

UPLIFT Newsletter

AUGUST 2015

****While this article is long, it seeks to be thorough. Please make the time to read it.**

It's been a little over a year since the General Assembly met, and we're still spending time and energy on the fallout of its actions. Of my 33+ years of ordained ministry, this past year has been one of the most painful and disappointing. But then again, that's all part of being a family. What one member does effects others. The way one chooses to act puts a strain on those around them. Difference of perception drives a wedge in relationships. Promotion of personal agendas disrupts the peace, unity and purity of the church. As Augustine once said, "The Church is like Noah's ark. If it weren't for all the water on the outside, you couldn't stand all the stink in the inside." There are days we must look like a sad bunch of children in God's eyes, but no matter how sad we may look, we are still God's children. It's that knowledge that has given me the strength to get through some days. Ultimately we are each accountable for our actions and inactions, and as long as there is purity in our motive and integrity in our behavior we are being true to our call.

The Session has asked me to recap highlights of our journey as a congregation since last summer. Within ten days of the Assembly, we held an informal gathering after worship to discuss decisions made by the 654 elders and ministers elected by their presbyteries to attend the meeting. Those who voted were not the paid staff who carry out the administration duties of the Office of the General Assembly, rather they were members of the 171 presbyteries that make up the Presbyterian Church (USA). While serving as representatives of those presbyteries, they were not required to vote the way a majority of people in their presbytery feel, rather they were called to vote the way they felt the Holy Spirit was at work in their conscience.

To be sure, the Spirit is discerned differently at times. Few families I've known agree on everything. So it is with the church universal, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the local congregation. But when we disagree, we talk things out. Sometimes that dialogue leads to new understanding and sometimes it leads to agreeing to disagree. The challenge is to not let our disagreement separate us from the love of Christ.

The General Assembly (by a 61% -39% vote) took an executive action, called an authoritative interpretation, to remove the ban that prohibited any Presbyterian ministers from being a part of any service that united same gender couples. In turn, they gave permission for any Presbyterian ministers to perform, and any Presbyterian church to host same gender unions in states where it is legal. Our Session took immediate action to declare that no same gender unions would take place on our church property. At the same time, I made it clear that I would not perform any such ceremonies here or anywhere else. The General Assembly made it clear that no local church could or would be required to allow its property to be used for such ceremonies and that no Presbyterian minister would be required to perform such ceremonies.

By a vote of 71% to 29%, the General Assembly voted to ask presbyteries to vote on changing the definition of marriage in our constitution from being "between one man and one woman" to being "between two people (traditionally between a man and a woman)." During the year, each presbytery voted on that proposed change. Our presbytery, Kiskiminetas (made up of the Presbyterian churches in Indiana, Armstrong, Jefferson, Clarion and Elk counties) voted by a 70%-30% margin to maintain the Biblical definition of marriage as being between one man and one woman. That was a clear statement as to where we stand. Sadly, a majority of presbyteries around the country voted differently and so the definition was changed. That change however does not in any way require us to change what we believe to be true and do anything that is contrary to our conscience. Who we are and what we believe has not changed.

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By a vote of 333 to 331, the General Assembly voted to divest stock holdings from Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard, and Motorola Solutions because of their investment in and profiting by what are perceived as non-peaceful pursuits in Israel and Palestine. While as a congregation we were about to invest some of our restricted funds in the Presbyterian Foundation, we have instead chosen to invest those funds in Thrivent Lutheran portfolios. The Session heard your concerns about divestment and responded by placing our funds in financial vehicles that are more supportive of Israel's place in God's plan.

Per Capita literally means "per head." It is an assessment whereby each person in a community pays the same amount to support the cost of basic services rendered. You do that in your local municipality. We also do that in the church. The General Assembly, the Synod and the Presbytery are each levels of church governance. They each have administrative expenses in the course of carrying out their work. The church takes those expenses and divides them equally by the number of people being served. In 2015, the per capita assessed for each active member of the church was \$27.05 with \$7.07 per person going to the work of the General Assembly, \$2.20 per person going to the work of the Synod and \$17.78 per person going to the work of the Presbytery. Many members pay their own per capita assessment over and above their financial contributions to the church. Some ask that church funds be used to cover their share. Because of their displeasure with actions at the General Assembly, some have intentionally withheld their per capita for 2015. In your offering envelope box, you each received a slip of paper that you could return to the church expressing your wishes. In order to honor your desire, the Session has stated that it will withhold the remittance of funds where such has been requested. If you said that you do not want your General Assembly per capita paid, not one penny of your contribution will be sent for General Assembly use. The Presbytery has also declared that none of its funds will be used to make up the difference. Again, not one cent of your contributions are going to the administration of the General Assembly unless you have specifically stated that you want them to. The same is true with the Synod and Presbytery if you so designated.

