

Presbytery Worship: “The Kingdom of God is like...”

Prelude “The Peace May Be Exchanged” Dan Locklair

Dr. Jeff Jones

Opening Sentences

Elder John Dickson

One: When asked, “When will the kingdom of God come,”
Many: Jesus responded, “The kingdom of God will not be
easily observed.”

One: For the kingdom of God

All: is in us and among us. Let us worship God as the
kingdom of God!

*Opening Hymn #32 “I Sing the Mighty Power of God”

32 I Sing the Mighty Power of God

- 1 I sing the might-y power of God that made the moun-tains rise,
- 2 I sing the good-ness of the Lord who filled the earth with food.
- 3 There's not a plant or flower be-low but makes thy glo-ries known.

Musical notation for the first line of the hymn, featuring a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a 4/4 time signature. The melody is written on a five-line staff.

- that spread the flow-ing seas a - broad and built the loft - y
God formed the crea-tures through the Word, and then pro-nounced them
And clouds a - rise, and tem-pests blow, by or - der from thy

Musical notation for the second line of the hymn, continuing the melody from the first line.

- skies. I sing the wis-dom that or - dained the sun to rule the day,
good. Lord, how thy won-ders are dis-played, wher-e'er I turn my eye,
throne, while all that bor-rows life from thee is ev - er in thy care,

Musical notation for the third line of the hymn, continuing the melody.

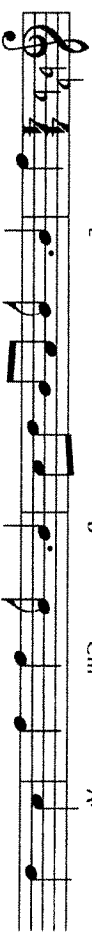
- The moon shines full at God's com-mand, and all the stars o - bey,
if I sur - vey the ground I tread, or gaze up - on the sky!
and ev - ery-where that we can be, thou, God, art pres-ent there.

Musical notation for the fourth line of the hymn, concluding the melody.

731 Give Thanks for Those Whose Faith Is Firm

Whose Faith Is Firm

Capo 1: (D) (A) (Bm) (G)
 Eb Bb Cm Ab



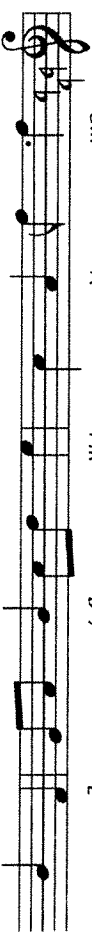
- 1 Give thanks for those whose faith is firm when all a -
- 2 Give thanks for those whose hope is clear, be - yond mere
- 3 Give thanks for those whose love is pure, a spar - kling
- 4 Give thanks for saints of a - ges past and saints a -

(D) (A) (D) (G) (Em) (A) (F#m)
 Eb Bb Eb Ab Fm Bb Cm



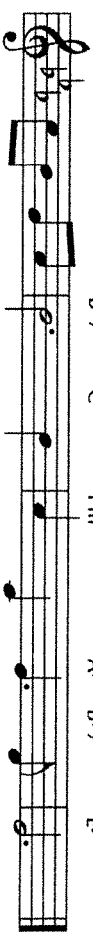
round seems bleak: on God's good prom - ise they re - ly, so
 mor - tal sight: who seek the cit - y God has planned, the
 pre - cious stone: they show by what they say and do an
 live to - day: though of - ten by this world de - spised, their

(Bm) (G) (Em) (A7) (D)
 Cm Ab Fm Bb7 Eb



while they live and when they die how force - ful -
 true, e - ter - nal prom - ised land, and steer on
 in - ward beau - ty, warm and true, for God's con -
 hearts by God are rich - ly prized. Give thanks that

(A7) (B) (Em) (G) (A7) (D)
 Bb7 C Fm Ab Bb7 Eb



ly they speak: the strong, who once were weak!
 toward that light, a bea - con ev - er bright.
 cerns they own: God's love through them is known.
 we may say we share their pil - grim way.

