



NEWSLETTER HIGHLIGHTS

HELPING OTHERS SEE GOD AT WORK

Brian Craker | Transitional Executive Presbyter



Last month, I was catching a late flight home from a denominational meeting in Louisville. We learned about the possibility of seeing the Northern Lights, which I had never witnessed firsthand. I was lucky enough to have been upgraded to a window seat near the front of the plane (thank you, Alaska Airlines, for the extra legroom!). It wasn't long after takeoff that I found myself looking regularly out my tiny window toward the north as the skies continued to darken, wondering what, if anything, I might observe. Seeing nothing at first, other than the beautiful lights coming from the city of Chicago, I decided to pull open my laptop and try to catch up on some email while waiting for darker skies.

We were about two hours into the flight when I closed my computer and found myself looking out the window to the north. It took a bit for my eyes to adjust from the ambient light inside the plane, but off in the distance I could see...something. At first, it looked like a gray haze on the horizon, moving like the wind. *"Could that be it?"* I wondered? Then I remembered that sometimes a camera can make the Northern Lights visible if the storm isn't strong enough. So, I pulled out my iPhone, set it to "night mode" and success! While the first couple of photos were blurry, it was clear my camera was picking up the lights in a way my eyes could not yet. I continued to play with the camera settings and time delay until I finally had this first clear photo. Where at first my eyes could only see gray, the camera showed green lights dancing, and a beautiful red backdrop against the constellation of the Big Dipper.

"Is that the Northern Lights?" I looked up to see a flight attendant pointing to my phone. I nodded, and she asked if she could see the photo I had taken. "How did you get your phone to take that so clearly? They're always blurry on my phone when I try to capture them." Others seated around us nodded as well, so I began explaining the settings I used for my photo.



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Before long, cell phones were pressed against airplane windows, each trying to capture on a screen what our eyes could only faintly see as shadows in the distance. Others asked if we could share photos that had already been taken. Then our flight attendant went to the front of the plane to turn off all the cabin lights for better viewing, and that is when we could finally begin to see the Northern Lights with our own eyes. Two hours later, the lights had drawn close enough that they looked like they were dancing just off our wingtips. On a flight that was only 75% full, people began rotating seats so others could have a moment in a window seat to enjoy the lights for themselves.

If I hadn't been intentional about looking for signs of the Northern Lights, I might have missed them at first. The glory of God was on display around us, but at first it took a "special lens" to help bring the majesty of the lights into focus amidst the other light pollution, both inside and outside the plane. Doesn't it feel like we need that in everyday life as well sometimes? We know that God is not bound to work solely inside church buildings, but rather that God is always at work in the world. Sometimes that work is bold and undeniable, but most of the time it's simple and reticent, easy to miss against the hustle and bustle of life. Not unlike in Luke 2, when Joseph brought his wife and newborn son into the temple for dedication and redemption according to the law. A typical sight on any typical day. They likely weren't the only young family walking into the temple courts to fulfill the law. But the Spirit gave a "special lens" to Simeon so he could see that Emmanuel had just entered the temple courts, and when Joseph, in his own act of faith, handed the infant Savior into the arms of this old saint, all that were present were blessed with words of peace, hope, and prophecy (Luke 2:28-35).



I believe God is at work all around us, sometimes in the miraculous, but mostly in the margins. We know the fruit of that work, but sometimes it is difficult to capture those moments against the immense pressures of life these days. Our communities desperately need to hear and see where God is at work around them now more than ever, and I believe that the church is called to do just that. This Advent Season, my prayer is for the Spirit to open our eyes in new and fresh ways...to stir within us, quieting our eyes and hearts so we can take notice of when God might be moving in the shadows. I am praying for the Spirit to give us that "special lens" so we can begin to see more clearly the beauty of God's work, and then turn and share that view with others. Just as my plane was transformed from a quiet everyday flight into a small community buzzing about the beauty of God's glory in the Northern Lights, I believe our communities can experience those same moments when we ask the Spirit to help us see and share the beauty of God at work in the world around us.





