



## THE CONNECTIONAL CHURCH: FINANCIAL STRENGTH

**Brian Craker | Transitional Executive Presbyter**

In my first two years as your Transitional Executive Presbyter, I have been exploring and sharing the power of being the Connectional Church, and how our theology and polity as Presbyterians bonds us together as the Body of Christ in a way that truly makes us stronger together. In past articles and presentations, I've shared examples of how our Presbytery of the Cascades (POTC) churches have worked together to provide local support in emergencies, or to share in mission projects that benefit communities and even larger regions. This time I want to pull the lens back much further and share an example of the Connectional Church that most are not aware of but has had a significant positive effect on many of our POTC churches for decades. As always, I begin my example with a story...

On February 22, 2026, the congregation of **Westminster Presbyterian Church Salem** gathered for a special celebration...the burning of the mortgage! Over a decade earlier, this congregation began dreaming of an expansion to their campus, of adding a multi-purpose space near the front of their building. This multi-use space was meant to not only be a place where the congregation could gather for their events, but was also meant to be a blessing of space that could serve the greater community. Boulder Hall (aptly named because of the massive boulders that were displaced as part of the project) was eventually built and has been the very blessing they dreamed it would be, including serving as both meal and meeting space for our Fall 2025 Presbytery Meeting (thank you again WPC-Salem for being such amazing hosts!)

The Boulder Hall project at WPC-Salem may not have happened had it not been for a church loan from the **Synod of the Pacific**. As you remember, a synod is the super-regional governing body that oversees multiple presbyteries in our denomination. The Synod of the Pacific covers POTC and Eastern Oregon, as well as the presbyteries in Idaho, Nevada, Northern and Central California. Our Synod works primarily as a Savings and Loan, providing critical funding for congregations in need of building and emergency loans, while also offering competitive short and long-term investment vehicles for both churches and presbyteries.

Why is this important? Has your church ever tried to walk into a bank to get a loan for a construction project, or a line of credit to help pay for a new roof or HVAC replacement?

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Most banks don't know how to assess a loan application from a church or non-profit, and thus yield a high rejection rate. But the Synod of the Pacific works exclusively with our regional PC(USA) churches and New Worshipping Communities, so they understand our needs inside and out. They are able to process most loans quickly and get our churches exactly what they need. It is a perfect example of being the Connectional Church...the Church helping with the needs of local churches so they can continue to live into their mission and live out the Gospel in their communities. POTC churches have been especially blessed by the Synod of the Pacific, obtaining loans for construction projects including new sanctuaries, new roofs, emergency electrical repair, even Green Loans for solar and earth-friendly projects. And in most cases, Synod loans come in at or below market rate!

“But where does the Synod get the money to loan out to churches?” Yet another amazing example of being the Connectional Church! Because they are a Savings and Loan, dollars that are invested in the various Synod investment vehicles allows the Synod to then loan dollars back into the church. The Synod offers competitive rates on various short and long-term investment options, but because there are no corporate overhead or shareholders to pay, administrative fees are often far lower than commercial investments, and every dollar stays within our denomination. Even the interest paid

on church loans stays within the Synod, and a portion is gifted back to our presbyteries and churches in grant dollars. Many of our POTC churches have investments with the Synod, and our Presbytery has over \$1million of our assets invested with them as well. The more dollars we have in investments with the Synod, the more they can offer in loans to churches when the need arises.

Warren Buffet famously said that the best investment you can make is in yourself. I believe that is true for us as well. When the Connectional Church invests in itself, we all become stronger financially, and in turn, can provide critical support in times of need. WPC-Salem was able to raise enough funds to not only pay off their loan early (and celebrate with a mortgage burning celebration), but also to invest in their future. Their dollars into the Synod of the Pacific Savings and Loan now allows them to be a future blessing to another PC(USA) church in our region. The same is true for all who have participated and benefitted from these savings and loan programs. To all of our POTC congregations who have paid off, or are still paying their loans, please know that your faithfulness will become a future blessing to a sister PC(USA) congregation. To all of our POTC congregations who have investments with our Synod, please know that you are helping provide financial strength to many sister PC(USA) congregations. Together, we share yet another example of the beauty that is the Connectional Church.





## KENILWORTH AT WORK

Pat Berger | Northeast Region Reporter

The newsletter at Kenilworth Presbyterian Church is called, “Kenilworth at Work!” After reading the newsletter and having a conversation with member Barbara Votrobeck, it is easy to envision that title!



