

CANDID CONVERSATIONS: TRANSITION TIMELINE UPDATE

Brian Craker | Transitional Executive Presbyter



“Are we still in transition, or are you now just our real exec?”

This was a question I was asked recently by one of our retired ministers at an HR luncheon gathering. The gentleman asking was honest and sincere. It seems like we’ve been talking about being “in transition” for some time. The answer I gave to him is the same answer I wish to give here: Yes...and no. Yes, we are still working through the steps of transition for our Presbytery, and no, as I was hired only as the Transitional Executive to lead this in-depth transition process. With summer 2026 marking the halfway point of my work, I would like to share a more in-depth look at where we are in our process, and what we can be looking forward to in the coming months.

We have been sharing periodic updates of our Presbytery Transition Timeline since my arrival as the Transitional Executive Presbytery (TEP). One of my critical roles as TEP is to help evaluate our current system and structure, then lead the effort to reimagine and restructure how we can function best as a Presbytery in modern times. Last Fall, we reported at our presbytery meeting hosted at Westminster Presbyterian Salem that we had completed the Evaluation and Triage portions of our work and were ready to begin the Mission Study phase of our transition (section listed in yellow).



Presbytery Transition Timeline

Evaluate

Triage

Mission Study

Design

Remodel

Implement

- Listening/Learning Sessions
- Discern current state of Presbytery

- Conflict Mediation
- Revise PLC Structure: Authoritative body to provide missional direction

- Info Gathering: Identify current/future needs of churches & ministers
- PLC: Clarify Purpose, Values, Vision and Priorities for future

- Study restructuring options; reevaluate everything from regions, commissions/teams, final PLC structure, funding against identified needs and priorities.
- Bring option(s) to Presbytery for input, return with final version for vote.

- Begin Restructure Preparations with updated by-laws, manuals, funding to Presbytery for review and input.
- Return to Presbytery for final approval and budget alignment

- Implement restructuring plan according to timeline and staffing realignments.
- Form search committee for installed Executive Presbyter in alignment with updated leadership needs.

Original Target Transition Completion: End of 2028

NEWSLETTER HIGHLIGHTS

[Presbytery
Superhero](#)
pg. 3

[The PLC Pulse](#)
pg. 4

[North Bend, First](#)
pg.5

[Transitions](#)
pg. 6

[Gresham,
Covenant PC](#)
pg. 7

Continued on page 2...



...Continued from page 1

The most important component of the Mission Study was a time of information gathering from all our congregations and minister members. Surveys were sent to the Sessions of our 87 congregations and our 340+ minister members. Many of the questions were open-ended, allowing for thoughtful responses. As we reported in June, we had a tremendous turnout, with nearly 55% participation from our minister members and 70% of our Sessions submitting substantial input for our PLC. The surveys generated over 1,200 pages of valuable information, and it took significant time to read and review EVERY survey submission, and then to begin generating lengthy summaries of the results with the entire PLC Executive Board. The PLC then began the work of reviewing all the materials and prayerfully discerning what they could and should mean for the future of our Presbytery, which will include clarifying our vision and setting priorities for our future. That work of discernment will be finishing later this month, and the PLC will be sharing their insights along with summary information from the surveys at our Fall Presbytery meeting hosted by First Presbyterian Church, North Bend.

This fall, the PLC will move into the next phase of our transition process, the “Design” phase (section listed in blue). This critical next step is where we take our clarified vision and updated priorities as a guide as we reevaluate our structure, regions, and funding to align with our future. Some have remarked that this step resembles the “rearranging the deck chairs,” and that we’ve done this before. In our current instance, I would humbly disagree. Much of our current structure as a presbytery has been in place for over 50 years, dating back to a time when congregations were vibrant and resources were plentiful, including ministers and volunteers, and we focused heavily on preserving regional relationships.

Now we face very different realities, where cultures have changed, resources have become scarcer, volunteers and pastoral leadership less available, all the while enjoying technologies that have drawn our connections and shared labors closer together. Reorganization processes of the past have only downsized the current model which, in its current design, restricts shared vision, silos resources, and impedes the crucial work of collaboration for our adaptive challenges. So, for this season, the PLC wants to reimagine what could be truly possible and design a new structure that focuses on our emerging needs and priorities, maximizes our resources with fewer volunteers, and is more flexible to change and adapt into the future. Thankfully the Design phase will move a bit more quickly, and the plan is for the PLC to begin sharing options to the Presbytery for crucial input in the Spring.