NORTHWEST REGION

FIRST, PORTLAND AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS TEAM UP FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Dianna Weston | Northwest Region Reporter

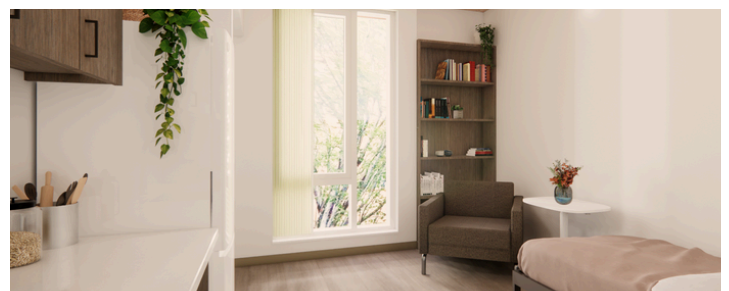
In September 2024, Rev. Heidi Bolt, Interim Pastor for Portland, First, arrived just as construction was beginning on the new Julia West House.

The house was named in memory of Julia West Lindsley, wife of the church's first installed pastor, the Reverend Aaron Lindsley. Reverend Lindsley served First Presbyterian from 1868 to 1886. Julia was the author of home training curriculums for early Sunday schools, established the first Women's Missionary Society on the west coast, raised six children, and worked alongside her husband helping the Chinese immigrant community, including women escaping human trafficking.

After she was widowed, she was a faithful member of the congregation for many years. After she died in 1905, the building that sat on the corner SW 13th and Alder was named for her. That building housed mission efforts of the church for many decades, including refugee housing through the Sponsors Organized to Assist Refugees (a program of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon), the home of Operation Nightwatch in downtown Portland, and a similar program for hospitality to the unhoused during the day. Later, the Julia West House became the home of GED programs and a men's clothing center called Best Foot Forward. Eventually, the broad array of services decreased as other agencies evolved, certain public funding disappeared, and the congregation became less able to support the activities while trying to maintain a building that was over 125 years old. By early 2018, Best Foot Forward had become independent and relocated. Although First Presbyterian provided over \$30,000 per year in

mission support to Julia West House, the cost of operations and repairs had far exceeded that amount. In April 2018, after lengthy discussion and consideration, the First Presbyterian Session determined the best course of action would be to redevelop the property, lease it out, or sell it outright.

The Julia West Task Force was created to pursue the repurposing of the property. In the summer of 2018, the Task Force issued a request for proposals to 11 organizations (both non-profit and business corporations) engaged in the development of low-income housing. **Community Development Partners (CDP)** was selected to act as the developer of what is now designed to be 90 units of permanent supportive housing (PSH) for low-income residents.



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Construction is now complete, and CDP has begun taking in residents. A large banner proclaims: “*Welcome Neighbors.*” The church outreach committee is adding to that welcome by assembling bags of day-to-day essentials, such as toilet paper, dish soap, and the like.

Julia West House will provide 90 fully furnished permanent supportive housing (PSH) units—60 studios and 30 one-bedrooms—for houseless elders and BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Color) individuals earning 30% or less of the Portland Metro median income. Residents will enjoy a community room, lounge area, communal kitchen, rooftop patio, laundry facilities, and secure bike parking. Offices for property management, resident services, and case management are located onsite.

Mai Huynh-Carnes, CDP’s Senior Development Manager summarized, “We’re thrilled about this building and excited to welcome residents who are already moving in—showing that environmentally responsible design can also create vibrant, livable communities.”

As for the First Presbyterian congregation, a church display in the chapel narthex says it all: “We are proud to see her name on the new affordable housing complex built on that lot. We think Julia would be pleased, too.”

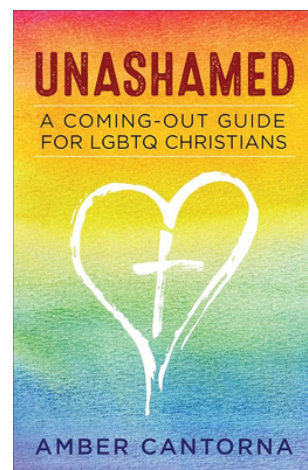


Rev. Audrey Schindler

RESOURCES FOR REPRESENTATION

Joe Igla | Member, Committee on Representation

At a time when LGBTQ populations face divisive attacks from both within and outside the Church, this book stands as a valuable resource. Navigating the relationship between one's identity and faith can be an extremely painful process, and I know firsthand as a transgender Christian myself. This book is full of guidance that I wish I had condensed in a single volume ten years ago! Within its pages is advice on how a believer can not just build their own affirming community, but also share their identity with loved ones and their own existing community in a way that is authentic and respects personal boundaries. The book is an easy-to-read resource for building communication skills and helps the reader construct an authentic expression of identity that is grounded in hope, courage, and personal respect. I consider the guidance in this book to be indispensable for a believer who wants to practice community-building as their faithful, genuine self, but I would also recommend it as reading for believers who have had loved ones come out to them and want to know more about the LGBTQ experience from an affirming Christian perspective. As a member of COR, I would highly recommend churches keep a copy of this book in their libraries as a resource on-hand for such circumstances as a congregant navigating their own identity, or one needing information about how to affirm or understand better their LGBTQ siblings in the faith. Highly recommended!





