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CANDID CONVERSATIONS: NEW GROWTH AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES

[Brian Craker](#) | [Transitional Executive Presbyter](#)



Maybe you've seen the occasional headline this year? I opened up the news app on my phone earlier this week, and there it was again...another headline about recent increases in church attendance. This article happened to identify multiple Hollywood celebrities, including Tom Holland and Chris Pratt from the Avengers movies, sharing their newfound appreciation for attending church services regularly in their hometowns. These articles coincide with trends that national researchers like Barna, Pew, and Ryan Berge have been tracking for some time. We are beginning to see a **renewed interest in the Church**, and it is leading to **new growth and new opportunities**.

In my article last March, "[Winter for the American Church](#)," I shared the fact that many researchers and semioticians believe our recent decline in attendance and membership is part of the typical 80-year cycle of spiritual awakening waves that is led by generational interest, followed by generational apathy toward Christianity. If 1950-1960 was the start of the last such wave in the US, then we are much closer to a new wave of spiritual awakening in the coming years. Some researchers believe we may be seeing the early signs of such a possibility...and unlike previous waves, this one seems to be spanning multiple generations.

Young Men

Many Anglican churches in the UK are reporting that they have more Millennials in attendance than any other generational group. This certainly seemed true when I attended a Sunday Anglican worship service in Cambridge back in 2019. As a member of Gen X, looking around at those in the nearly full sanctuary, for once, I felt like part of the older crowd. Nothing was different about the worship service... all the smells and bells of traditional Anglican worship in a 400+ year old sanctuary, except for the kids activity center at the very back of the church, where the children of these millennial parents could gather for quiet activities during the service, before rushing up to the front to receive their blessing before communion.

In the US, the recent surge in new church attendance among young adults has been led by young men aged 18-30, predominantly in urban, suburban, and college town regions. Barna notes this group has experienced a significant rise in spiritual hunger, a "greater openness to God," and these young men are turning to the local church to fill that hunger. Research is showing most of these Millennials & Gen Z are citing stories of faith from extended family members (grandparents, aunts & uncles, etc.) as their inspiration to explore the church.

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Many of these young men want to go beyond just Sunday worship attendance and are seeking out older men (Gen X and Boomers) to serve as faith mentors for faith inspiration and discipleship, as well as a strong desire to serve in missional and community outreach. In the last few months, I've spoken with some of our POTC pastors who have noticed this trend of young men visiting their churches and affirmed these trends.

Young Women

On the flip side, Barna notes that this same age group (18-30) of young women is "increasingly and surprisingly churchless and unaffiliated." The reason this is surprising is that over the last 40 years, women made up the majority of churchgoers, at times at a rate of 2-to-1 over men. The Gen Z women, in particular, make up the largest group of faith unaffiliated, also known as "the nones." But that doesn't mean they aren't searching for answers. In fact, researchers have found the level of spiritual hunger just as high in these young women as with young men, but with one key difference: a reluctance to step into the doors of a traditional church on their own.

Reaching this group is not impossible. In fact, it is a growing opportunity for the church. While Pew Research shows that many "nones" cite previous negative experiences with Christians or a specific church, they are open to meaningful conversations about faith and spirituality if others are willing to meet them where they are. A recent survey found 77% of this group was "open to organized religion," but responded best to a personal invitation. The key is first meeting them where they are and listening to their story. The Pacific Northwest has long been a haven for the "nones", and many scholars have shared ways to better understand and interact with this group, including our own **Rev. Dr. Liz Leavitt (Rose City Park, Portland)**.

Recent Retirees

This final group "flips the script" a bit. The last of the Baby Boomers Generation is reaching retirement age, and researchers say as they close their chapter on regular employment, many are picking up and moving to new places, usually in search of more affordable living while on a fixed income. As these Boomers land in new communities in search of new connections and relationships, many are returning to their roots and back into church. This group is also not interested in just being "pew sitters," but instead finding purposeful engagement in missional community service and social justice projects, while also building new relationships. I'm hearing from some of our POTC pastors and elders that they are seeing this trend in their churches, especially in more affordable areas of our Presbytery, particularly in central/southern Oregon and along the coast. Helping this group find solid connections and places to serve has been key.