The final part of the question that was posed to me was regarding the chair that I currently fill as Executive Presbyter. When the original job search for the TEP was conducted in 2023 with assistance from the Synod, the expectation was that our transition process would take roughly 4-5 years to complete due to the size and complexity of our presbytery. This timeline was based on the experiences of other presbyteries who had previously undertaken our process, or something similar.

Continued on page 3...



...Continued from page 2

Things move much more slowly in a Presbytery due to our size and the limitations of regular meetings, and Synod encouraged us to not to rush the process. So, when I began full-time as TEP in January 2024, we set a target completion of the transition process at the end of 2028, and it looks like we will be very close to that. Lastly, as a part of my contract for this position, I specifically added a provision that a search committee for our permanent presbyter be formed before I begin the fifth and final year of my TEP contract.



I am excited for the work that is ahead of us, and we look forward to sharing and engaging more with you in the coming months. As I have mentioned in the past and wish to implore yet again, the PLC needs your continued prayers as they work to discern the best path forward for our presbytery to be of even greater service and support to our congregations and minister members for years to come. To God be the glory for all that has been and for what is yet to be.

NEW FEATURE: CHURCH SUPERHERO!

Our "Church Superhero" feature shines a spotlight on the extraordinary individuals across our region who step up to lead, serve, and transform our communities. For this issue, our superhero is **Mike Shiffer** of Tualatin Presbyterian Church!

Superhero Skills: Technology, problem-solving, bookkeeping, and even church bulletins

Hidden Charms: Kindness, patience, & generosity of spirit



Mike is Tualatin PC's Tech Support volunteer, where he patiently helps others navigate technology every Sunday morning from the sound booth. He also assists the Finance Committee, does bookkeeping, fills in for the church secretary, sings in the choir, and chairs the Pastor Nominating Committee. But what really caught our attention (as if the above is not enough) was what happened outside the walls of Tualatin Presbyterian. When a Creswell/First PC member mentioned the church's serious technology challenges during a Sunday visit to worship at Tualatin PC, guess who said, "I can help with that!" Mike donated his time, made the trip to Creswell at least twice (that's 432 miles!), and put his considerable tech skills to work. The result? Sunday morning streaming is up and running, and a new website is underway.

No big announcement. No invoice. Just one church member hearing that a sister congregation was in need and saying, "I can help with that." Thank you, Mike, for being a terrific example of connectional ministry in action!



THE PLC PULSE

Margaret Mitsuyasu | Presbytery Leadership Commission (PLC) Chair

Greetings presbytery siblings!

As we begin the new program year together, your **Presbytery Leadership Commission (PLC)** hopes to increase our communication with you about our work. To that end, we plan to provide updates (like this) after each of our meetings.

A major part of our August 19th meeting focused on **outlining our goals, commitments, & timeline for the year ahead**. It is an ambitious plan, but one we believe balances both urgency & thoughtfulness. We will be sharing more details about this plan with you in the next few months, and we hope you will join us in our commitment to discerning the way forward in our life together. In addition to the work of outlining our year and discussing the ways we will approach our work in order to do it well, we also tended to a number of other matters:

It was a particular joy to meet with TE Brad Busiek, the chair of the presbytery's New Worshiping Communities Team (NWCT), who presented the new **New Worshiping Communities Manual** that the team has been diligently developing over the past year. The PLC was impressed with their work, and grateful for the opportunity to discuss the NWCT's vision for a renewed & clarified sense of purpose in the season ahead. We are excited about the new energy emerging in this part of our presbytery's life together, and appreciate both the theological depth and clarity of process reflected in the team's work on this manual. The PLC **adopted the new manual** with enthusiasm and has **authorized the NWCT** to begin receiving inquiries for partnership and grant applications. Stay tuned for more from the NWCT directly!



The PLC also:

- received a report on the **Warm Springs fire status** and were advised on the community's preferred approach to funds disbursement (thanks for your contributions!)
- continued discussion on a refreshed & expanded **background check policy**
- discerned a sabbatical year for the **Bisbee Grant** to build available funding
- considered a **stewardship opportunity**
- spent time in small groups **reflecting on our commitments** outlined in the PLC Covenant (#1-5 this month) and in **prayer & mutual support** for one another!

