

THE VALLEY BRIDGE



March 24, 2015

MARCH 29: PASSION/PALM SUNDAY

Justice Advocacy

Palms: Mark 11:1-11 or John 12:12-16; *Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29*

Passion: Isaiah 50:4-9a; *Psalm 31:9-16*; *Philippians 2:5-11*;
Mark 14:1-15:47 or Mark 15:1-39 (40-47)

Fellowship of Prayer: Ashford Presbyterian Church of Milroy

We have two lay pastors who share our Sunday devotions,
Troy Krause and Doug Bengtson.

Fourteen members in our church, and no youth

Our session—Clerk Patricia Rosa, Members Dan Leach, Clay
Rosa, Daryl Leach

Treasurer—Caroline Datyler

Presbytery Commissioner—Patricia Rosa

Head of our Music Department—Kim Leach

Our prayer concerns are for the health of our church family
and their families.



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Panel

Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys
4055 Abbott Drive
Willmar MN 56201

320-235-7910

minnesotavalleys.org

Monday-Friday:
8:00-4:30

We're on Facebook, too!

THE WORD FROM RICK: “NOW WHAT?”



By now, the news about the passage of Amendment 14-F regarding the expansion of the definition of marriage is “old news” for many of our people here in Minnesota Valleys. Last Thursday, a letter was composed by our Presbytery Moderator, Stated Clerk, and myself, and sent to clerks of session and pastoral leaders across this presbytery. Hopefully, it has arrived in all of our congregations and has been shared with the extended Presbyterian community in the churches Minnesota Valleys.

Being one of those people who believe that just because a letter has been sent, that everyone has seen it or read it, I decided that I want to share it here in this week’s edition of The Valley Bridge. If this is “new” for just one person, it is worth it. Over communication sometimes has its place, and it is certainly preferable to no communication.

In the letter, we made a promise of sharing an explanatory resource with you in this week’s newsletter. You will find that following the letter. This document tries to bring some understanding to this issue. I hope that it can be useful to you and others who are a part of our extended family.

Grace and Peace,

Rick

A LETTER TO THE SAINTS OF THE PRESBYTERY OF MINNESOTA VALLEYS

March 18, 2015

To the Saints of the Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys:

Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

With the actions of two presbyteries on Tuesday, March 17, we have arrived at a moment of significant change in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). It is a change that is being greeted with both celebration and mourning. The amendment expanding the definition of marriage has now been approved by a majority of the presbyteries. Beginning on June 21, 2015, the Book of Order will define marriage as “a unique commitment between two people, traditionally a man and a woman, to love and support each other for the rest of their lives.”

We are keenly aware that there are those in our congregations who believe that our church has chosen to disregard the teaching of Scripture, the wisdom of those who have lived and died for the faith before us, and the continuing consensus of the contemporary church around the world. There is a concern that the church is yielding to our culture and misrepresenting Scripture. We are also aware that there are those who believe that this action is seen as being faithful to the teachings of Jesus Christ and extending his grace and good news to the world around us.

THE WORD FROM RICK, CONTINUED

We reaffirm to the congregations of Minnesota Valleys that the language of this amendment does not require participation in services of marriage with which a Session or Teaching Elder may disagree. It remains up to each Session and Teaching Elder to determine what is and is not faithful for themselves and for their congregation. We encourage teaching elders and ruling elders to work with their congregants to fully understand the meaning of this change to our Book of Order. To assist our congregations in this matter, we shall include a resource in next week's edition of "The Valley Bridge."

As we move forward, we will continue to face great challenges to our witness as a denomination and, more importantly, to our personal faithfulness. It is not enough for us to simply be for or against something. We have been called to extend the grace and good news of Jesus Christ and further the witness of the Kingdom, in light of this new reality we believe that we are still called to accomplish this together.

We who represent the leadership of this presbytery realize that there is a significant change in our corporate life, and that this change will have a profound effect on the future of our life together. It is our deepest hope and humble prayer that we can move forward in mission together. We know that there are those who will wish to disassociate themselves from local congregations, the presbytery, or the greater church. We pray that this does not become the case. We need people of good will and strong faith who represent all perspectives in order for us to seek a balanced view of faith and life, and create a broad witness. Our challenge is to be stronger together because of what we hold in common. We believe in, and respect, the faith and conscience of each Presbyterian in this presbytery, as they respond faithfully to what they hear our faithful Creator God calling them to do and be. We believe that our Creator God does have a future in mind for us – as congregations, as a presbytery, and as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

We borrow these words from our brothers and sisters in the Fellowship Community, "Joining in God's mission in this culture and leading others in this time of profound change is difficult. Yet God has called and equipped us for his mission. Accepting that call – growing in Christ's likeness, living by God's Word, and joining in God's mission in the world – cannot be done alone." We need each other.