Reason for Hope

If we are beginning to draw this "winter season" of the American church to a close, then we have reason to hope that exciting times may be ahead. While a typical result of spiritual awakenings has been a steady increase in church attendance, it has also ushered in new chapters of the gospel in action, including focuses on social transformation and equality, increasing access to health and education, and significant shifts in philanthropy to help those in greatest need. In the past, churches that were invitational, focused on discipleship, outwardly focused by living out the gospel in their communities, or were engaged in social activism benefited greatly from these seasons, and Presbyterians have historically been at the forefront of these movements in the past. Data and history can paint us a picture, but it's the connectional church that must capture the moment, be the Living Gospel, and move our communities toward change. I, for one, am filled with hope and anticipation for what this next season may bring.



CASCADES WELCOMES NEW STAFF MEMBERS!

Clark Scalera | Advocate for Congregations & Clergy

The Commission on Ministry is pleased to announce that the two vacant Team Leader staff positions have now been filled. In early 2021, the COM noted an increased need amongst congregations and pastors in *three primary areas* – addressing conflict in healthy ways, providing increased care and support for pastors, and resourcing congregations during times of pastoral transition. To help address these needs more adequately, three new staff positions were created to help organize, equip, and employ leaders from around the presbytery for this work. Each of these positions was filled in 2022, and teams were developed that have greatly enhanced and supported the ministry of the presbytery. **The Rev. Dr. Sarah Sanderson-Doughty** was hired at that time as the Conflict Team Leader, and has done an admirable job recruiting, training, equipping, coordinating, and leading a team that has supported numerous churches, and the presbytery itself, move constructively through times of conflict. Sarah is continuing in this important area of service and ministry within the presbytery.

The other two team leader positions focused on pastoral transition and support of pastors became open, and over the summer the COM has worked in conjunction with the Personnel and Administration Committee of the presbytery to conduct a search for each of these roles. We are pleased to now announce the following two hires:



The Rev. Robin Garvin will be serving as the **Pastoral Transition Advisor**. She will both be providing direct support for churches during times of transition and helping to train and resource the Commission on Ministry.

Robin has been an ordained teaching elder for 35 years, retiring in 2024 after serving six congregations in Washington and Oregon. A native of San Jose, California, Robin is married to Roger Garvin, a family physician and professor at OHSU. They have an adult daughter, son-in-law, and two grandchildren who reside in Atlanta. In addition to being “Grammy” or working with a congregation in transition, Robin can often be found walking her beloved rescue dog, Penny, hiking, reading a good work of fiction, cooking, listening to a wide array of music, or cheering loudly for her beloved Gonzaga Bulldogs.



The Rev. Kelly Dickson will be serving as the **Pastoral Support Team Leader**, working alongside a dedicated team to promote the health, wholeness, and spiritual well-being of ministers throughout the presbytery.

Kelly comes with deep vocational preparedness for this work and has previously served on the Care of Pastors team. Kelly is a minister member of our presbytery and is the founder of **Shalom Collective**, which is itself a ministry dedicated to the care of pastors and faith leaders across denominations and differences. Kelly has received training in soul care, spiritual formation, and community transformation at Ruth Haley Barton’s Transforming Center. Kelly is passionate about supporting and caring for pastors and ministry leaders, and will be a valuable addition to the staff of the presbytery.



ASK THE CLERK: HOW DO OVERTURES GET TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY?

Paul Belz-Templeman | Stated Clerk

Presbyterians are passionate about many things. The denomination can act and speak when the General Assembly (“GA”) votes on **overtures**. In a nutshell, an overture is a motion made to the GA from a presbytery that requests the Assembly to take particular action or endorse a particular statement. We are entering the season for overtures and concurring with overtures as the GA is coming up in the summer of 2026. For the record, in 2015, Cascades approved the overture that become the PC(USA)’s “Matthew 25” initiative. At the same meeting, we concurred with another overture that ultimately added “caring for God’s creation” as one of the ways that the Book of Order now states is part of the ministry of church members. We all can have a say in what the denomination says and does.

So, How Do Overtures Get to GA?

Suppose you have an idea. Perhaps you would like the national church to take a position on immigration or request that the denomination and its agencies reduce fossil fuel usage by restricting the use of Artificial Intelligence or something else.

1. Check with the stated clerk (that’s me!) to see if a similar overture is in the works and how best to fulfill the desired goal of your overture.

2. Write an overture which takes the following form:

“The Presbytery of the Cascades overtures the 227th GA [(2026)] of the PC(USA) to [state the specific action the GA is asked to take].”