There has been concern that some of the mission money sent to the General Assembly is being used toward "liberal" causes. In response to that concern, the Session has designated where our mission money is used. Our contribution to GA mission is used only toward educational mission in Ethiopia, medical mission in Bangladesh and agricultural mission in Haiti. We have highlighted these missionaries in previous newsletters and will continue to make you aware of their ministries. The Session assures you that our mission support reflects our congregational values.

There was concern about a report made to GA about the issue of gun violence. While this report's point of view is different from many of those in the pew it is only a report. It in no way requires church members to change.

At each turn, the Session has heard your concerns, discussed the issues and responded as the responsible leaders you called and elected them to be. While some congregations in the presbytery received little or no information about the issues, you have been offered a number of resources. In an effort to be transparent, we have encouraged dialogue with leaders of neighboring congregations. In the Fall, we took the initiative of inviting all the churches in the presbytery to come here to discuss where we've been and where we're going. There were about eighty in attendance. That gathering led to a second time of conversation that was held in Plumville. Both times, leaders from our congregation were instrumental in making things happen.

In an effort to reverse the actions of the GA, a group of ten elders and ministers from our presbytery (5 of whom are from our congregation) met numerous times to compose an overture to restore to our constitution the traditional definition of marriage. It is built upon the foundation of Scripture and the confessions of our church. In September, the presbytery will vote on whether or not to send that overture to General Assembly. If possible, we will seek another presbytery to concur with it, and if one does, it will become a part of the business considered at the 2016 GA to be held in Portland, OR. To my knowledge we are the only one of the 171 Presbyteries to take initiation in crafting such an overture.

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Seeking to be faithful, a few weeks ago we invited The Rev. Dr. Ralph Hawkins of Shenango Presbytery to come and speak to a gathering of 90 elders and ministers in our Fellowship Hall about a new organization called The Fellowship Community. This is a national ministry birthed by the union of two conservative, evangelical groups: Presbyterians for Renewal and Fellowship of Presbyterians. It is committed to staying within the Presbyterian Church (USA) while working to help congregations grow in their understanding of who Scripture calls us to be and what faith in Jesus Christ calls us to do. It is not a reactionary group, defining who we are not. Rather it is a network of like-minded people of faith living out the Gospel in such a way we bear witness to the world so they come to know who we are. Our Session has taken action to unite with hundreds of other Presbyterian congregations taking this stand. We have made a commitment to be a part of this network for one year, and should we find the relationship edifying, we will renew that partnership when the time comes. A copy of the Covenant can be found in this newsletter.

As your pastor, I am proud of the leadership shown by the elders of this congregation. They have wrestled with the issues and made some tough decisions. From all you have read, I hope you can see how they have responded to the concerns of the church. There was not always agreement in the midst of discussion, but everything was done openly and in a spirit of love. To be sure, they have modelled integrity in the household of faith and I hope you respect their faithfulness.

Please continue to pray for this congregation and for the Presbyterian Church. Again and again the Bible tells us that the ways of the world and the ways of God will clash—so we should not be surprised when there is conflict. As you study the issues, read the original reports and do not base your decisions on second hand information. Any time you need specific information, please don't hesitate to call me and I will be happy to seek out the documents for you. At the same time, I would appreciate seeing any documents that you have found helpful.

We live in changing times, but God changeth not. Stand boldly in the truth. Proclaim faithfully what is right in the sight of God. Do all things in a spirit of love and show forth the grace that you've been shown.

In Christ,

Pastor Jim

Worship Assistants—10:00 a.m.