We continue to hear God's call to serve God's people in southwestern and west-central Minnesota, as well as around the world. We are committed to find ways to do that together. We firmly believe that there is more that binds us together, than separates us. We pray that we can build upon, and celebrate those things which hold us together, as we seek to live in the midst of, and seek to understand, those things upon which we do not fully agree. May we continue to encourage, support, respect, love, and most especially pray for one another, and for Christ's church, as we seek to embrace and give witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ.

*Grace and Peace to you,
In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*

*The Rev. Richard C. Carus
Designated Executive Presbyter*

*The Rev. Dr. Candace Adams
Moderator of the Presbytery*

*The Rev. Pamela R. Prouty
Stated Clerk of the Presbytery*

**ADVISORY OPINION REGARDING
APPROVED AMENDMENT OF W-4.9000**

What is the status of the proposed amendment to the Constitution on marriage? It appears that a majority of presbyteries have voted to approve amending the *Book of Order* section on marriage, W-4.9000 in the Directory for Worship, by replacing it in its entirety with new wording. This new wording will become part of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) beginning June 21, 2015.

Will the approved amendment allow teaching elders to perform marriage services for same-gender couples? Yes, as long as the couple “meet the requirements of the civil jurisdiction in which they intend to marry.”

Will the approved amendment require teaching elders to conduct marriage services for same-gender couples? No. A teaching elder cannot be compelled to perform a marriage service for a same-gender couple. “Nothing herein shall compel a teaching elder to perform nor compel a session to authorize the use of church property for a marriage service that the teaching elder or the session believes is contrary to the teaching elder’s or the session’s discernment of the Holy Spirit and their understanding of the Word of God.”

Will the approved amendment allow sessions to approve holding marriage services for same-gender couples on church property? Yes. Sessions may permit the use of church property for the marriage service of a same gender couple.

Will the approved amendment require sessions to allow marriage services for same-gender couples to be held on church property? No. Sessions may deny the use of church property for the marriage service of a same-gender couple.

Will a session be able to categorically prohibit a marriage service for a same gender couple from being held on church property? Yes. Under our Constitution, sessions have the authority to make categorical determinations regarding the use of the church’s facilities.

Will a session be able to prohibit the pastor from conducting a marriage service for a same gender couple or compel the pastor to perform such a marriage service? No. Apart from denying a request for a marriage service to be held within church facilities, the session cannot prohibit the pastor from conducting the marriage service of a same-gender couple, nor compel the pastor to conduct any such service.

Will a teaching elder be able to conduct a marriage service within church facilities without session approval? No. Only session has the authority to permit or deny the use of church property for a marriage service. The pastor cannot compel the session to approve a marriage service nor can the pastor conduct any such service within the church facilities without session approval.

ADVISORY OPINION REGARDING APPROVED AMENDMENT OF W-4.9000, continued

How does the approval of the amendment of W-4.9000 affect the authoritative interpretation of W-4.9000 approved by the 221st General Assembly (2014)?

The authoritative interpretation of the current W-4.9000 stays in effect until June 21, 2015, when the old wording of W-4.9000 is replaced with the approved amendment. At that time the authoritative interpretation will no longer be in effect since the portion of the *Book of Order* that it is interpreting will no longer be in the Constitution.

What will be the new wording of W-4.9000 in the *Book of Order*?

Marriage is a gift God has given to all humankind for the well-being of the entire human family. Marriage involves a unique commitment between two people, traditionally a man and a woman, to love and support each other for the rest of their lives. The sacrificial love that unites the couple sustains them as faithful and responsible members of the church and the wider community.

In civil law, marriage is a contract that recognizes the rights and obligations of the married couple in society. In the Reformed tradition, marriage is also a covenant in which God has an active part, and which the community of faith publicly witnesses and acknowledges. If they meet the requirements of the civil jurisdiction in which they intend to marry, a couple may request that a service of Christian marriage be conducted by a teaching elder in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), who is authorized, though not required, to act as an agent of the civil jurisdiction in recording the marriage contract. A couple requesting a service of Christian marriage shall receive instruction from the teaching elder, who may agree to the couple's request only if, in the judgment of the teaching elder, the couple demonstrate sufficient understanding of the nature of the marriage covenant and commitment to living their lives together according to its values. In making this decision, the teaching elder may seek the counsel of the session, which has authority to permit or deny the use of church property for a marriage service.