A rationale for the proposed action shall be included. [Click here for an example of an overture in the approved format.](#)

It’s often best to work with a group of people when writing an overture. And, if you are part of a wider Presbyterian group, they may have proposed overtures that are written and need a presbytery to overture or to concur (see below on concurrences).

3. Submit the overture to your church session. The church session can review the overture, and if they approve, they can request that Presbytery overture the GA. Deadlines for submission are October 2, 2025, for our Fall meeting and January 7, 2026 for our Winter meeting.

4. The Presbytery will discuss and vote on the overture. If it passes, then I will submit it to the GA.

Concurrences

You know how when someone makes a motion in a meeting and we all breathlessly wait for someone else to say “second!”? In the same way, an overture needs to have at least one “second” or concurrence from other presbyteries. Since all concurring presbyteries are listed, people strive to get a long list of concurrences to show GA commissioners that the overture has broad support. If you know of an overture that could use a concurrence from Cascades, the easiest way to do it is to get your session or another session (or several sessions) to request that presbytery concur with the overture. The process is the same as an overture. In fact, there are times when it isn’t clear which presbytery will be “overturing” and which presbyteries will be concurring. No worries there. The stated clerk and the GA sort that out after the overtures are submitted- we are clever that way.

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Overture Advocate: Tell the GA Committee Why This is Important

An adopted overture with at least one concurrence goes first to a GA Committee for study, amendment, and recommendation before that committee presents the overture to all the commissioners of the GA for vote. The Presbytery can name overture advocates to present the overture to the GA Committee. We can also name an overture advocate when we are a concurring presbytery. The GA Committees are meeting online June 23-24, 2026, and at some point during that time period will hear from the overture advocates for each overture. When there are multiple advocates from different presbyteries, it gets a little more complicated, but we can work that out down the road. If you have an idea for who should be the overture advocate for your overture, let me know when the session submits the overture.

Questions?

Let me know if you have any questions on the overture process. I'm here to help with the process.

Paul Belz-Templeman serves as Stated Clerk of the Presbytery. He can be reached at statedclerk@potc.org or 503-227-5486.

YOUTH RETURN FROM TRIENNIUM ENERGIZED BY FAITH AND FRIENDSHIP

Rev. Don Ludwig | POTC Triennium Registrar & Coordinator

From July 28–31, over 2,000 Presbyterian youth from across the country gathered in Louisville, KY, for the 2025 Presbyterian Youth Triennium. The Presbytery of the Cascades sent a vibrant delegation of 8 youth and 5 adults representing **St. Andrews, Bethany PDX, Westminster PDX, and First Vancouver**. Thanks to the generous financial support of the Presbytery, our participants experienced this faith-forming and life-shaping event built around the theme “As If We Were Dreaming.”



The event combined inspiring worship, dynamic learning sessions, and unique opportunities for connection. One of the most beloved traditions—button trading—proved to be a highlight for our group. Youth exchanged pins with new friends from across the nation, many collecting 20+ buttons as tangible reminders of the friendships and connections made. Our participants returned home enthusiastic about putting their faith into action in the real world, carrying with them both memories and renewed vision for their journey of faith.

We are deeply grateful to the Presbytery of the Cascades for making this trip possible. Our youth and adult leaders look forward to sharing more about their experiences at the October Presbytery meeting. Until then, we eagerly anticipate growing our delegation at Triennium 2028.



WARM SPRINGS MANSE NEARING COMPLETION

Pat Berger | Northeast Region Reporter

Attention! The manse remodel project at Warm Springs Presbyterian is almost complete! By the time of this publication, it is possible that all the tools have been put away. Now there will be a place for a new minister to live.

With this project, it seems as though several things came together quite rapidly. Board of Trustees member **Chuck Missar (First, Cottage Grove)** remembers receiving his first email about the project last September. Because of his background in facilities management, he was assigned to the Property Management Committee. **Thomas Lundy (Missional Resource Manager, POTC)** said Missar was a joy to work with, as he understood projects, people, and politics. Trustees Chair **Mark Olson (Lincoln City/ Chapel by the Sea)** had previous carpenters-union experience, and had also worked alongside indigenous communities. **Amy Clements (Multnomah, PDX)** and **Larry Thornton (Waldport)** were also on the committee, both of whom have careers focused on large-scale building projects. Without much delay, Mark said to the group: "Go!" And they did.