One of the projects that keeps people busy is their preschool. Since Multnomah County went to free preschool for all, the school at Kenilworth isn't quite as big as it was. Now, instead of having a class for four-year-olds and a class for three-year-olds, there is one class for three- and four-year-olds. It is a co-op, and thus parents of the children take turns helping in the class--each day there is one teacher and two parents. There are ten parents on the board of the preschool, and each one has a particular responsibility. This spring, they are hosting a monthly open house and tours for prospective parents.

Kenilworth will also rent space to an art literacy academy this summer. KPC and the neighboring community center ran a music and art camp, which ended with the pandemic.

KPC is also an Earth Care Congregation. They are a collection site for various plastics, electronics, straws, twist-on bottle caps, wine bottle corks – things that aren't permitted in people's home

recycling bins. Also, as part of this program, the church does not use paper plates. All napkins and tablecloths used at the church are fabric. The PC(USA) has a process for churches to complete before becoming Earth Care Congregations, and Kenilworth has done that and continues in the program. Each month, someone on the Earth Care team writes an informational article for their newsletter – everyone is learning about caring for God's good earth.

“Groceries for Grout” is their effort to feed their neighbors. Grout is the name of the elementary school close to the church. Last month, they fed over 2,300 people! They receive groceries from the Oregon Food Bank, New Seasons (Woodstock), QFC-Westmoreland, City Team Ministries, and other donors, in addition to buying some food. For January, 38 volunteers (from the church and other places) put in 435 hours to make all of this happen. The food bank is open on Fridays. The set-up begins at 11:00 in the morning—food is set out, and at noon people start going through the line. They are open for about two hours and serve up to 170 people during that time.

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*Members of the KPC Community*



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Within the church, their women's group meets on the third Saturday of the month from September through May. They use the denominational women's study, and the women take turns leading the study. And there is "Souper Hot Topic," which also meets once a month. Someone in the church finds an article in the news, and a group of eight to ten gathers for a soup dinner and conversation. This has been put on hold during Lent while they meet weekly for a Lenten dinner and study (this year, they are studying Paul). Usually about 18 come for this study.

Like most churches, Kenilworth is busy during Lent with special services and studies. The Sunday after Easter is known as "Bright Sunday." Sometimes called Holy Humor Sunday, this is an ancient tradition that uniquely celebrates the resurrection of Jesus—the supreme "joke" God played on Satan. This was started by Pastor Emeritus David Jewel and inspired by Rev. Bud Frimoth. This year, the service will be called "Paul Comes to Portland" and Pastor Jewel will be writing the script for the day. There is a time called "Dock Talk," during which two men tell "dad jokes." There is also an open mic time for people from the congregation to tell church appropriate jokes!

We could all get much inspiration from what is happening at Kenilworth Presbyterian Church – and all of this as they are beginning the process to search for their next Pastor. Blessings, Kenilworth, as you move forward in faith!

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## RECENT TRANSITIONS IN CASCADES PRESBYTERY

### New Pastors

The Rev. Craig Roberts (Honorably Retired) transferred his membership from San Jose Presbytery.

The Rev. John Yu (Columbia, Vancouver) transferred his membership from Denver Presbytery.

### Installations/Commissioning

Buck Tohill will be commissioned at Community PC, Lakeside on March 15, 2026.

The Rev. John Carrick was installed as Pastor of Corvallis, First on January 11, 2026.

### Necrology

The Rev. Susan Grewe passed away on December 31, 2025.

The Rev. John Braund passed away on February 23, 2026.

The Rev. Rob Elder passed away on February 14, 2026.

### Pastoral Changes

#### St. Andrew's, Portland

- The Rev. Sarah Sanderson-Doughty ended her service on February 15, 2026. The Rev. Amy Delany is now serving as Bridge Pastor.

#### Portland, First PC

- The Rev. Heidi Bolt completed her interim service and is now serving as Ministry Relations Officer with the Presbyterian Foundation.
- The Rev. Joan Miller is now serving as Interim Pastor.
- The Rev. Andrew Wall is now serving as Associate Pastor of Spiritual Formation.

The Rev. Scott Crane will begin his service to Dallas, First on March 2, 2026.

The Rev. Kelly Dickson is now serving as Bridge Pastor at Oak Hills, Milwaukie.

### Retirements

- The Rev. Lori Hedlund
- The Rev. Ken Henry
- The Rev. Graig Flaich will retire from Lake Grove PC on Sunday, April 30, 2026.
- The Rev. Greg Wood (Community PC, Florence) retired from service on March 1, 2026.



