

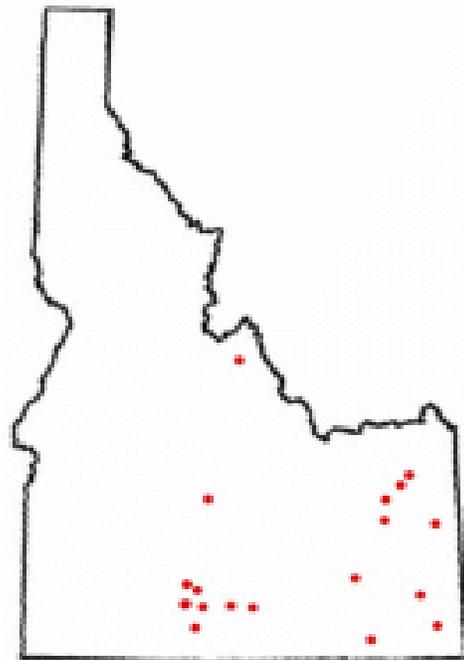
# ***THE KENDALL CONSTELLATION***

*A Newsletter of Kendall Presbytery*

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*“You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship You.” (Neh. 9:6)*

# Presbytery Retreat 2014

Kendall Presbytery met for another annual retreat at the Monastery of the Ascension in Jerome, Idaho on October 23-24, 2014. Although we appreciate very much the participation of all who were in attendance, it must be acknowledged that the attendance was down from previous years in part, no doubt, to the loss of three congregations from our Presbytery in recent years, but also in keeping with a trend of lower attendance over the years due to declining interest.

Perhaps it is time to seek a different model for corporate learning and enrichment. “A time for everything,” the good book says ... maybe the annual retreat as we have know it has run its course and it’s now time for something new. The fact that the houseflies have virtually taken over the place in Jerome has added to the disenchantment that was well under way under the leadership of the spiders in previous years. When you need to act swiftly in shooing flies with one hand while you try to steady a camera with the other so you can take a quick picture of the communion table, you know there’s a problem. “Hurry up and close that door ... you’ll let the flies out!” was a recurring joke all weekend. I think we can find something better.

That aside, the discussion was fruitful and we made a good start to identifying our “essential purpose” and our “core values” (implying behaviors we seek to exemplify). Influenced by Phil Bergey, a consultant who has been busy assisting various Councils of the Presbyterian Church in recent years, we sought to put aside “churchy” language which eventually gets lost in translation and becomes emptied of clear meaning, and instead use clear simple

language to identify our essential purpose and core values.

We also disposed with the typical pattern of writing down all responses to a variety of questions designed to elicit thoughts on these topics, because it often becomes difficult later on to dispose of the ones that were further from the mark and, often out of a misplaced desire to be inclusive of every response, produce a list of things that is meaningless because it is too long. Any list of priorities that is ten items long is not a list of priorities - it is a useless laundry list.

By continuing the conversation and asking basic questions again and again in different ways, a pattern begins to emerge as the group learns from their interactive experience and central thoughts and emphases distill their way up to the surface.



The discussions were led by Presbytery Moderator Blake Walsh and Executive/Stated Clerk Ron Lavoie. The following questions and considerations were used to guide and elicit discussion among the gathered body:

**Visioning Exercise: Asking important, basic questions repeatedly so as to gain emerging insights as the group learns together from its continued interaction.**

**Introductory considerations:**

1. Parkinson's Law (the universal tendency to loose focus and to grow over time in the wrong ways)
2. to lose a sense of core purpose over time (e.g., the Centers for Disease Control)
3. to dilute core purpose by addition of non-core emphases and activities
4. to undermine organizational integrity by allowing bad behaviors contrary to core values (e.g., the Veterans Administration)
5. Phil Bergey's method ([philipcbergey.com](http://philipcbergey.com)):
6. to ask basic questions in non-religious terms (religious words are mysterious and soon become ill-defined)
7. to seek a sense of: core purpose, core values (must relate to ideal behaviors), and a "higher purpose"
8. for organizations who have drifted away over time, look for vestiges of core purpose in inflated structures and trim down to essentials (no list of anything is effective if its longer than three - two is better ... it may take time and repeated consideration to consolidate down to an effective number).