Presbytery Offering and Prayer of Dedication

offering plates are available in the center aisle

Necrology (Appendix E)

Elder Susan Keaney and Rev. Owar Ojulu

*Hymn #731 "Give Thanks for Those Whose Faith Is Firm"

536 Rise, O Church, like Christ Arisen

1 Rise, O church, like Christ a - ris - en, from this
 2 Rise, trans - formed, and choose to fol - low af - ter
 3 Rise, re - mem - ber well the fu - ture God has
 4 Ser - vice be our sure vo - ca - tion; cour - age

meal of love and grace; may we through such love en -
 Christ, though wound - ed, whole; bro - ken, shared, our lives are
 called us to re - ceive; pres - ent by God's lov - ing
 be our dai - ly breath; mer - cy be our des - ti -

vi - sion whose we are, and whose, our praise. Al - le -
 hal - lowed to re - lease and to con - sole. Al - le -
 nur - ture, Spir - it - ed then let us live. Al - le -
 na - tion from this day and un - to death. Al - le -

lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia: God, the won - der of our days.
 lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia: Christ, our pres - ent, past, and goal.
 lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia: Spir - it, grace by whom we live.
 lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia. Rise, O church, a liv - ing faith.

Lord's Supper—Rev. Jennifer Frayer Griggs

Invitation

Great Thanksgiving

Lord's Prayer

Breaking of the Bread

Sharing of the Bread and Cup

The communion bread is gluten free so that all may partake of one loaf

Prayer after Communion

*Hymn #536 "Rise, O Church, Like Christ Arisen"

*Postlude Tuba Tune in D Major (C.S. Lang)

At the close of the meeting: Benediction: Rev. Dr. Martin Ankenm

Copyright and Notes on Hymns and Liturgy

Today's Call to Worship and Prayer of Confession were written by Rev. Sara Sadler.

CREATION AND PROVIDENCE

32 I Sing the Mighty Power of God

With minimal revision this text brings together six of the eight four-line stanzas in an 18th-century hymn written for children and originally headed "Praise for Creation and Providence." The anonymous German tune provides a fitting sense of breadth and wonder.

TEXT: Isaac Watts, 1715, alt.
MUSIC: Casparianich der Herrng. Vorphänwärtigen Kirdchen Halkapwde. 1784; n.1. 1888

ELIACOMBE
(CM1)

SERVICE MUSIC

582 Glory to God, Whose Goodness Shines on Me

TEXT: Trial, liturgical text; adapt. Paul M. Wasile, 2008
MUSIC: Paul M. Wasile, 2008
Rev. Adapt. and Assoc. © 2008 Paul M. Wasile

GLORY TO GOD WASILE

Music reprinted, podcast, and streamed with permission under ONE LICENSE #A-713544. All rights reserved.

DISCIPLESHIP AND MISSION

731 Give Thanks for Those Whose Faith Is Firm

The first three stanzas of this text are organized around the three great virtues—faith, hope, and love—mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13:13. These have indeed been the marks of the faithful people of God always and everywhere, and the final stanza sums up our gratitude for them.

TEXT: Martin E. Luthardt, 1898
MUSIC: C. Hubert H. Parry, 1888
Rev. © 2003 Kevin Anderson, Ltd.

REPTON
8.A.8.8.6.6

LORD'S SUPPER

536 Rise, O Church, like Christ Arisen

The second line of the first stanza shows that this hymn is meant for use in the context of the Lord's Supper, but the first stanza further carries its special purpose as a sending hymn celebrating the values guiding the works of the church in the world: service, courage, mercy.