## HAVE TENT, WILL TRAVEL: A CONVERSATION WITH STEVE HAMMOND

Dennis A. Smith | Central Region Reporter

Steve Hammond is now retired...sort of. In his years in Cascades Presbytery, he has accompanied and energized many of the churches in the Central Region. I caught up with Steve via Zoom at his home in Albany to review his years of ministry.



### *What have you learned about small churches?*

I've always found in small churches a strong sense of belonging and mutual service that extends to the larger community. Every small church I have served has always been vitally connected to whatever is going on in that community, contributing to the well-being of the larger whole. Small churches make a difference!

### *Tell us how you got started in ministry.*

I've been a tent-making minister all my career. I started out as a minister of Christian Education in a large church in San Diego. Then, with the support of the PC(USA)'s Major Mission Fund, we had a chance to go to Bovill, ID, population 289. From a congregation of 1800, we moved to a congregation of 13 that had been without a resident pastor for 50 years. We were a young

family with two kids, and that church slowly grew to 48 members.

From there, I returned to school to complete my training as a Physician's Assistant (PA). We had learned in Bovill that a church that size would never be able to support a full-time minister with a family. Two years later, we returned to Bovill to practice medicine and continue serving that congregation.

My supervising physician moved, so we moved north to St Maries, ID. I did pulpit supply there, and then we moved to Spokane where I taught family medicine. There I did interim work at two small churches, but I wanted to return to more active involvement in the life of a congregation.

We moved to Alpena, Michigan and spent more than 11 years there. The church had space available and opened a free clinic. I was at that clinic for 8 years and had 3000 patients, filling a critical need for healthcare in that community.

In 2014, we were able to take advantage of new services offered by Obamacare that allowed many of those patients to access broader health services. That allowed me to retire...sort of.

We followed our kids back to the Pacific Northwest. We wanted to see mountains again! We've been here since 2015. I served as interim in Dallas, OR for two years and did regular pulpit supply in the region. Thankfully, Dallas now has a new stated supply pastor. That will give them more continuity than I could offer.

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*You mentioned that the church in Bovill had not had a resident pastor for 50 years. What is the role of the laity in small churches?*

It is critical! Unfortunately, sometimes a minister comes in and screws things up! I can think of one church with more than 50 members, lay led, with strong Bible study and music programs, and my advice to them as they interviewed pastoral candidates was to make sure whoever they called didn't try to undercut all that they had already achieved as lay leaders.

I think of a small church like McKenzie Valley. They now have only 10 members and are pastored by a Commissioned Ruling Elder (CRE). Yet they maintain their building, reach out to folks in need, host a mobile meals site, and offer a strong arts program to that town. All of that is lay driven.

*What about the sacraments in small churches like these?*

In my experience, small churches respect and value the sacraments. That's why it's important that elders be trained to serve communion. Sometimes, narrow sacramentalism can be a pretext for maintaining clericalism. But affirming the importance of lay leadership in celebrating the sacraments has revitalized the sacramental life of some small churches. We've become more flexible on these issues in recent years and I think we're starting to get it right, recognizing the need for more diversity and inclusion in our local churches.

*What training to lay leaders need to be protagonists in keeping small churches alive?*

Part of the challenge is that leaders in small

churches are also leaders in the larger community. I'm not sure that they always need to know the intricacies of the Book of Order. Polity is important, but it isn't the gospel! I've not spent time training elders in "churchiness". My focus has been on teaching leaders how to communicate more effectively, how to be a part of a team that performs concrete tasks like visiting people, and how to create an atmosphere of collegiality and community.

*What level of connection do people in small churches feel with the presbytery or the denomination?*

I especially appreciate some of the grants available to local churches. If a small church gets support and services from Presbytery, they aren't likely to become congregationalists.

We've also seen this post-COVID as churches once again reach out seeking ecumenical collaboration with other churches. I can think of one community where all the local churches worship together every 5th Sunday. As local churches join together, they can share together access to different denominational and community resources. They can also advocate together for important issues facing the community. I've found the Presbytery of the Cascades to be an important ally in this process.

*What else would you like to share with the Presbytery?*

Now that we are undergoing another re-visioning process, it would be useful to revisit the [Pneumatrix report](#), which summarizes some key learnings of the last re-visioning process. I'm at the end of my career and I want to pass the torch, not by proposing a return to the past, but by lifting up some ideas that have worked and continue to work.