A WORD FROM OUR PASTORAL SUPPORT TEAM

Kelly Dickson | COM Pastoral Support Team Lead

For many of us, December feels sacred and mysterious, yet also chaotic and exhausting.

As pastors and faith leaders, we feel the weightiness of this season as we hold these dark days leading to the dawn of the long-awaited birth of Christ before our congregations, trusting God's Spirit to do the work that only God can do to bring a "thrill of hope." But we also feel some unspoken pressure to offer fresh meaningful reflections on familiar passages. There are extra services to coordinate, visitors to plan for, and events to organize. The season of Advent is both wonderful and wearying.

Adding to our weariness is the underlying push toward material consumerism. Whether spoken directly or woven subtly into countless holiday advertisements, the question "What do you want for Christmas?" echoes throughout the month of December. We ask it of the people we love as we search for meaningful gifts, we hear the mall Santa pose it to children waiting eagerly to share their Christmas lists, and we're reminded of it each time Mariah Carey's "All I Want for Christmas" plays on repeat. This December, I wonder if we might consider a different question.

In my work with pastors and faith leaders, one of the questions I often ask is, "***As someone serving in ministry, what do you feel you need most?***" I ask this question because the answer helps us get to the heart of what Jesus was pursuing when he similarly asked: "*What is it you want me to do for you?*" (John 1:38, Mark 10:36, Matthew 20:32, Mark 10:51, Luke 18:41). Good questions help us name what it is we truly desire and what is going on in our souls. Some of the answers I have gotten to this question are:

- A caring community that doesn't view me solely as a giver or leader.
- The energy to keep going.
- In this season, I need a space away from leading—somewhere I can rest and hear the Lord speak through others.
- How to ask others to help.
- Conversation and feedback around how to live out of the overflow of the Spirit, not just pouring out of ourselves and finding us empty.
- Support, affirmation, rest, collegiality.
- Space to disconnect and reconnect well, help setting boundaries and not compare myself to others because I don't feel that I measure up.
- Connection with others who get what it is like to be a pastor. I need rest and retreat.

As I live into this new (to me) position of Pastoral Support Lead for our presbytery, I am focused on your answers to this question, "As a person in ministry, what do you feel you need most?" If you would be willing to answer that question, I invite you to complete this [brief two question survey](#). I am currently gathering a team around me to create opportunities where some of these needs might be met...but the truth is, the needs and longings are endless. My prayer is that somewhere within these weeks ahead, you find a moment to breathe, to name your true needs before God, and to receive again the quiet hope of Christ who meets us right where we are.





PRINEVILLE PC RECEIVES TECHNOLOGY GRANT FROM CASCADES PRESBYTERY

Dennis A. Smith | Central Region Reporter

Priscilla Smith serves as Stated Clerk of Prineville Presbyterian: “Our pastor retired not long ago, and as we began the search process, our Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) noted that any possible candidates would want to check us out.



Prineville Presbyterian Church

“Where could candidates go to learn how we are present in the community? What’s going on at our church? We are active in our community, supporting the local food bank and unhoused students. We work ecumenically. But someone looking at us from afar wouldn’t know that.

“Without a current website or social media presence, current information just wasn’t available.

“We also understood that newcomers to Prineville looking for a church – we’re a growing community of 12,000 people and the county seat

of Crook County – will go on-line to see what is available. There are 30 churches here and we’re located two miles outside of town, so new folks wouldn’t drive past us every day. We need to increase our visibility in the community.

“Our PNC chair heard that the Presbytery offers Technology Grants so I, as Clerk of Session, checked it out, applied for a grant to build a website, and our application was approved!

“We live-stream our Sunday service. A website will allow us to broadcast our worship service directly and offer viewers easy access to an archive. The site will also have news, a history of the church, a donation link, our monthly calendar, and a copy of our monthly newsletter. We’ll be able to include all the usual stuff that you find on a basic website.

“When we asked for bids, we stipulated that our website builder must also take charge of registering a domain name for us and provide training so we can maintain the site ourselves.