You have elected an incredible group of people to serve in leadership on your behalf, and I am so grateful to be among them and to serve with them! This commission takes the work you have entrusted to them seriously, and their work at this meeting embodied the strategic thinking our 2025 reorganization was intended to achieve. They are a dedicated group, and committed to both thoughtful reflection & forward progress – as their deep engagement with several significant topics (over nearly three hours) shows!

We are looking forward to the coming year of service with you and for you!

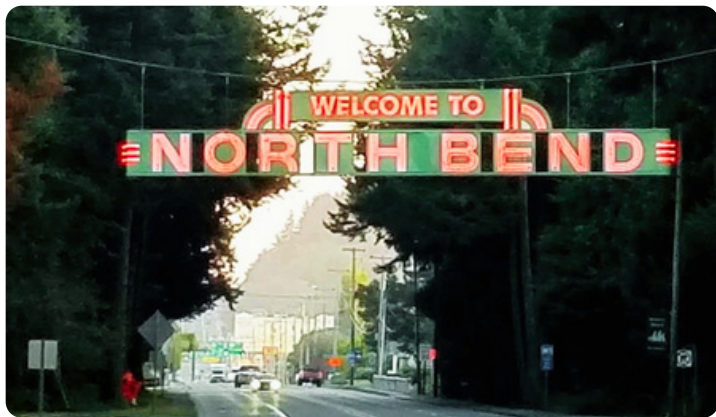


NORTH BEND, FIRST AND A CULTURE OF HOSPITALITY

Danny Peters | Communications Manager for Cascades Presbytery

When Pastor Eric Lindsey came to First Presbyterian of North Bend a decade ago, the community found itself in a similar moment to many other churches.

“In the not-so-distant past, the church was full of younger families. There was a preschool and a massive youth group,” Eric shared. “Together, we have really tried to discern what God has for us. As a church, it was important to lean on our strengths, and the strength of this community is hospitality.”



This culture of hospitality is perhaps most evident in the church’s food cupboard, a ministry that was initially established about 50 years ago. “The food cupboard is all about feeding our community, but over the years it has turned into a bunch of other things,” Eric said.

When Pastor Lindsey first arrived at the church, the food cupboard was open once a week. Currently, the ministry has expanded to twice a week with an estimated 500-800 people served per month. Every Monday and Wednesday, you will find dedicated members of the church volunteering their time to meet critical needs in the North Bend/Coos Bay community. The food cupboard is set up similar to a supermarket, with guests having the ability to peruse the shelves as they might normally do in a store.

Over time, the food cupboard has also become a conduit for connecting the community to other critical resources. If a member of the community needs financial assistance, they are able to submit a resource request for help with their rent or a utility bill. Because these needs are often greater than any single organization can handle, the church proudly partners with five other local congregations to pool financial resources and ensure no one has to face an emergency alone. Additionally, the food cupboard partners with several other programs in the community to assist people in areas of housing insecurity, counseling services, and substance abuse recovery. By linking food security with these wraparound services, the cupboard serves as a hopeful, central hub where the community comes together to help neighbors rebuild their stability and well-being.

Eric noted that the COVID-19 pandemic marked a notable shift in their level of engagement with the surrounding community: “It [the pandemic] has certainly framed and formed our understanding of what our call is. We are way more hands-on now. We have far more weekly contact with our neighbors than we did before.”

Over the years, the congregation of North Bend, First has remained flexible in their ministry, which also extends to Sunday morning worship. The church embraces a blended worship style, featuring traditional hymns as well as contemporary Christian music. This Fall, the church is exploring a new tradition as they collectively mark the **Season of Creation**, an annual ecumenical period (September 1-October 4) where Christians unite in prayer and action to care for God’s good creation.

Continued on page 6...



...Continued from page 5

The Season of Creation has long been a fixture of worship in the Eastern Orthodox church, but is now becoming something that Protestant denominations are embracing as part of their church calendar. In a recent worship service, members of North Bend, First were invited to actively participate in worship by bringing water from home, which would then be added to the baptismal font to highlight the global theme of “Living Water.” The act transformed the baptismal font into a powerful visual representation of unity and global interconnectivity.