TEXT: Susan Pifer, Chanceler, 1997
MUSIC: Timothy J. Stone, 1997
Rev. © 1997 Susan Pifer Chanceler
Music © 1997 Augsburg Fortress

SURGE ECCLESIA
9.7.8.7.8.7

Rolls of the Presbytery as of 1/1/2025

**Roll 1 – Engaged in a Validated
Ministry (G-3.0104)**

**A – Those serving within
congregations of the church
(G-2.0503a)**

Rebecca Abbott
Martin Ankrum
Larry Armstrong*
Brenda Barnes *
Laura Blank
Derek Campbell
Anthony Catullo *
Ron Durika
Kristen Emrick
Cliff Foster
Jennifer Frayer-Griggs
Donald Glunt
Peter Goetschius
Edward Gray
Molly Hall
Danielle Kendig
Brian Kilbert
Steve Lasor
Ben Nti
Owar Ojulu
Curtis Paul
Geoff Rach
Doug Rehberg
Robert Ruefle
Sara Sadler
Dawn Sherwood
Rebecca Siddle
John Simpson *
Regina Sturiale
Rick Sweeney*
Hyiwot Teshome
Alice Tondora
Sue Washburn*
Travis Webster
Andrew Wirt

**B - Those in other service to this
church**

Brenda Barnes—*Redstone
Highlands, North Huntingdon**
Lisa Dormire - *Vice President,
Fund Development, Presbyterian
Senior Care, Greensburg*
Susan Washburn – *Pittsburgh
Theological Seminary**

**C - Those serving beyond the
jurisdiction of this church**

None

**Roll 2 - Members at Large
(G-2.0503b)**

Patrick Ewing
Peter Keith (OA)
Rebecca Maiman

**Roll 3 – Honorably Retired
(G-2.0503c)**

Larry Armstrong *
Ross Bash
Susan Blank
Clifford Buell
Bruce Cadenhead
Cynthia Cadenhead
Sylvia Carlson
Terry Carnahan (OA)
Anthony Catullo *
Carole Isley Corey
Eugene Degitz
Jim Farrer
Gary Filson
Ken Foust
Mary Kay Glunt
Donald Graff
Donna Havrisko
James Hepler
Donna Hess
Douglas Holben (OA)
Clark Kerr
Jay Lewis

Dennis Macaleer (OA)
Charles MacPherson
Gail Mason (OA)
Bruce Maxwell
David McCabe
John McClure
F. Lee McDermott
Aleda Menchyk
John Michael (OA)
John Morrow
Norma Murphy (OA)
Rod Murray
Richard Noftzger
Kirk Orr (OA)
John Pressler
Marnie Abraham Russell
John Simpson *
Doug Stevens
James Stobaugh
Richard Sweeney*
Robert VanWyk (OA)

**Roll 4 – Certified Christian
Educators and Associates
(G-3.0104)**

* Listed twice due to their also
serving in some Temporary
Supply capacity or other service
to the church.

(OA) living outside the area

Presbytery of Redstone
Income and Expense Statement
 GENERAL FUND 01, December 2024

01/10/2025 03:44 PM

	Current Period	Year to Date	Annual Budget	Annual Budget Percentage
INCOME				
CONTRIBUTION INCOME	\$34,239.89	\$347,187.84	\$370,000.00	93.83%
INTEREST INCOME	0.00	96.73	5,000.00	1.93%
MISCELLANEOUS INCOME	-10.16	43,823.86	7,000.00	626.06%
RELEASE FROM RESTRICTIONS				
TEMP RESTRICTED RELEASE	-14,670.67	-63,657.97	0.00	0.00%
Subtotal Release From Restrictions	-14,670.67	-63,657.97	0.00	0.00%
RELEASED FROM RESTRICTION	14,670.67	63,657.97	0.00	0.00%
TOTAL INCOME	34,229.73	391,108.43	382,000.00	102.38%
EXPENSES				
SHARED MINISTRY & MISSION	\$14,509.33	\$95,698.90	\$103,000.00	92.91%
COMMITTEE EXPENSES				
COUNCIL	594.12	2,985.16	2,000.00	149.26%
COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY	0.00	425.00	500.00	85.00%
COMMITTEE ON PREPARATION	0.00	0.00	3,000.00	0.00%
Subtotal Committee Expenses	594.12	3,410.16	5,500.00	62.00%
OPERATIONS	15,310.33	63,826.18	40,321.00	158.30%
PRESBYTERY STAFF				
EXECUTIVE STAFF	11,339.81	134,739.72	134,121.32	100.46%
ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT	2,550.00	36,193.03	50,162.98	72.15%
EMPLOYER PAID FICA TAXES	920.79	9,610.83	8,000.00	120.14%
Subtotal Presbytery Staff	14,810.60	180,543.58	192,284.30	93.89%
APPORTIONMENTS	8,455.17	101,462.04	101,462.00	100.00%
RESTRICTED EXPENSE	3,097.40	15,051.23	0.00	0.00%
TOTAL EXPENSES	56,776.95	459,992.09	442,567.30	103.94%
TRANSFER ACCOUNTS				
TRANSFER FROM OTHER FUNDS	\$82,346.83	\$86,541.71	\$60,000.00	144.24%
TOTAL TRANSFERS	82,346.83	86,541.71	60,000.00	144.24%
EXCESS INCOME/EXPENSES	\$59,799.61	\$17,658.05	-\$567.30	-3,112.65%