## **Discussion questions:**

1. What is the essential (practical) purpose of the Presbytery?
2. What gifts have we been given and how can we best use them in the fulfillment of our purpose?
3. What things can we identify as our core values as Presbyterian Christians?
4. What behaviors do we seek exemplify, and which ones (sometimes exhibited in Presbytery life) do we wish to avoid and eliminate, if possible, from our corporate life?
5. Is there anything about our particular setting (time and place) that affords a special opportunity for meaningful contributions to the propagation of the gospel and the building of God's kingdom?
6. What is our higher purpose ... what can we do for God's kingdom as a presbytery?
7. What values do we wish to uphold and exemplify in all we do?
8. Should our purpose and structure be clearly derived from our theology, or would it be acceptable for it to be driven by business considerations, or perhaps a by socio-political frame of reference? Corollaries?
9. Are there certain behaviors that we easily fall into that we wish to avoid in Presbytery life?
10. What is our higher purpose? Does it represent a thoughtful and prayerful response to our particular time and place?
11. Is our higher purpose founded on the core of our theology or is it based on a fringe or ancillary part of our theology? Which would be a more uniting experience for us?
12. Would it be acceptable if our core purpose, values, and higher purpose only amounted to something we printed out

for Presbytery meetings, or should the emphasis of infuse everything we do? How?

13. In the ever-changing landscape of the Presbyterian Church (USA), what do we envision for the future of our Presbytery, its churches, its operations and boundaries? How do we prepare for the unknown?
14. What useful capabilities will new technology deliver for Presbytery life? What are the limitations of technology in regard to the need for meaningful interactions and the building-up of an authentic friendships and a real sense of community?
15. What particular challenges and opportunities are emerging for us as we seek to serve God at this time and in this place?

**Putting it all together ... what is our:**

1. identity: who are we? ... what do we say about ourselves?
2. motivation: what sentiments and convictions animate and innervate our efforts?
3. practical purpose: what is the Presbytery supposed to be doing? what is its main work?
4. value system: what behaviors do we cherish and strive to exemplify at every opportunity?
5. theological touchstone: what is the core theological element animating our purpose for God's kingdom? What theological awareness do we strive to maintain while carrying out our purpose so that we will be responsive to our particular time and place and make the best of opportunities that are uniquely ours here and now?



Although it was acknowledged that we have only begun our work in this area, important things were said and a consensus emerged in some areas. It was clear that **our purpose is to build relationships of integrity among our ministers, preachers, and among our congregations.** This essential purpose is mirrored closely in our structure which contains two operational committees: Ministerial Relations and Church Relations. Other structures, such as Council, Trustees, Board of Managers, etc. are supportive of these two essential functions as are our two staff professionals: the Executive/Stated Clerk and the Executive Administrative Assistant.

Identified as **our core values are respect and humility.** This recognition is identified as a hope and prayer that neither the Presbytery nor its members will ever act in a condescending

manner toward any of its members or congregations, but will be as eager to listen as to speak, and ever bear in mind that we all learn from one another - that no one has a monopoly on truth or righteousness.

All Presbyteries have failed in this regard at one time or another and this discussion evoked painful memories for some in our Presbytery as well. We are hopeful that a commitment to these core values and to the behaviors which they imply will be a means of grace and healing wherever there are unhealed wounds and strained relationships due to past events.

In regard to our theological touchstone - the theological awareness that we seek to carry with us as we pursue our purpose - **emphasis on the Trinity was identified as a particular response to our time and place**, surrounded as we are in Eastern Idaho by a population of followers of Jesus Christ who have not accepted the Trinitarian formula but have in recent years been trending that way, and are exhibiting a keen desire to be recognized as a legitimate Christian Church by the more traditional Christian Churches.

While the recognition of this theological touchstone does not alter our purpose or our core values, it makes us mindful of the **unique opportunity that is ours to contribute to God's kingdom by being a clear witness to the Trinitarian faith in Eastern Idaho.** Perhaps we will be, as a result, even more diligent in teaching this essential doctrine in our congregational Christian education efforts, in our worship, in our examination of candidates for ordination. We have an opportunity to do something through our faithful witness here and now that only a few other Presbyteries have. This is something we can do for God's

kingdom that is not as readily available to a Presbytery in central Florida, for example. Doing so would be a faithful response to the special setting that God has placed us in.

We have yet to begin a serious discussion of “who we are” or “what motivates us,” but I have no doubt that we will continue the discussion with ideas already in mind. It is hoped that we will be able to develop a five-part statement (who we are, what motivates us, our essential purpose, our core values, and our response to our time and place) that is written in elevated language, suitable for use in worship, as a convening exercise whenever presbytery meets, and as a teaching device to acclimate newer members to the ethos of the Presbytery. For organizations who do not invest any energy in such an exercise, Parkinson’s Law takes over quickly and thoroughly (the universal tendency for organizations to grow bureaucratically and expand their original mandate to the eventual loss of their sense of purpose and become self-serving.)

In any well-ordered organization, all participants are able to answer, without hesitation, a simple question: “What is the purpose of your organization?” Whenever such a question begins a long discussion, it shows that Parkinson’s Law has taken effect and that organization is in need of rescue.

May God come to our aid with the promised Holy Spirit and help us take hold of our calling with faithfulness and grace. May God’s blessings be with us all this Advent Season.

In Christ our Lord,

*Ron Lavoie*