced on mobile devices or computers – but not immersive.)

Imagine finding yourself on the shores of the Sea of Galilee learning what Christ taught there or experiencing God’s transforming work face-to-face with Portland Rescue Mission clients or being transported on a Celtic pilgrimage to a Scottish monastery. This innovation in ministry moves individuals beyond the confines of their locations to the vast work of God’s mission in the world.

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As individuals join our online community through these experiences, we will help them find a local church for themselves if they do not yet have a community of faith. After all, soma.digital does not replace in-person church, but rather is a mission to reach those online, give them an experience of God's vast work, and help them connect with a local congregation.

However, the digital mission field extends beyond soma.digital's reach. There is a deep need for greater online ministries to capture those unwilling or unable to attend in-person church. Imagine those with mobility issues, neurodivergence, the incarcerated, the home-bound, the spiritually curious, and so forth, who wouldn't enter a church building but who long to experience God's global presence for themselves.

This mission field may be the only way a large segment of the population will ever engage in meaningful spiritual discovery. Additionally, for faithful churchgoers, such online engagement would greatly augment their faith experiences, drawing them deeper in Christ.

The need for innovative digital ministries is great. If you're curious to learn more about how soma.digital is doing this or partner with us in mission and ministry, here is our 2½-minute Vision Video: <https://www.somadigital.org/videos/v/somadigital-vision>.

Also, if you want to receive daily encouragement, be sure to follow us on our social media platforms:

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/soma.digital.org/>
- Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/somadigitalorg/>
- Twitter: <https://x.com/somadigitalorg>
- TikTok: <https://www.tiktok.com/@soma.digital>
- YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@somadigitalorg>

As the future of technological innovations and connectivity continue to expand, our denomination is becoming poised to engage it through initiatives like these. Online ministry is a burgeoning mission field filling a specific and increasing gap for those in need. And so, this leaves us with a question:

How might your ministry reach the growing digital population for Christ?



There's a Place for You!

The presbytery nominating committee encourages your participation on presbytery committees. Please take this opportunity to suggest yourself or someone you would recommend for service on a committee or taskforce in the presbytery. We will use this information to update our committee and nomination database. Interested? Click [here](#) to nominate yourself or someone you know.

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Resources help Ministry and Mission



Turning Over Tables: A Lenten Call for Disrupting Power
By Kathy Escobar

With keen insight and unwavering conviction, visionary pastor Kathy Escobar guides readers on a Lenten journey inspired by the ways of Jesus to dismantle the systems that perpetuate inequality and injustice.

From flipping the moneychangers' tables in the temple to uplifting the poor and marginalized, Jesus' actions and words turn the world's idea of power on its head.

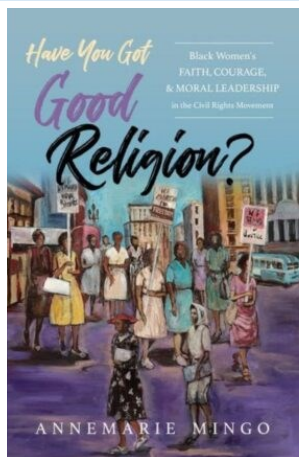
With each week of Lent, readers will dig deeper into Jesus' challenge to the pervasive influence of privilege and oppression that have dominated since ancient times. Through poignant reflections and thought-provoking practices, readers will discover how they can harness the disruptive power of Jesus' teachings to effect meaningful change in their communities and beyond. Together, we can turn the tables and build a world where justice, healing, and greater equity reigns supreme.

Click [here](#) for more information.



Around the Table - A Blog Resource
"Around the Table" is a Lilly Endowment Inc. funded initiative in the Presbyterian Church (USA) that will engage faith communities and parents and caregivers in innovative practices of sharing stories that grow intergenerational communities to support household faith formation.

The most recent blog is "How is it with your Soul? Really?" By Rev. Neema Cyrus-Franklin
Click [here](#) to explore the web site



Have You Got Good Religion? Black Women's Faith, Courage and Moral Leadership in the Civil Rights Movement

By AnneMarie Mingo

Mingo foregrounds Black churchwomen as primary theologians who understood "God's alignment with them" to endow them with moral authority and, from a position many would

consider "powerless," to harness the extraordinary power to remake their world.

From its opening cameo of George Bess Jr.'s murder – the "accidental" drowning of a six-foot-tall Black man in a three-foot-deep Mississippi creek – *Have You Got Good Religion?* grabbed my heart and refused to let go. AnneMarie Mingo expertly adapts the womanist virtue ethical method inspired by the late Katie G. Cannon to the first-person accounts of Black churchwomen who led the Civil Rights Movement from their marginalized locations.

Mingo's ethnographic research into the lives of activist Black churchwomen – including personal interviews – adds complexity to the more limited perspective of scholars who focus on the "headline" stories of the era's male pastors and activist leaders. She does this by illuminating the larger sociohistorical background of women's activism and by analyzing the interactive factors of family structure, gender roles, migration, the role of the Black church and the ways women lived out their faith in local and national contexts. Click [here](#) for the whole review by B. Hunter Farrell in the Feb 13, Issue of *Presbyterian Outlook*.

Do you have a book, a Bible Study, a resource that has helped you in your ministry? Please share. Send to editor, Kathleen Waugh at kwaugh8@outlook.com

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