## THE VALUE OF RELATIONSHIPS IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Dianna Weston | Northwest Region Reporter

Leslie Hanscom, recently retired Director of Community and Family Engagement for Valley Community Presbyterian Church, Portland, looked back at her experience there and realized that a lot of what she did and why she did it came out of mission and vision work in calling a new pastor, a process many of our churches are engaged in these days. She encourages churches to make sure their current mission statement reflects who they are and who they want to be going forward. In other words, what is your “why”?

“You can’t implement until you know where you’re hoping to go,” she says. “We all want to reach out to the next generation and be partners in our community,” she continues. “We’ll have to experiment. The place to start isn’t programs, but relationships—especially not for young people. They won’t come on Sundays unless you’ve created a meaningful relationship first.”

So, how to do that? Valley has had success in two major ways:

- They created strong relationships with their in-house, on-site preschool.
- They sponsored community-wide events.

Their neighborhood pumpkin festival attracted 200 people, almost all from the wider community, the preschool, or the immediate neighborhood. Other gatherings included a blessing of the animals, partnering with Raleigh Park Elementary School, and for the last two years they have hosted the school district’s regional Battle of the Books, which awarded Valley the Faith Partner of the Year award in 2025.

At the last book event, 435 people were welcomed through their doors. Valley provided



*Community Easter Celebration*

volunteers and didn’t charge for the space. Speaking of volunteers, the congregation boasts ten regular school volunteers at nearby Raleigh Park Elementary. Valley presents or participates in six community events a year. Outreach includes obtaining a calendar of community events and getting involved.

Some guideposts for successful community engagement are:

- Decide what your church is going to do with young families and connect so they’ll thrive.
- Engage your congregation on what is possible – embrace radical hospitality.

Valley also hosts a community choir for elementary school students and a family music class for younger children. During the family music class, songs, stories and musical games are enjoyed by children ages newborn through preschool, who are accompanied by a grown-up. This helps build community among the adults, in addition to the students.

Leslie concluded her thoughts with the observation that just as our church communities differ in geography and neighborhood make up, our bridges to connection will vary. The important starting point is to meet our neighbors where they are and engage them there.



## SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AS A MINISTRY RESOURCE

Offered by the Pastoral Support Team

### *Why Spiritual Direction or Spiritual Companionship?*

As a church leader, engaging in the practice of Spiritual direction will give you sustenance and support in your ministry.

Spiritual Direction is a relationship of companionship and trust where you can share your highs and lows, listening for the Holy Spirit's leading. A spiritual director will deeply attend to you, as you navigate the challenging and rich environments of work and family, make decisions, and seek to build healthy relationships. Over time, we become more attuned to God's presence and action, and often experience more clarity, meaning, and fulfillment in life and ministry.

### *Finding and Choosing a Spiritual Director*

Carefully review the qualifications of a potential spiritual director and decide if they are a cultural and spiritual fit for you. Each Spiritual Director has their own style of practice based on their personality, background, and training. Feel free to interview two or three people before choosing who to work with. Also, you may want to agree at the beginning of the relationship to evaluate how it is going after three or four months.

Your spiritual director should have received training and supervision from a reputable program, and agree to abide by the ethical guidelines of their denomination and Spiritual Directors International or another training institution--click [HERE](#) for more information.

While most people choose to have a Spiritual Director within their own faith tradition, it can be interesting to meet with someone with a different background (for example, a Presbyterian



choosing to work with a Franciscan priest). Ordained pastors often seek to work with other clergy, but many qualified lay people serve as spiritual directors.

Many Spiritual Directors work through Zoom, but some offer direction in person at their office or at a spirituality center. Expect that they charge a fee for their service; some offer a sliding scale. Pastors can often draw on their education fund to cover this fee.

### *Listings of Spiritual Directors*

Here are some resources for finding spiritual directors:

- [Spiritual Director International Directory](#): a wide range of Directors (SDI Members) meeting locally and by zoom.
- [Franciscan Spirituality Center, Lake Oswego](#) (There are protestant directors on staff).
- Spiritual Directors — [SoulFormation](#) - Vancouver-based training program focused on Ignatian Spirituality.
- [Interfaith Spiritual Center](#) – Spiritual Direction in Oregon
- [Companioning Center](#)

If you would like to learn more about spiritual direction or have any questions, feel free to contact Rev. Jan Reynolds (spiritual director), reynoldsjanicek@gmail.com. May your experience with Spiritual Direction be rewarding, enlightening, healing and supportive.



## SAVE THE DATE FOR 2026-27 PRESBYTERY MEETINGS!



- 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
- January 27, 2027:** Online Meeting
- April 2027:** In person, NW Region (Dates TBA)
- June 23, 2027:** Online Meeting

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

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