Emilou Ely and Marcia Lesch at the Prineville Autumn Fest fundraiser



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“I know some small churches are afraid to tackle this kind of project. Technology can be intimidating! But a Tech Grant can include a training component. I’m sure that a website can increase your visibility in the community.

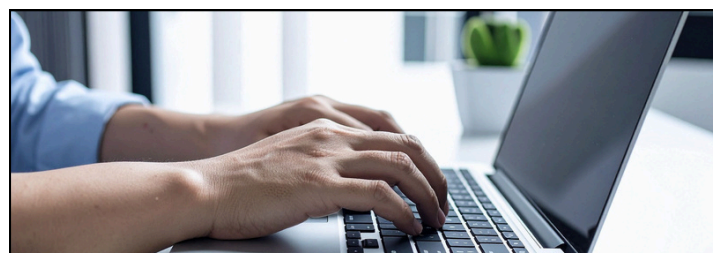
“Churches that have no website may be saying something about themselves, and perhaps not what they intended.”

Eileen Sheelar is the chair of the **Communication and Technology Team (CATT)** for the presbytery. She also serves as a ruling elder at **John Knox PC in Keizer**. She’s a former Moderator of POTC and a current member of the Presbytery Leadership Commission.

“There are two large PC(USA) churches in nearby Salem,” notes Eileen. “We are the small church here in nearby Keizer. We’ve found that some people prefer small churches. As a small church, we make ourselves visible in our community through our mission. But we also recognized that we needed a webpage to heighten our presence.

“As a member of a small church,” comments Eileen, “I understand how important it is not only to help small churches stay afloat, but also to help them keep up with technology.

“The Tech Grants offered by Presbytery are designed to help small churches heighten their visibility and make it easier for all people to participate in church activities. Grants can be for up to \$4000 and the applying church is expected to pay 10 percent of the total cost. Churches are expected to provide an accounting of the expenses within a year. If a church has unexpected delays, we can negotiate an extension.



“The process is straightforward: The [application](#) tells us who you are, what you propose, and should include a bid.

“Tech grants aren’t just for websites. It could be for a new sound system, a large screen TV or projector to help in worship or Christian Education. Some churches have needed security systems, hearing assistance systems, or a laptop for the office. Some need to provide simultaneous interpretation into sign language or Spanish or Korean.

“We’re here to help you reach out to their community and make your activities more accessible to your members.

“We won’t make a grant if you don’t have people trained to operate the technology. That’s why we often suggest that churches ask vendors to include a training component in their bids. But we also suggest that a local church reach out to local grandkids and high school students to help them get up and running.

“Tech grants aren’t just for small churches. We treat applications from all churches equally. We know that being larger doesn’t necessarily mean that a church has available financial resources.

“The review process is quick. We can usually consider the application and respond with a check within 2-3 months. We know that once a church builds the momentum to jump into the deep end of the tech pool, it’s important to provide the resources as quickly as we can.”



MORELAND PC BECOMING A COMMUNITY CENTER FOR THE ARTS

Pat Berger | Northeast Region Reporter

If one spends much time around **Moreland Presbyterian Church** in SE Portland, one will hear a lot of very fine music! And it isn't only the people at Moreland who are making music.



Over the years, the church has partnered with their local neighborhood association, SMILE (Sellwood-Moreland Improvement League). One of SMILE's annual events is their summer concert series. When they were in need of a location to host the series last summer, their music event coordinator asked the church if they could host it in their parking lot. The church enthusiastically agreed, and for six weeks in July and August, they hosted a wide variety of musical artists from Portland and beyond.

Volunteers from Moreland PC and SMILE teamed up to set up tables and chairs, (most brought portable chairs), the stage and sound equipment, and provided hospitality for all. Community groups sponsored each concert. Non-profits were encouraged to display information and opportunities to volunteer. Attendance averaged 200, with a couple of the concerts attracting at least 250 people!

According to **Pastor Brian Marsh**, beautiful music filled their neighborhood, and rather than receiving noise complaints, neighbors joined in the fun by listening and dancing, and even helping with clean up. It was clearly, he said, "a case of church and neighborhood working together as one joyful village." He even mentioned that SMILE has already reached out to the church to host again next summer!

