

Executive Presbyter's Report

Wednesday, October 5, 2016

When the winds of the Spirit blow, we see signs of it. I believe the Spirit's wind is blowing in our presbytery. The Spirit is blowing, inspiring fresh ideas. I travel a lot in our presbytery. As I travel, I listen to the different voices in the presbytery, and I have noticed the following efforts under way:

In the Native Ministries Region

- The Native Ministries Committee is making a fresh beginning at this presbytery. They will:
 - a. Elect new officers, who will begin meeting monthly by phone,
 - b. Review the health of the Native Ministries churches, and their leadership needs,
 - c. Begin planning how to follow-up on the General Assembly's renunciation of the Doctrine of Discovery, and their apology for the trauma caused by boarding schools in Native American life. Specifically, how do we address the trauma using Native American cultural wisdom, the insights of the social sciences, and the healing power of the Holy Spirit? Christian leader Dorothy Bekoalak, MSW, from Bethel is scheduled to be present for this planning session.

Fresh movements of the Spirit among congregations in the Native Ministries Region include:

- Wainwright, Atkasuk and Nuiqsut are hiring a half time interim Teaching Elder—a pastor to serve as teacher and coach to local leaders.
 - a. Wainwright has identified three elders, who wish to be trained together as a team of CREs, and Nuiqsut has identified one.
 - b. All three churches are in the process of nominating new elders, and wish for their sessions to be freshly trained as a team.
 - c. All three churches wish for their Sunday School teachers to receive training.

The sessions of the three churches have asked Rev. Hugh Anderson to serve half-time as teacher and coach to leaders in these three villages. They are in the process of finishing up the contract negotiations. Hugh will begin with a 12-day tour of the three villages beginning November 4. The contract is for one year as the three churches spend time evaluating their needs and considering how to redesign a long-term job description for a teaching elder.

- Rev. Joseph Reid, Barrow's new stated supply pastor, is working with the session to clarify the church's understanding of God's mission for them now, and living that mission in a way that touches lives and helps people hear God's call to discipleship. They are reviewing their radio ministry, restarting their Sunday School, and looking to improve their ability for social witness in the region.
- Gambell Presbyterian Church has been in conversation with the three leadership bodies of their community: The Native Village of Gambell, the Sivuqaq Corporation and the Gambell Indian Reorganization Act Council, to turn their new building into a combination church and community center. Community activities will be held in the building in partnership with a variety of agencies—but the community partnership is key, because the Gospel of Jesus Christ is about healthy people, and about healthy communities. The Rasmuson Foundation has invited the presbytery to submit a grant request for \$500,000 for this year (we had originally asked for \$1,000,000). We have applied for a grant of \$207,000 from the Presbyterian Women's Birthday Offering to complete the *manse* portion of the building—grants to be awarded soon.
- In Fairbanks, a group of Iñupiaq people met in May and decided to begin a new Christian gathering that will include worship, food-and-fellowship, and Iñupiaq drumming and dancing.

They discovered that summer was not a good season to start. Russel Snyder, one of their leaders, is calling for a first gathering to take place on Sunday, October 16.

- Chapel in the Mts. has been celebrating God's grace since a plane crash last December miraculously ended with no deaths. The congregation has been exploring how to properly respond in gratitude (see Luke 17:11-19). As a result, worship time changed to 3 p.m. on Sundays to unite the generations in worship, Sunday School began again, an Iñupiaq language for adults class began (also to unite generations), and plans have been made for a community celebration on the survival after such a dramatic crash.

In the Road System Region

1. Eagle River Presbyterian Church is doing some congregational soul searching—seeking a new sense of God's mission for them to embody in their community. They are being very intentional in interviewing their members and in seeking new ways to connect with youth and younger adults.
2. Trinity Presbyterian is looking for a new pastor, which makes this a season that challenges the church to redefine their understanding of God's vision for their ministry.
3. Both Korean churches, First Korean in Anchorage and First Korean in Fairbanks, are at work raising up new leaders. Because elders had moved out from their churches, they don't have enough elders left to provide a quorum for session meetings. They are therefore partnering with the presbytery, borrowing pastors and elders from nearby churches in our presbytery, to form administrative commissions to help and strengthen them during this period of raising up new leaders. This appears to me to be a wonderfully positive cross-cultural partnership at work in our presbytery and something to celebrate. I have not heard of this happening in such a positive way in other places.
4. New Hope Church is exploring how to use two CRE candidates to renew ministry in North Pole. The first candidate, Darlene Matz, will come before the presbytery for commissioning at this presbytery.
5. Four S. Central congregations (First Wasilla, United Protestant in Palmer, Anchor and First Pres Anchorage) continue energetic ministry with the homeless people of the region.
6. Yukon Presbyterians for Earth Care and the Presbytery office are exploring a proposal to hire a seminary intern, beginning next fall, to promote Young Adult Leadership Development in the presbytery, and to serve as Project Y.E.S. coordinator for youth ministry in the presbytery. Project Y.E.S. began in Anaktuvuk Pass and Nuiqsut, and is a peer-evangelism ministry that focuses on building strong Christian youth leadership, while doing Christian service in local communities. Their study curriculum has been a holistic one that celebrates God's love for all creation and all people. Project Y.E.S. was very successful, but stopped when CCE Sally Lipson left Anaktuvuk Pass. The project needs a region-wide director to be able to function.

It is important to look to the life-giving movement of the Spirit at this time. Our churches are aging, and our budgets are tight. Yet, God is always leading us in fresh ways, re-forming us into new ways of being the church. Transformation is always both exciting and difficult. I hope that we all will remain faithful in looking for the movement of the Spirit, and openly celebrating it.

Sincerely, Curt Karns 