“Whenever you do something new in worship, you never quite know how it will go,” Eric noted. “But as we have leaned into this new tradition of the Season of Creation, it has been amazing to see how people have responded.”

On October 23-24, Cascades Presbytery will be gathering in-person at North Bend, First. The church is excited for this opportunity to extend their hospitality to the wider presbytery. If you are a Ruling Elder or Pastor in our presbytery, we hope you will make the trip down the Coast and experience it for yourself!



Pastor Eric Leads worship at a recent Sunday morning service



Church members add their own water to the baptismal font to mark the first Sunday of the Season of Creation

RECENT TRANSITIONS IN CASCADES PRESBYTERY



New Pastors

- Sarah Tunall (Columbia, Vancouver) has joined Cascades Presbytery from Yellowstone Presbytery

Installations/Commissioning

- John Yu was installed as Associate Pastor at Columbia, Vancouver on Sunday, September 13
- Dennis Smith was commissioned to North Bend, First on May 17

Retirements

- Phil King retired effective June 18, 2026.

Pastoral Changes

- Jenni Bales is the new Pastor at Kenilworth PC, Portland
- Joan Miller was approved by the Presbytery to become Lead Pastor of Portland, First PC
- Spencer Parks is now serving as Temporary Bridge Pastor at Medford, First
- Robin Garvin is serving as Transitional Consulting Pastor at Presbyterian Community Church, Florence
- Lindsey Groves has completed her service to Westminster, PDX as of April 16



COVENANT, GRESHAM: AN UPDATE FROM SE DIVISION STREET

Pat Berger | Northeast Region Reporter

Pastor Josh Dunham at Covenant, Gresham is recently back from his sabbatical, which he spent walking the camino de Santiago in Spain, and then travelling with his wife and daughter through Europe. And with so much happening at Covenant, it's hard to know where to start!

We started in Spain. The journey was made possible in part because of a Lilly Grant that Pastor Dunham received for his sabbatical. The grant allowed him to spend three weeks walking the Camino. He walked 150 miles in total, averaging 10 – 15 miles a day. He traveled in a group of ten, which included two professors from Columbia Seminary and eight pastors—some active and others retired—as they walked from village to village rather than through remote wilderness. Arrangements were made at each village where they would end their day for a places to stay and eat. The group first met last January to start preparations for the journey. One of the professors handled the day-to-day group logistics. Pastor Dunham did some of his own work for each day, too. The three weeks journey allows one to walk portions of the camino. He walked the first section and the last section, and would like to go back and walk the middle section with his wife Anna and daughter, Clara (Europeans often do one section at a time.)

Following his time on the Camino, Josh was joined by his wife and daughter as they vacationed in Spain, England, and Norway. In England, he did some background study on his family name, and in Norway, they visited some of his wife's family members. He presented a slideshow of the whole experience to those who attended worship at Covenant at a recent service. He reported to the congregation that he was struck by the diversity of religions that they



experienced throughout the trip. His favorite church that they visited was one that was built around a giant, 12 foot tall rock, which took up the entire center of the sanctuary! There was a cavity in the rock, where the congregation had placed an icon. He was so inspired -- we are likely fortunate that he returned!

Josh is deeply grateful for the work done by Pastors David Hutchinson and Carley Friesen during his absence. The congregation studied a book that Pastor Dunham had studied in college called *Unbuilding Walls*, which is a powerful book about immigrant rights and racial justice. In collaboration with a Spanish-speaking preschool they host in their building, Covenant recently hosted a community barbeque. There was a taco truck, and even a blow-up water slide (which Pastor Dunham's daughter loved!). Approximately 60 people attended, evenly divided between congregants and preschool families. A fine time was had by all!

Solar panels have also been installed at Covenant, and even in the summer, they are seeing benefits. With the preschool being year-round, they will indeed experience energy savings through every season.

Continued on page 8...



...Continued from page 7

Now that Fall is here, there is much anticipation for families coming back, potential new members, and hosting new community partners in their building. They are excited about a new connection with their preschool—their church administrator’s son is now enrolled! Their Christian Education elders are involved with the school, and they will be inviting other members to become involved – Pastor Dunham says that the school is “fantastic to work with”! Blessings on your ministries, Covenant!



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.

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

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