August 2 *Communion*

Liturgist: Alice Santoro
 Acolyte: Cole Stuchal
 Flowers: Gene & Chery Artman
 Projector: Kayla Moran
 Audio: Tyler Moran

August 9

Liturgist: Mary Anzelone
 Acolyte: Chase Stuchal
 Flowers: Naomi Sigafos
 Projector: Blake Tonkin
 Audio: Mitchell Tonkin

August 16

Liturgist: Bonni Dunlap
 Acolyte: Olivia Eckenroad
 Flowers: Bill & Deb Lint
 Projector: Jonathan Clayton
 Audio: Jaison McKinney

August 23

Liturgist: Bobbi Monroe
 Acolyte: Brylea Borbonus
 Flowers: Jeff & Rose Lewis
 Projector: Mary Anzelone
 Audio: Alex Baker

August 30

Guest
 Minister: Rev. Ron Libengood
 Liturgist: Rick Shoemaker
 Flowers: Rick & Willa Shoemaker
 Projector: Kayla Moran
 Audio: Tyler Moran

August Treasurer's Helpers

Joanne Torrance & Naomi Sigafos

Scripture Texts for August

2 Ephesians 4:1-16
 John 6:24-35
 9 Ephesians 4:25-5:2
 John 6:35, 41-51
 16 Ephesians 5:15-20
 John 6:51-58
 23 I Kings 8
 Ephesians 6:10-20
 30 Guest Minister
 Rev. Ron Libengood

September

6 James 2:1-17
 Mark 7:24-37

Gracious Separation Policy

If a congregation in Kiskiminetas Presbytery seeks to leave the Presbyterian Church (USA) there is a process that must be followed. This process has been approved by the presbytery and those seeking dismissal are bound to follow it. The document can be found by Googling “Kiskiminetas Presbytery Gracious Separation Policy.” It is there in pdf form. You can also contact the Presbytery Office in Yatesboro at (724) 783-7196. By contacting them you will be sure to get the most accurate of information emailed or sent to you.

Our Church.com (r-church.com)

Our new website is up and running and its quite a site to behold. We want to thank Janet Smith and Jill Wolford for their many hours of gathering information and working with the designer. We hope it will keep our church family informed and at the same time be a way to invite others into our ministry. Please take a look at it and let us know what you think.

Vacation Bible School 2015

We had a wonderful Vacation Bible School in June. Over fifty people took part. Check out the bulletin board for pictures. The smiles on the children’s faces say it all. We give a special thanks to Jen Borbonus for her coordination of the variety of gifted volunteers who made things happen. We’re already looking ahead to next year.

Thank You

Bobbi and Pastor Tim would like to thank all those who sent kind greetings and congratulations on the occasion of their 25th wedding anniversary. The wonderful thing about notes and cards is that they can be enjoyed again and again. Please know that your thoughtfulness is appreciated—and pray for Bobbi as we go for the gold.

Immunization Clinics

The PA Department of Health is providing a public immunization clinic at the Blairsville Community Center. Several dates are scheduled: August 19, September 16, October 21, November 18 and December 16. Each clinic will be held from 9:30—11:30 a.m. If you have questions or would like to schedule an appointment, call the PA Dept. of Health at 724-357-2995.

Secretary on Vacation

Jill will be taking a well deserved vacation from July 30– August 7. We wish her safe travels and thank those who have volunteered to staff the office in her absence.

Essential Tenets

A “tenet” is a basic core belief that is held by an individual or a group. It is part of that which defines who they are. Included in this newsletter is a piece called “Essential Tenets.” It explains those beliefs shared by those who are a part of The Fellowship Community. You can also learn more about the organization by visiting their website—www.fellowship.community. Click “about”, then go down to “community members” for a list of who else (individuals and congregations) around the country have joined.

Mandatory Reporter Training

According to our Book of Order, all ministers, elders and deacons in the church are considered mandatory reporters of child abuse. The presbytery has provided the 3 hour training required by Act 31 and 126. Pastor Tim and two elders attended this. We are in the process of putting together that same training here at the church. It is approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. We hope to open it to all churches in the area in an effort to make our community a safer place. We are working in partnership with The Alice Paul House of Indiana. The training is set for Thursday, September 17 from 7:00-9:00 p.m.

A New Look

By the time you read this, the new carpet in the sanctuary should be installed. We thank all those who supported this project with their gifts of time and money.