People from the church started ripping out wallboard and found that the insulation was full of mouse droppings. It all had to go. Plumbing needed replacing, as did all the electrical. The house interior had to be taken down to studs, which were missing in some exterior walls!



These experts added up all projected costs and came up with \$300,000. Some were in favor of tearing down the existing manse. The situation in Warm Springs, however, is that there are very few available rentals within miles, and most of the regional builders are busy and prefer not to work in such a remote location. The result was that the committee decided to rebuild, hiring contractors and managing the work themselves. They met and built a solid partnership with **Danny Martinez and Heather Crow-Martinez**, who are very involved in the Warm Springs church. They also met with **Beverly Crow**, who chairs the Warm Springs Advisory Committee. They met with others in the church and in the community. People began to trust them and told them so.

The results are quite nice. The church and the tribes will be proud. The new energy-efficient heating system also cools. New energy-efficient lighting and appliances will cost less to operate. The manse also features insulated windows and a fresh coat of paint throughout. The project seems to be coming in on budget!

A live-in tribal member will watch over the property until a new minister arrives. Once needs are determined, furniture and cleaning supply donations will be encouraged. Landscaping and other work parties will be encouraged, but they will need to be self-managed – people at the church are just too busy trying to get the everyday business of the church done to be able to manage work projects. Stay tuned for opportunities to participate in work parties and to contribute furniture and supplies.

Many thanks to the Trustees, and particularly to those on the Property Management Committee. Now the people of the Warm Springs church can focus on finding their next pastor – the right one for them. Best wishes for the future of your ministry.



GOD'S WORK NOT LIMITED TO A BUILDING

Dianna Weston | Northwest Region Reporter

Just as many mainline churches have done, the leadership of **Mt. Scott PC (Portland)** looked at the deferred maintenance on their 100 year-old building, and at their diminishing volunteer pool fatigue and started a revitalization plan.

Then along came COVID. Sound familiar? Churches learned how to provide online services, with the result that post-COVID folks had gotten used to not coming to church. Also, members who were very active 10 years ago had become homebound or moved closer to extended family.

These developments, along with increasing facilities maintenance expenses and a non-ADA compliant building, led **Pastor Sue Van Stelle** and Mt. Scott's Session to realize that pouring resources into the building would conflict with achieving their community mission. One thought was to rent unused space, but again, post-pandemic, more people were working remotely, so there was little to no demand there.

It made more sense to pool resources with another congregation than to stay. So, about a year ago, the Mt. Scott Session initiated informal meetings with **Oak Hills PC** in Milwaukie. The elders of both got together informally several times, which resulted in a proposal to the congregation in early May 2025. That led to a joint worship service, with the Oak Hills pastor, **Christy Polk** and Pastor Sue co-preaching, both choirs singing together, and a lunch after the service.



Mt. Scott members pray over Pastor Sue at their final worship service on August 31, 2025

The congregations agreed to merge. Then it was approved at the June Presbytery meeting. The last service at Mt. Scott was held on August 31st. The newly merged congregation held their first service together on September 7th..

When two congregations merge, there are Presbytery guidelines to follow, but Mt. Scott will still have a say in where their funds will go. The good news for Oak Hills is that some of those funds will be used to pay off the Oak Hills mortgage. They have also designated a portion to the Warm Springs Church and to Barbie's Village in Portland.

Pastor Sue joined the Presbyterian ministry after a career in education. When she answered a need for a children's ministry director at her Presbyterian Church in Nebraska a number of years ago, Sue began to discern how God might be calling her to use her gifts of teaching and leadership to serve the church in other ways.

As she says, "I wanted to see God at work." At this particular crossroads, she shares that the "spiritual lights will still be on, even though the old Mt. Scott building will go dark."

These are faithful, spiritually alive people who still have God's work to do, wherever and whenever that may be.



MSPPC Choir in worship



A SEASON OF GROWTH IN MILL CITY

Dennis A. Smith | Central Region Reporter

Welcoming eight new members into your 50-member church this year is a big deal. That is on top of four added last year, and more new members in the wings.

This, in a town of 2,128 in Central Oregon. We are talking about **Mill City PC**, nestled in the foothills of the Cascades on the banks of the North Santiam River.



“We take worship seriously, but not a whole lot else,” joke Dan and Ruth Lemke. “Our mission is loving people, not judging them.” Dan and Ruth are relative newcomers to the community, having lived here “only” 30 years.