The marriage service shall be conducted in a manner appropriate to this covenant and to the forms of Reformed worship, under the direction of the teaching elder and the supervision of the session (W-1.4004-.4006). In a service of marriage, the couple marry each other by exchanging mutual promises. The teaching elder witnesses the couple's promises and pronounces God's blessing upon their union. The community of faith pledges to support the couple in upholding their promises; prayers may be offered for the couple, for the communities that support them, and for all who seek to live in faithfulness.

A service of worship recognizing a civil marriage and confirming it in the community of faith may be appropriate when requested by the couple. The service will be similar to the marriage service except that the statements made shall reflect the fact that the couple is already married to one another according to the laws of the civil jurisdiction.

Nothing herein shall compel a teaching elder to perform nor compel a session to authorize the use of church property for a marriage service that the teaching elder or the session believes is contrary to the teaching elder's or the session's discernment of the Holy Spirit and their understanding of the Word of God.

USEFUL NEWS

Synod continues to offer grants to collegiate ministry efforts

The Synod of Lakes and Prairies, continuing its long-standing commitment to collegiate ministry, offers short-term funds to help established ministries become self-sustaining and seed money for new ministry initiatives of established ministries. There are also opportunities for leadership development grants and mini-grants for fall- or spring-break activities. Details, grant applications and contact information are on the Synod of Lakes and Prairies web site – by using this link – <http://lakesprairies.org/CollegiateMinistries>



Regarding Ruling elders: speaking ordination

Dee Wade, a teaching elder in Louisville, contributed this month's installment of "Regarding Ruling Elders," a resource distributed by the Office of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Wade writes, "In the presbytery in which I serve, several new faith groups are emerging. One is led by a teaching elder who was ordained to serve her group while it was still being formed. Another is becoming a commissioned ruling elder in order to be his community's pastor. As a former member of the presbytery's committee on ministry, this has gotten me thinking about the purpose and origin of ordination. The church doesn't exist in order to ordain people. The church ordains people that it needs in order to carry out its mission." Wade's complete column can be found at: <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2015/3/16/regarding-ruling-elders-ordination/>



'Being Reformed' now has more than 40 studies

The best-selling "Being Reformed: Faith Seeking Understanding" series now has more than 40 studies to choose from with the recent releases of "Call to Mission" and "Great Prayer of Thanksgiving." The series is biblically based and provides adults with a foundational understanding of the Reformed faith. Each six-session study, written by well-known and respected scholars, features scripture, prayer, in-depth commentary and questions for reflection. Details are at: <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2015/3/12/more-40-being-reformed-studies/>



EVENTS ON THE HORIZON

Here is a calendar of significant leadership development conferences and events for your calendar! Keep your calendars up to date, so that you don't miss out!

- May 4-6 [Great Plains Wee Kirk Conference](#), Fremont, NE
- June 18-21 [Churchwide Gathering of Presbyterian Women](#), Minneapolis, MN
The 2015 Churchwide Gathering of Presbyterian Women will bring together thousands of women (and a few men) for worship, education, community-building and much more at that Hyatt Regency Minneapolis. For information about the Gathering, [email Patricia Longfellow](#) or call 844/PW-PCUSA (844/797-2872), x8015. For questions about registration, [email the registrar](#) or call (540)520-2610. For voting representative questions, [email Veronica Green](#) or call 844/PW-PCUSA (844/797-2872), x5844. [Registration options](#) | [Event information](#) | [Schedule](#) | [Hotel accommodations](#)**
- July 26-31 [Synod School](#) at Buena Vista University, Storm Lake, IA
Catalogs are available at the presbytery office.
- July 30-August 1 [Big Tent 2015](#), Knoxville, TN

FOUR CHURCHES AWARDED MEDICAL DUES ASSISTANCE GRANTS

At their March 19th meeting, the Committee on Ministry (COM) awarded grants ranging from \$507-\$602 to four churches: Foley, Jackson, Osakis and Worthington, to partially assist in the increased Board of Pensions medical dues for teaching elders and their dependents in 2015.

Last Fall, Presbytery approved offering grants to churches with financial difficulty paying the 1.5% medical dues increase from Board of Pension for their teaching elder with dependents in 2015. Synod of Lakes & Prairies has provided the Presbytery with \$6666 for this program and COM could provide additional dollars.

A two-page grant application is available on the Presbytery website under Forms and then Committee on Ministry. Approval from the church's session is required. While there is no deadline on submitting applications, the next round of applications will be reviewed by the COM at their next meeting on April 16th.

For more information, please contact Gloria Vande Brake at 218-820-4197 or gloriavande@hotmail.com.