News from Church World Service (CWS)

This year CWS has provided many items for economically disadvantaged and homeless people. Most recently, for example, in Salt Lake City, Utah, 450 heavy-weight Blankets were distributed by Crossroads Urban Center to the disadvantaged and homeless in the region, and in Moravia, New York, 120 heavyweight blankets, 60 School Kits and 120 Hygiene Kits were distributed by Good Shepherd Catholic Community to disadvantaged families. In 2014, CWS provided some 3,220 blankets to disadvantaged and homeless people in the U.S.

Mission Giving Thank You's

Thank you for your recent donation of \$500 to Habitat for Humanity of Indiana. We especially appreciate support from repeat donors such as you. We have selected Leann Coleman as our next partner family. She has two young boys. The house is a couple blocks from their future junior high school. We hope to complete the house before the holidays. Donations such as yours allow us to renovate or build simple, decent houses for low-income working families who cannot afford conventional financing. Your donation will be used to buy building materials for our project.

Sincerely yours,
George Rittenberger, Treasurer

Thanks to your recent gift of \$500, homeless families will have a safe, warm place to sleep until they can get back on their feet. Your willingness to help homeless families in our area weather this crisis in their life makes a difference. Your donation will help us continue to provide families with basic necessities like food and blankets as well as give us the resources to teach them the life skills that they need to maintain their independence after they leave the program. To date we have provided services to 33 families. Eighty three percent of our families have been able to maintain their permanent housing after leaving our program. Our agency is supported by donations and fund raising efforts. Generous donors like you are the key to our success and make it possible for Family Promise to provide local children and families in need with assistance and critical services.

Sincerely,
Carole Reed, Network Director
Becky Driscall, Board Member

Walk for a Wonderful Life

The Suicide Task Force of Indiana County will host the 3rd Annual Walk for a Wonderful Life Sunday, September 27 beginning at Mack Park Grandstand. Registration will begin at 1:00 p.m. and the walk begins at 2:00 p.m. Registration fees (donation) of \$15 for those ages 13 and up. A free t-shirt will be guaranteed to people who pre pay the registration fee by August 31st. Proceeds from this event will benefit STF Community Awareness Programs.

Compassion International News

Dear United Presbyterian Sunday School,
I say hello to you with lots of love, in the name of Jesus. Thank you very much for your letter because I feel excited to know that you pray for me. I want to talk to you today about my household. I live with my mom, my dad and my sister, and I help to do our house chores, such as making our beds and sweeping our house, among other things. What kind of house chores do you use to do? My house is built with bricks and cement blocks, and it is painted black and green; the place I like the most in my house is our living room because we use to get together in order to listen to music and share our free time as a family. I ask you to please pray for me because I will start studying soon so I will be able to fulfill this purpose. Of course, I want you to please pray for my parents and my extended family, so that our dear God strengthen us in each trial we may face in life. Have you faced any trials in life? I think about you with all my affection, and I want to express my gratitude to you for your sponsorship, your letters and your prayers for us. I invite you to read Romans 12:10. I say goodbye for now with a warm hug.
From your friend and brother,
Jeferson Morales

Newsletter Deadline

Please have articles to be published in the September issue of the UPLIFT Newsletter to the church office by Sunday, August 16. Thank you.

Christian Music

Joyful Java & Music Cafe is held each Tuesday evening from 7:00—9:00 p.m. at the Koffee Shoppe in Blairsville. On Tuesday, August 11th the Nightengals will be the guest musicians. All are welcome to come and enjoy an evening of Christian music.

An Evening of Prayer & Praise

Join several of the pastors and praise bands from Blairsville Area churches as we enjoy an evening of music, worship, and prayer! An evening of prayer and praise will be held Friday, August 14 from 6:00-8:00 p.m. at the Blairsville Bandstand. (the night before the Knotweed Festival) Bring a chair and enjoy an evening with friends and family. The event is sponsored by the Blairsville Ministerium.

Guest Musicians

The schedule to date is listed.

August 2 Vicky Westley & Amy Yackuboskey
August 9 Angela Lyons
August 16 Jessica Clayton
August 23 Adam Loucks
August 30 Nightengals
September 6..... Dave Hiltabidle