Over the past few years, Moreland has evolved into a community center for the arts. They are the anchor location in SE Portland for the educational programs of the Oregon Repertory Singers for students K-12. Every Wednesday during the academic year, approximately 150 students find their way to Moreland to participate and fill the whole church property with glorious singing. Moreland also serves as a performance venue for Classical Up Close, a non-profit created by musicians from the Oregon Symphony who offer free community-based chamber music performances each spring. For the past three years, they have hosted the last of their performances for their season, and they are due to host that final performance this next season.



Neighborhood concerts in the Moreland PC parking lot

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These concerts always fill the sanctuary to capacity (and last year, *beyond* capacity with people sitting in the chancel behind the musicians!). Each concert is informal in nature and includes a question-and-answer portion with the musicians. The Portland Metro Band and the Solid Brass Ensemble also perform and rehearse at Moreland. Additionally, they host fundraising community concerts to benefit some of their local mission and peacemaking partners, such as Transition Projects (Willamette Center shelter for women and their partners) and Mainspring PDX. Their space also welcomes local recitals for piano and vocal students.

And as if all of this weren't enough, Moreland recently celebrated its 140th anniversary as a congregation! A special brunch, worship, storytelling, and (of course) music made for a most festive Sunday. Congratulations, people of Moreland, and best wishes for your continued ministry!



RECENT TRANSITIONS IN CASCADES PRESBYTERY

New Pastors

- The Rev. Roger Rice transferred his membership from Baltimore Presbytery
- The Rev. Bill Humphreys transferred his membership from Santa Fe Presbytery
- The Rev. John Carrick began service to First, Corvallis on October 16
- CRE Dennis Smith began service to North Bend, First on July 1, 2025.

Necrology

- The Rev. Bruce Cameron passed away on October 18, 2025
- The Rev. Donald Frank passed away on July 17, 2025

Pastoral Changes

- The Rev. Brian Heron has transferred his membership to Twin Cities Presbytery
- The pastoral relationship between The Rev. Lisa Robeck and Tualatin PC was dissolved on November 2, 2025

Installations/Commissioning

- Char Mace was installed at Camas, St. John's on Sunday, November 23.

Retirements

- The Rev. Scott Dalgarno retired from service on December 1, 2025
- The Rev. Scott Peterson will retire at the end of 2025.



2026 BRINGS CHANGES TO PC(USA) SPECIAL OFFERINGS

At our November stated meeting, we celebrated our presbytery's generous support of **PC(USA) Special Offerings**. In fact, Cascades is the highest giving presbytery to Special Offerings nationwide!



Historically, the denomination has collected four offerings throughout the year: One Great Hour of Sharing, Pentecost, Peace and Global Witness, and Christmas Joy. However, beginning in 2026, the PC(USA) is making significant changes to Special Offerings. The following is from **Rev. Wilson Kennedy**, Associate Director of Special Offerings & Appeals:

The 226th General Assembly (2024) approved several changes to the churchwide Special Offerings to take effect January 1, 2026. These changes were recommended by the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board through the Special Offerings Review Task Force. Thanks to members of the Task Force for their creative work.

The biggest change you will note is a new lineup of offerings:

- One Great Hour of Sharing
- World Communion Offering
- Christmas Joy Offering

That means:

1. **The Pentecost Offering will be discontinued after the 2025 Offering.** However, all current recipient causes will continue to be funded through the churchwide Special Offerings. Specifically, ministries focused on children-at-risk, youth, and young adults will now be part of the Christmas Joy Offering.
2. **The Peace & Global Witness Offering will transform into the World Communion Offering beginning in 2026.** Through 2025, congregations and mid councils are invited to retain a percentage of gifts from their Pentecost and Peace & Global Witness Offerings. In 2026, there will be a new grant-making program to support local and regional ministries.
3. **Overall, causes, rather than programs will receive funds as determined by leadership of the future unified agency.** This does not mean currently funded programs will no longer receive funding. Broadening the scope of funding areas will invite more congregations, mid councils, and individuals to support the churchwide Special Offerings while discovering new ways to do God's work in the world.

Over the next year, we will be redefining the Special Offerings experience to encompass this new direction. Be on the lookout for occasional updates on this process while continuing to receive resources, communication, and opportunities for the current schedule of Offerings.



SPECIAL OFFERINGS



SAVE THE DATE FOR 2026 PRESBYTERY MEETINGS!



January 29, 2026: Online Meeting

April 24-25, 2026: In-person meeting at
Vancouver, First

June 18, 2026: Online Meeting

October 23-24, 2026: In-person meeting at
First, North Bend

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