The Fellowship Hall is almost empty now, but just minutes ago 30 people were gathered around the tables sharing good food and good conversation as part of Café Connection, the meal for seniors offered on Tuesdays and Thursdays at the church. In addition, Mill City’s food cupboard serves 40-50 families each week and hosts an after-school program for 35-40 3rd-5th graders from the nearby elementary school. After the local library burned down a decade ago, Mill City invited the library board to set up shop in available space on their campus.



This reporter chats with Dan & Ruth Lemke and Rev. LaVonne Alexander

A relaxed hospitality imbues Mill City. They understand that space created in common by neighbors serving neighbors is sacred space. Back in 2020, a forest fire exploded overnight from 500 to more than 100,000 acres, devastating Gates, the next town down the road. Everybody in town has a story about that fire’s destruction, but also about how the communities were able to come together in a time of crisis.

We move to Rev. Alexander’s office to continue our conversation. “When I graduated from seminary, I thought I knew just about everything, and I spent a lot of time just trying to straighten people out. But I’ve learned that my job is not to tell people what to think, but just to love them up. That’s what we try to do together at Mill City, as best we can.

“We’ve had to adjust to one another. I’m a pseudo-Catholic when it comes to liturgy, but I’m not big on dogma. I feel like God has called me here to serve this loving, welcoming, embracing, non-judgmental community. Because that’s where I am and that’s where this congregation is. The Holy Spirit brought us together.

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“I deeply believe that each of us in this community is on their own journey, and our task is to love one another, accompany one another, wherever we are. Our Reformed understanding is that God is the instigator of everything; even our desire to be found comes from God.

“This congregation called me to help them deepen the church’s engagement in the community. We have done that together. Our members, even though some are now in their 80s or older, can still lead our programs and maintain our campus. Our people are connected to all kinds of local groups that multiply our ability to serve Mill City, from the community chorus to service clubs to the library.

“When I came three years ago, this congregation was already flowing along with the community, just like the North Santiam River. They’ve been here for 130 years. I just jumped onto my paddleboard and merged into the stream.”



*Rev. LaVonne Alexander, Mill City
PC*

RECENT TRANSITIONS IN CASCADES PRESBYTERY

New Pastors

- The Rev. Karin Hejmanowski has transferred her membership from Presbytery of San Jose
- The Rev. Joshua Kim has transferred his membership from Seattle Presbytery
- The Rev. Steve Klump has transferred his membership from Olympia Presbytery
- The Rev. John Carrick has transferred his membership to Cascades to begin serving as head of staff at Corvallis, First in October

Installations/Commissioning

- CRE Mark Dobney was commissioned at Pioneer PC, Warrenton on Sunday, August 31
- The Rev. Scott Dalgarno was installed at Southminster PC, Beaverton on May 25, 2025
- The Rev. Junha Kim was installed at Westminster PC, Portland on June 8, 2025

Passings

- The Rev. Gregory Scott Tatman passed away on June 4, 2025
- The Rev. Donald Herbert Frank passed away on July 17, 2025

Pastoral Changes

- The Revs. Wendy & Mark Olson have completed their service to Community PC, Waldport
- The Rev. Laurie Newman is the new Interim Pastor at Rise Church, Tigard
- The Rev. Phil Brown is now serving at Community PC, Redmond
- The Rev. Carmen Goetschius ended her service to First Pres, Portland on July 1, 2025
- The Rev. Susan McDougall has completed her service to Kenilworth PC, Portland
- The Rev. Scott Crane will end his service to First, Corvallis on August 31.
- CRE Buck Tohill ended his service to United PC, Reedsport on August 31.

Retirements

- The Rev. Dwayne Brown will retire effective September 30, 2025
- The Rev. Jeannine Graham was granted Retired status effective July 29, 2025
- The Rev. Bill Syrios was granted Retired status as of June 18, 2025
- Carol Prichard was granted Retired status on July 10, 2025
- John Maynard was granted Retired status as of June 19, 2025



JOIN US FOR OUR FALL STATED MEETING!

DATE: October 24-25, 2025

LOCATION: Westminster Presbyterian Church (Salem)

We are looking forward to seeing you in October for an in-person presbytery meeting. While we are always grateful to meet together, it is always a rich experience to be physically together as one body, united in Jesus Christ. Keep an eye on the weekly *Cascades Connections* for updates!



The Omnibus is published four 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 Danny Peters, Communications Manager.

Email: communications@potc.org

Omnibus retains permission to modify submissions for clarity and space limitations.

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