Redstone Presbytery
Commitment to Larger Church
December 31, 2024

	2024 PLEDGE	TOTAL PAID	% Payup as of 12/31/2024	Unpaid Pledge Balance
Adah, Palmer		249.99		(249.99)
Apollo, Poke Run	3,660.00	2,745.00	75%	915.00
Avonmore	1,000.00	2,103.00	210%	(1,103.00)
Belle Vernon, First	4,500.00	4,500.00	100%	-
Belle Vernon, Harmony	1,200.00	1,200.00	100%	-
Belle Vernon, Marion	2,400.00	2,400.00	100%	-
Belle Vernon, Rehoboth	3,000.00	3,000.00	100%	-
Bolivar	1,500.00	1,500.00	100%	-
Brownsville, Calvin		828.00		(828.00)
Brownsville, Ft. Burd		2,640.00		(2,640.00)
Brownsville, Hopewell				-
Colver		132.00		(132.00)
Cresson	1,500.00	1,500.00		-
Delmont				-
Derry	1,000.00	1,000.00	100%	-
Dunbar, First		1,275.00		(1,275.00)
Dunbar, Laurel Hill	1,062.00	1,062.00		-
Ebensburg		1,000.00		(1,000.00)
Fairchance		1,000.00		(1,000.00)
Farmington	650.00	650.00		-
Fayette City, Little Redstone		2,500.00		(2,500.00)
Greensburg, First	31,000.00	31,000.00	100%	-
Greensburg, Maplewood	6,000.00	6,000.00	100%	-
Greensburg, Westminster	6,000.00	5,500.00	92%	500.00
Irwin, First		23,416.67		(23,416.67)
Irwin, W. Hempfield	3,000.00	3,000.00	100%	-
Jeannette	2,400.00	2,400.00	100%	-
Johnstown, Bethany	1,680.00	1,680.00	100%	-
Johnstown, First		6,000.00		(6,000.00)
Johnstown, Second		2,200.00		(2,200.00)
Johnstown, Westmont	16,000.00	16,000.00	100%	-
Lake Lynn	800.00	800.00		-
Latrobe, Main St.		26,500.00		(26,500.00)
Latrobe, Spring St.		3,000.00		(3,000.00)