CHURCH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT V

By Stan Menning

Recently I attended a workshop on Evangelism at Lakeshore Center at Okoboji. It was led by Rev. Robert Houser. Bob is a retired pastor and Presbytery Executive, most recently the EP at Central Nebraska Presbytery. Our conversation for the day included the different phases of evangelism, activating and assimilating new members, hospitality and inactive members. I will be writing a series of articles sharing about each of those topics. Today I am just sharing findings from the U.S. Congregational Life Survey Research Services. Have fun discussing them and I hope you find encouragement in them.

MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT EVANGELISM AND CHURCH GROWTH

1. Only congregations in rapidly growing areas are adding members
 - a. How worshipers experience their congregation is a better predictor of growth than population change in the local community
 - b. Congregations that care for children and youth, involve many worshipers in the congregation in many ways, and welcome new people are more likely to be growing congregations
2. Only new or recently established congregations are growing
 - a. Less than half of fast growing PC (USA) churches were established after 1960
3. Only large churches grow
 - a. Four in ten fast growing PC (USA) churches have fewer than 200 in worship
4. Most people have been attending their congregation for years and years
 - a. One-third of worshipers are new in the last five years; in fast growing PC (USA) churches one-half are new
5. Most new people are new to the faith
 - a. Most new people in Presbyterian churches (40%) have changed denominations; 8% are first-timers, 23% are returnees, and 30% are transfers
6. New people usually learn about the congregation from advertising
 - a. Many new people (49%) visit for the first time because someone invited them; only 6% come for the first time due to advertising
 - b. Most new people visit between 1 and 3 congregations before choosing their new home

CHURCH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT V, CONTINUED

7. Denomination is irrelevant to church seekers
 - a. Half of new people (54%) say denomination is important in their search
 - b. Denomination is less important to those under age 25
8. New people usually come back after the first time because of the coffee hour
 - a. People return because of the friendliness of the people (55%), quality of the sermon (34%), and the overall worship experience
 - b. Too many new people (24%) report no follow-up from the congregation after their first visit or don't recall any follow-up (20%)
9. Growing congregations rely exclusively on big church signs and big advertising campaigns
 - a. Growing congregations use multiple methods to attract new people
 - b. Growing PC (USA) congregations are more likely to hold events to meet new people or to add members, advertise in the newspaper or telephone book, use email, have a church Web site, and send materials to or telephone first-time visitors
10. All congregations do the same things to integrate new worshipers into the congregation
 - a. Growing congregations use multiple methods to integrate new worshipers
 - b. Growing PC (USA) congregations are more likely to have a specific group for newcomers and to invite such people to take part in small groups or service opportunities
11. New member integration methods are entirely successful
 - a. New people are less involved in their congregation than those who've been there for longer
12. Worship services in growing churches offer only contemporary music
 - a. Almost all worship services in growing PC(USA) churches (89%) include traditional hymns
 - b. Services in growing PC (USA) congregations are more likely to include contemporary music, laughter, applause, participation by teens, drums or electric guitar, and visual projection equipment

Findings from the U.S. Congregational Life Survey (www.UScongregations.org), Research Services, PC (USA).

CALENDAR

Tuesday, March 24: Congregational Resources and Development meets at the presbytery office from 10:00–2:00

Wednesday, March 25: Rick and Virginia out of the office

Thursday, March 26: Next Pres Team meets at the presbytery office at 9:00

Friday, March 27: Book Club meets to discuss *Ragamuffin Gospel*

Sunday, March 29: Rick Carus at FPC Lake Crystal; John McKay at Union St. Peter



VOLUNTEER TO SERVE ON THE PRESBYTERIAN PANEL

Presbyterian Research Services is inviting you to join a list of potential Presbyterian Panelists! Since 1973, church leaders have turned to the Presbyterian Panel to learn more about the beliefs and practices of Presbyterians. By joining this list, you will be added to a group of people who are willing to fill out occasional surveys (four per year) that help Presbyterian entities, congregations, and others make informed decisions and reach their goals. All surveys will be available in English, Spanish, and Korean.

It is important that the group of selected panelists represents Presbyterians as a whole. If you are interested in serving on the Presbyterian Panel, please answer the following demographic questions to help Research Services select a representative sample of Presbyterians:

[Click here](#)

If you are selected to become a Presbyterian Panelist, Research Services will send you a welcome letter with further details. If you are not selected right away, they will keep you on a list of potential Panelists for the future. You can unsubscribe from this list at any time. This list will not be shared with anyone outside of Research Services and will not be used for any other project without your permission.

If you have any questions, please contact Research Services by phone at (800) 728-7228 ext. 2040, or by email at panel@pcusa.org.