

**Executive Presbyter Report**  
**October 2024 Yukon Presbytery Meeting, Fairbanks, AK**  
Rev. Elizabeth Schultz

Hello Yukon Presbytery,

This presbytery meeting marks my one-year anniversary as your Executive Presbyter. I am thrilled at this milestone, as I am so thankful that God called me to this role and because we have done so much good work together over the past year.

The theme of Presbytery in October 2023 was, “For I’m about to do something new!” The Scripture was, “Forget the things that happened in the past. Don’t keep on thinking about them. I am about to do something new. It is beginning to happen even now. Don’t you see it coming? I am going to make a way for you to go through the desert. I will make streams of water in the dry and empty land.” Isaiah 43:18-19 (NIV)

God has been doing many new things in our presbytery! And as inspiring as this scripture was, it was not an exact match for our circumstance. We certainly don’t “forget all that has happened in the past”, especially the beloved members of this Presbytery and the good work that has been done by so many. And, we did not start with “dry and empty land.” The work of this Presbytery has been faithful for generations. It is an honor to work with all of you as God continues to renew us day after day, leading us forward in this work. Thank you for all your support and encouragement over the last year.

When I was applying for the job, I highlighted 5 initial goals that I had for myself as your EP. I am going to organize this report around those five goals, highlighting a few of the things we have accomplished together. Most of these goals are works in progress, they have been both good and challenging to pursue, and they continue to inspire me as we head into year two!

***The first goal was to build up support groups for pastors and leaders.*** Perhaps the most important part of my job description is to be a Pastor/Shepherd to the Pastors and Shepherds in our Presbytery. I take this calling very seriously and have sought to get to know all of you to build up this important relationship. In addition to the support that I can hopefully offer to each of you, I know you need the support of one another. In each conversation that I have had with all of you--whether in person, on the phone, in zoom or through text-- the need for more connection and communication in our Presbytery was expressed. For those that can travel short distances to be together in the southcentral part of the state, monthly lunches have been happening to offer encouragement and support. For those in more rural places, or urban areas with longer distances between churches, it has been harder to find regular ways to connect. While the sending of a monthly newsletter from the Presbytery office has been reinstated, this place to share information does not equate to deeper connection and support. I would encourage us all, as we continue to develop our Mission Strategy as a presbytery, to continue to prioritize the need for connection and to think of multiple ways that leaders in each region might be able to offer additional support. The Presbytery will have limited funds to support multiple in-person gatherings, but there are funding opportunities available from outside entities for regional meetings, as well as increased availability of technology and internet connection to help us all. I commit to

continuing to think and plan creatively for how we can deepen our ties as the connectional church.

***The second goal was to review our committee structure.*** My initial questions were around the topics of each committee, making sure we were prioritizing the right ones and reflecting on what might be missing. However, It quickly became apparent that the most pressing need was to increase and support the membership of our existing committees. And thank you to all of you who responded to this need. We now have almost all of our current committees up and running with full membership. We still have need of additional members on several of our committees, which you will hear about through the nominating report. I encourage you to volunteer to serve if you are able. As soon as we have all of our current committees up and running, I do want to return to the review of the committee structure to identify any changes that might be helpful as we pursue our mission strategy together.

***The third goal was to build a team related to financial stability.*** So much work has been done in this regard. Many thanks go to the members of the Stewardship and Investment Committees, to our former Financial Secretary Rachel Graham, to our new Administrator of Finance and Operations, Adam Lees, and to the entire Executive Board for their hard work and many meetings on this topic. Our first steps here were to gain a clearer understanding of our budget, including doing a full review of funding line items to bring them into current practice. We have a new budget format and have cleaned up our funding line items so they are easier to understand. We now have a clear picture of what we have and don't have, as well as information to guide us in making faithful decisions about our spending and our stewardship efforts going forward. While regular and generous church giving is always needed to support the overall work of the Presbytery, I am also inspired by the good work of our churches to work with all of you to help find additional state and national funders to support your missions and your buildings. Identifying a team to help with stewardship efforts and with grant applications will be crucial to meeting our goals for long-term sustainability.

***The fourth goal was to build up more educational opportunities and trainings.*** Many people have worked hard to increase these opportunities, while also recognizing that more is needed. The Commissioned Lay Pastor (CLP) Taskforce within the Ministry Commission has been working very hard to build a robust program to both recruit Ruling Elders (RE) and Commissioned Lay Pastors in our rural areas, while also encouraging continuing education and mentorship programs for current Ruling Elders and CLPs. We have added an afternoon training component to each in-person presbytery meeting, as well as taken advantage of theological training opportunities from our ecumenical partners, such as the Native American Course of Study (NACOS) training hosted by the United Methodist denomination in Anchorage later this month. Overall, this is an area that needs to grow and expand. I look forward to working with state and national partners to increase these opportunities going forward.

***The fifth goal was to represent the Yukon Presbytery to the National Church.*** In addition to attending several trainings, orientations and leadership development programs for new Executive Presbyter and two regional retreats held by our Synod, I was joined by other members of our Presbytery to attend a conference hosted by the Board of Pensions and the General Assembly in Utah this past summer. At each of these in-person meetings, and in multiple zoom calls with

national partners throughout the year, I have taken seriously the obligation I have to share the unique blessings and challenges facing our presbytery. I have told our stories, championed our ministries, expressed our great and unique needs, deepened existing connections and sought out new partnerships. I am incredibly proud to represent the Yukon Presbytery to the National Church. I look forward to you hearing from our commissioners to the General Assembly about the overall representation of the Yukon Presbytery to those gathered.

### **A note about travel**

The first step in knowing best how to serve the churches of this presbytery, and to get to know the pastors and leaders in each community, ideally includes the ability to travel in-person. While I have had the opportunity to visit most of the churches in our Presbytery in the last year, I have not been able to visit all. Logistically, visiting each church in our Presbytery each year may not be possible. While it was an honor and adventure to visit both Gambell and Utqiagvik, I am very aware that the churches I have not been able to visit are in our most rural communities. It is my hope to visit each community this coming year, but that will depend upon deepened partnerships, the availability of travel funding and housing.

### **Additional things to highlight**

#### ***Staff and Leadership***

I have wonderful staff and leadership to work with! I am thankful every day for the incredible work of our Stated Clerk, Doreen McNeill, our new Administrator of Finance and Operations, Adam Lees, and the leadership of the Executive Board and our Committees. I am also very thankful for several retired pastors, and our past Executive Presbyters, as they have offered ongoing support and encouragement.

#### ***Policies and Procedures***

It has been quite a while since the Presbytery of Yukon has updated many of its policies. Now that we have a full committee structure and additional staff, we are making our way through the work. Policies and documents that need an upgrade include: Bylaws, Standing Rules and Manual of Operations, Personnel Manual, Sexual Misconduct and Child Protection, and Financial Best Practice. Policies that are being created include: Travel Policy, Harassment and Anti-Racism policies and an Information Technology (IT) policy.

#### ***The Presbytery Office***

The physical Presbytery Office, which is rented from First Presbyterian Church at 616 West 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Anchorage, AK 99501, is open again and improving by the day. Both Adam and I live in Anchorage and are in the office quite often, working a hybrid schedule of working from home and in-person. The office needs organizing, with many past files needing to be digitized and then either archived, shared with our national office of historical records, or thrown out. We would welcome help from anyone interested in this task!