Redstone Presbytery
Commitment to Larger Church
December 31, 2024

	2024	TOTAL	% Payup	Unpaid
	PLEDGE	PAID	as of	Pledge
			12/31/2024	Balance
Leisenring	400.00	500.00	125%	(100.00)
Ligonier, Pleasant Grove	850.00	850.00	100%	-
Lower Burrell, Grace		6,416.63		(6,416.63)
Lower Burrell, Puckety	10,000.00	10,000.00	100%	-
Masontown		200.00		(200.00)
McClellandtown		5,200.00		(5,200.00)
Merrittstown, Dunlap's Ck.		150.00		(150.00)
Mt. Pleasant, Reunion		1,084.00		(1,084.00)
Murrysville, First		12,000.00		(12,000.00)
Murrysville, Newlonsburg	22,250.00	22,242.00	100%	8.00
Murrysville, Union	4,000.00	4,000.00	100%	-
N. Alexandria, Community	4,000.00	4,000.00	100%	-
N. Alexandria, Congruity	6,000.00	5,631.98	94%	368.02
New Florence, Bethel	3,000.00	2,750.00	92%	250.00
New Florence, Trinity	3,825.00	3,506.25	92%	318.75
New Kensington	4,900.00	4,924.96	101%	(24.96)
New Salem	2,000.00	2,971.00	149%	(971.00)
N. Huntingdon, New Hope	5,448.00	5,448.00	100%	-
Patton	4,620.00	4,620.00	100%	-
Revloc	1,800.00	1,800.00	100%	-
Scottdale	500.00	500.00	100%	-
Smithfield, Grace Chapel	800.00	850.00	106%	(50.00)
Smock, Pleasant View		10,000.00		(10,000.00)
Trafford, Level Green	5,925.00	5,774.00	97%	151.00
Uniontown, Tent				-
Uniontown, Third		961.00		(961.00)
Uniontown, Trinity	2,640.00	2,966.50	112%	(326.50)
Vanderbilt, E. Liberty	1,000.00	850.00	85%	150.00
West Newton, Sewickley	500.00	675.00	135%	(175.00)
W. Newton, Sewickley UP		700.00		(700.00)
West Newton, United		130.00		(130.00)
Totals	172,810.00	280,482.98		(107,672.98)

**ORDINATION ANNIVERSARIES IN 2025
(5-year intervals)**

5 YEARS	10 YEARS
15 YEARS	20 YEARS
	Travis Webster
25 YEARS	30 YEARS
Patrick Ewing	
35 YEARS	40 YEARS
45 YEARS	50 YEARS
James Hepler John Michael Rick Sweeney	Larry Armstrong Dennis Macaleer John Pressler
55 YEARS	60 YEARS
John Simpson	Eugene Degitz
65 YEARS	70 YEARS
John Morrow	

Adah, Palmer Community – Elder Diana Davis

Avonmore, First – Elder Raymond Bussard

Belle Vernon , First – Elder Bill Callaway

Ebensburg – Elder Carolyn Vaughn

Greensburg, First – Elder Dr. George Chambers, Elder Arthur Caramella

Johnstown, First – Elder Donald Bash

Latrobe – Elder Robert (Jud) Beltz, Elder Susannah Calvo, Elder Loretta Furgeson, Elder Dr. John Krouse, Elder Dr. Wylie Overly, Elder Dr. John Parker

Lower Burrell, Grace Community – Elder Martha Gumbert, Elder Charles Markle, Elder Dick Scott

Murrysville, First – Elder Mary Florida, Elder Lowell Rowley

Murrysville, Newlonsburg – Elder Bob Quigley, Elder Paul Boget

New Alexandria, Community United – Elder Alton Goodlin, Elder Glen Machesney

New Alexandria, Congruity – Elder Janet Rugh

New Florence, Bethel – Elder Shirley Alberter

New Kensington, United – Elder Anne Kostray Jacobus, Elder Sandra Lee Ruffner Mozzy

New Salem – Elder Miscik Stilwell

North Huntingdon, New Hope – Elder James St. Clair

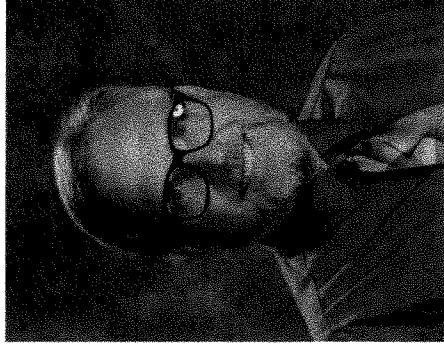
Patton – Elder Neale Dow, Elder Betty Lou Switzler

Smock, Pleasant View – Elder Gaye Wright

Uniontown, Trinity United – Elder Virginia Higgenbotham, Elder William Long

Teaching Elders – Rev. James Giesey, Rev. George Joey Hickok

Lon Weaver's Ministry-in-Brief



Questions for the 21st Century Church:

How do we bring the *joy and healing power* of Christ's love into all of our relationships?

How do we open ourselves to the *ineffable* – the indescribable, inexpressible love of God – as divisive forces threaten all levels of community?

How do we face *disillusionment* meaningfully, regularly shedding illusions so that we can embrace and offer God's love, and do God's will?

How do we embody a ministry of *improvisation*: the joyful, creative, healing, and life-changing encounter with a future we cannot foresee?



A recent northern Minnesota sunrise



With my family – my wife, Robyn, and our two children and their spouses – at a beloved vacation spot north of Toronto

Selected Publications

“Tillich and Bonhoeffer: Philosophy and Biblical Theology in the Service of Resistance” (2020)

“God – The Unacknowledged Spirit of Healing in Film” (2015)

Applied Christian Ethics: Foundations, Economic Justice, and Politics (2014, Editor)

Religious Internationalism: The Ethics of War and Peace in the Thought of Paul Tillich (2010, Author)

Against the Third Reich: Paul Tillich's Wartime Radio Broadcasts into Nazi Germany (1998, Translator)

Faith Statement (Excerpts)

“The force behind God’s creative activity is love. Thus, we are the result of God’s love, and love is the basic mark of our identity. . . .”

Jesus Christ is “the bridge over the chasm of sin. . . the proof of God’s tenacity, of God’s unwillingness to give up on a creation blemished by our hateful and unmindful use of individual and collective freedom, the testimony to hope’s victory over despair. . . .”

The Holy Spirit is “God’s vibrant presence in our midst. . . God’s Spirit ever surprises us. . . opening new windows of insight, attesting to our limits and our capacity for redemptive change.”

Reflections on Experience

– Past Ministry –

Apollo Presbyterian Church (1987-1990) kindly welcomed me as a new pastor, patient with my limits, affirming of my strengths and initiating our young family into the ambiguities of village culture.

Appleby Manor Presbyterian Church (1990-2001) daringly dove into a co-pastorate with my wife, Robyn, and me. It embodied spiritual vigor through groups devoted to deeper paths of ministry and to exploring the new.

– Present Ministry –

Glen Avon Presbyterian Church (2001-present) has a core of members open to visionary ministry relevant to our day. The increasing secularity of our culture poses important challenges to its ministry, yet the congregation is growing increasingly faithful to Christ in embracing diversity and inclusion. A new intergenerational program is a source of renewal for members and friends.

Marshall School (2012-2024) invited me to serve as its chaplain and instructor in ethics and religion as it began its post-Roman Catholic, broadly inclusive period. It has confirmed that effective engagement – of colleagues and students, of the spiritual and the nonspiritual, cross-generationally, and cross-culturally – is a dynamic adventure.

Quotations that Inspire My Reflection and Action

“To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts.”

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (1849)

“The truth does not change according to our ability to stomach it.”

Flannery O’Connor, *Letters to Betty Hester* (1955-1964)

“You may kill me with your hatefulness, But still, like air, I’ll rise.”

Maya Angelou, “Still I Rise” (1978)

“...the world offers itself to your imagination....”

Mary Oliver, “Wild Geese” (1986)

“Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside, you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.”

Naomi Shihab Nye, *Words Under the Words* (1994)

“For all of us, becoming indigenous to a place means living as if your children’s future mattered.”

Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013)

“The new dawn blooms as we free it. For there is always light.

If only we’re brave enough to see it.

If only we’re brave enough to be it.”

Amanda Gorman

“The Hill We Climb” (2021)

Presidential Inauguration Poem

Selected Biblical Teachings that Drive My Ministry

Micah 6:8

“Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world’s grief.

Do justly, now.

Love mercy, now.

Walk humbly, now.

You are not obligated to complete the work,

But neither are you free to abandon it.”

(*a version often attributed to the Talmud*)

Matthew 9:36

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” (NRSV)

Romans 12:2

“Do not be constantly conformed to this world, but be ever transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God— what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (MLW translation)

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND MISSION OF
INTERIM EXECUTIVE PRESBYTER
by Rev. Dr. Matthew Lon Weaver

Western Pennsylvania holds a special place in my life. I was born in Wilksburg, baptized at Edgewood Presbyterian Church, and spent my first eight years in Swissvale. My family moved to rural, Fremont, Ohio where I grew through youth and into adulthood. I returned to Pennsylvania to be trained as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament. I completed by formal graduate work in Pittsburgh: an MDiv (1986) and STM (Master of Sacred Theology – 1996) at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary; and a PhD (2006) at the University of Pittsburgh. Robyn Watkins Weaver and I were married in 1985, a few blocks from the seminary at Eastminster Presbyterian Church. We are the parents of two adult children – a son and a daughter, both born in Magee Women's Hospital – who are the source of great pride to us.

Up until now, two presbyteries in different parts of the country have blessed me with opportunities to serve Christ in many ways. I've served as associate pastor to two senior pastors, a year as *de facto* interim pastor between them, twenty-plus years in co-pastorates with my wife, Robyn, eleven years as her parish associate for worship and music, and the director of a range of music groups over time. I've worked with four executive presbyters with various gifts and temperaments, and served on multiple presbytery committees, chairing seven of them. This included nine years on the Committees on Ministry of both presbyteries, five years as chair. I've taught Synod School classes, and I served with Robyn as co-chaplain for family camps over five summers at Camp Lambec in northwestern Pennsylvania. For the General Assembly, I've served on one of the planning committees for the Westminster Conference on Worship and Music and participated in several meetings of the Social Ethics Network during the course of two decades.

Within academia, I've taught courses in ethics and religion in higher and secondary education, twelve years as chaplain and nine as department chair. I've collaborated in developing a number of innovative approaches to curriculum and culture. As a writer, I've directed my writing to an array of issues in the field of social ethics, often through the lens of the German-American theologian, Paul Tillich, publishing twenty articles, translating one book (*Against the Third Reich* – 1998), writing a second book (*Religious Internationalism* – 2010), and editing another (*Applied Christian Ethics: Foundations, Economic Justice, and Politics* 2014), tending the work of multiple authors and scholars in the process. For my entire ministry, I've been active in ecumenical organizations. For the past twenty years, I've relished engaging in interfaith work with members of the Jewish and Islamic communities. In my service to Christ, I've taught people from ages five to ninety-five, preached and lectured to audiences ranging from an academic community of five hundred people to gatherings of a few dozen scholars sharing my focus on social ethics and religion, and to faith communities ranging from 350 to 600 members.

Collaboration has also been key to my ministry. I've delighted in serving with staff and members in the church, with dozens of colleagues in academia, with various musicians in varied contexts, and with partners in the broader community. It's been a marvelous gift to share this journey with Robyn, both together and along the different paths our ministries have taken us: she is a perpetual source of Christ's grace in my life. In serving Christ in Redstone Presbytery, I will pursue dynamic conversations that value the perspectives of all participants as we chart a course into the future, always seeking the Spirit's counsel. This calls for mindfulness, discernment, advocacy, and humility, resting on the scriptural counsel that we are to turn to the One who reaches out to the weary to provide us rest (Mt. 11) and whose tender mercy can transform our minds to discern faithful paths (Lk. 1 & Rm. 12).

Finally, we serve Christ in troubled times. We live in a defiantly polarized nation, facing the long-term challenges of climate change, the continuing crisis of Russia's war on Ukraine, and the multiple fronts of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, I'm inspired by Wendell Berry's call to "learn all we can about where we are, making common cause with that place, and patiently committing ourselves to it;" I'm moved by Seamus Heaney's dream of a world "where hope and history rhyme;" and I'm encouraged by Amanda Gorman's confidence that we can offer light to the world if we are "brave enough to be it." Thus, inspired by this wisdom, I take great joy in sharing Christ's call with the people of Redstone Presbytery as your Interim Executive Presbyter.

Published at biblicalleadership.com January 2025 and offered through Redstone Presbytery Healing Prayer Ministry Network ... use freely

Ten simple ways to enhance your church's future by Jim Farrer

Simple, yes, but certainly not easy. Most pastors are already overworked with business as usual, and leading a "turnaround" is the most difficult task of church leaders. We will cover most of the issues in bringing about change in a companion article.

Understanding Jesus' promise

Jesus promises that he will build his church (St. Matthew 16:18). However, congregations are not automatically zapped into health, vitality, fruitfulness and more members.

Resurrection is necessary

"Revitalization is a waste of time," declares consultant Bill Easum in *A Second Resurrection*. He continues, "... reformation, renewal and revitalization don't get to the heart of the problem." What will it take to get eyes open to kingdom reality, hearts on fire, love for outsiders and the mind of Christ (I Corinthians 2:16)? Resurrection.

A physical fire or the fire of the Holy Spirit

Consultant Dr. Norman Shawchuck once said that new vitality comes either through a new vision or a calamity. Another leader believes that congregations become truly motivated by a fire that burns down the building or when the fire of the Holy Spirit invades the members. Of the top 25 denominations in total membership the only two that are growing are charismatic denominations, where members have likely had a moving experience with the Living God, had their lives changed and are eager to share Christ.

The role of the Bible

The Bible is our handbook for church vitality. We might begin our strategy at St. Matthew 22:37-40. Here Jesus summarized the first and greatest commandment. In any venture we are to "put first the Most High God." God is to be placed above our idol of tradition: "We never did it that way before." God is also to be above our idol of fear. An early turnaround question to ask in any size/type of church is therefore: "What is God calling us to do today that in 15 or 20 years from now people will say was a smart and blessed thing to do?" Jesus second greatest commandment is to love neighbors and outsiders as much as ourselves.

The role of prayer

Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson conducted research on more than 300 formerly declining congregations across ten denominations. "Start with intentional prayer. It is not just cliché--prayer is where it starts," admonishes Stetzer in *Comeback Churches* (p.111).

In *Turnaround and Beyond* Ron Crandall reports that a national four-year study covering 30,000 congregations in six denominations reveals that the few congregations that had exciting success in reaching new adults with the gospel had rediscovered prayer. However, it also indicates “a resistance to serious investment in prayer is encountered again and again.”

Letting our light shine

Driving past a majority of church buildings, one may discover a sign giving the church’s name and hours of worship. Very few follow St. Matthew 5:16 and “let their light shine” alerting *outsiders* what is going on *inside*. Even a banner in the churchyard or along the street declaring: “Something is happening here...by God” sparks attention.

The role of inviting

Consultant Thom Rainer reported that 21 percent of active churchgoers invite another person to church in the course of a year, but of those only two percent invited an unchurched person. Scott Thumma in a mega church study discovered “that in mega churches 87 percent of members have invited at least one person to services in the past year.” Some churches encourage members to list family, friends and those at work on a personal prayer list with the intention of inviting them to a church event appropriate to their needs.

Sending people out

Several congregations have received a burst of energy, changed hearts and opened eyes when perhaps five percent of their memberships return from mission trips especially to the third world. Other congregations make arrangements for church leaders to visit a similar-sized but healthier church to monitor what they did and do.

A better financial future

Include at the bottom of the order of worship or announcement sheet: “Please remember the church in your will.” After all we are still in the era with the greatest turnover of wealth in history.

Engage an outside consultant

It takes a humble pastor to suggest an outside consultant. But these leaders often help you build on genuine strengths and rethink your ministry area. An important factor in turnaround congregations is enhancing their confidence in God and in their future.

Jim Farrer, honorably retired, served Redstone Presbytery and the Synod of the Trinity in Congregational Development and Evangelism. A broadly-trained consultant in church vitality and published author, he has instructed leaders from 19 denominations, having led seminars from coast-to-coast and at Jerusalem Seminary in October 2022. Previously he oversaw the serving of Holy Communion at the “largest Presbyterian gathering ever held in America.” Find Jim’s current and many archived articles at biblicalleadership.com along with articles from turnaround experts from many denominations.