



MAGNIFY THE MESSAGE

"O MAGNIFY THE LORD WITH ME, AND LET US EXALT HIS NAME TOGETHER." PSALM 34:3

A PRESBYTERY OF WEST VIRGINIA PUBLICATION

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PAVING A PATH FOR THE PRESBYTERY

Have you ever found yourself wondering exactly how you got where you are today? Why did God choose this direction for your life? Some of us look at Proverbs 16 and say, I committed my ways to the Lord and therefore He directed my path. For John Bolt, installed as moderator at the fall stated meeting of the Presbytery of West Virginia, that is an undeniable truth.

In 1997, Bolt moved to Charleston, West Virginia. He and his wife, Margaret, joined the congregation at First Charleston, and then he discovered his time was more flexible than in previous stops and, following the Lord's call to become more involved, Bolt did just that.

"I had done freelance work for [The Presbyterian Outlook](#), helping cover the General Assembly, which gave me a desire for presbytery-level involvement," Bolt explained. "As a result, I volunteered to serve on

Committee on Ministry (COM); I had also been a presbytery commissioner from First Charleston and was aware of the need for COM members, so I offered my name and was elected."

Crediting his background as a cradle Presbyterian, moving from Greenville, South Carolina, to Atlanta, Georgia, to Dallas, Texas, and now Morgantown, West Virginia, Bolt believes experiencing the culture of multiple congregations has been instrumental in shaping his influence and knowledge of the PC(USA).

Bolt's service to the church has included serving sessions at four different churches, including as clerk on three; as a journalist for The Associated Press covering two General Assemblies, which in turn led to free-lance opportunities for The Outlook helping report on many more General Assemblies as well as follow-ups to GA decisions such as writing feature stories.



BOLT AND HIS
GRANDDAUGHTER

Elected as PWV's representative on the then-named General Assembly Council, Bolt served on its Congregational Ministry Division which provided a broader appreciation of the work of the church at large. As his knowledge and experience expanded, his understanding of the denomination, at many levels, broadened.

Over the years, Bolt has served the Presbytery of West Virginia as a Commissioned Lay Pastor, leading two small congregations in Charleston; Commissioned Pastor, moderating sessions of two Morgantown congregations; and served on the Committee on Ministry and the Vocations Committee. He has been a commissioner to

Presbytery from two different churches multiple times and served as the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of West Virginia. On a regional level, Bolt has been a presbytery commissioner to the Synod of the Trinity, which included two terms as moderator. Later, he chaired the search committee for a synod executive. In addition to two terms on GAC, his national service included serving as a GA commissioner and on the former News Advisory Council.

"When I became involved in this presbytery, there were some 140 congregations and more than 11,000 members. Now it's down to about 110 congregations with just around 6,000 members," Bolt said regarding the largest factor he has seen impact the trajectory of the Presbytery. "Naturally, this has affected mission and ministry within the presbytery. Despite that, however, the presbytery has continued to do important and faithful work."

Bolt finds the polity to be "extremely logical and faithful" which gives a balanced approach to Presbyterian understandings. "Our polity is solidly based on theology. Indeed, the Book of Order is as much an important theological resource as a rule book. His hope is to model being a faithful presbyter and leader.

"Maybe it's because I grew up Presbyterian, and haven't really experienced anything else, but I believe wholeheartedly in our understanding and approach to faith," Bolt stated. "I feel I have a responsibility to be, essentially, an evangelist for being Reformed/Presbyterian. Especially today, so many people need to hear about the grace of God in a way that may be different for them, and even a number of our own members have never really been taught or exposed to the deep theological reasons behind why our understanding is the way it is. I try, sometimes successfully, sometimes not, to model that in every way."

Believing success in the role of moderator will be defined as someone who helps the presbytery discern God's calling in any situation with fairness and equity, Bolt considers personal success as not embarrassing himself on the presbytery floor. He believes the largest accomplishment to date



THE REV. DAWN ADAMY PASSING THE GAVEL TO JOHN BOLT AT NOVEMBER'S STATED MEETING.

“
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”

that he has been involved in is chairing the pastor nominating committee which found Zac Morton to be First Presbyterian, Morgantown’s pastor, a congregation Bolt has been a member of since 2009.

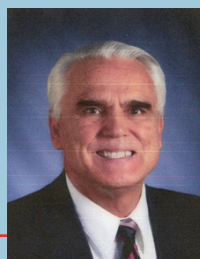
Recalling how First Morgantown completed the Ministry Information Form eight years ago clearly outlining that it was looking for a new pastor who, among the usual things, would be a visible, reformed voice in the community. Bolt said Pastor Morton has helped First Morgantown grow stronger in ministry and finance.

The community is more aware of First Presbyterian Church and its ministry. We are gaining members, many of whom are young adults and families,” Bolt explained. “Many others who have been hurt by the church in the past are returning to church for the first time in years. Many of them have said this is the first time they’ve felt comfortable and truly welcomed in church. More than one new member has expressed the wish they had known a church like First Morgantown existed.”

Bolt’s favorite part of working alongside congregations is simply being a part of the people of God, “with all their flaws and missteps,” and doing kingdom work on earth. Each position he has stepped into has held its own influence and knowledge and prepared him for the next role to which God would call him. Looking forward to serving as Moderator, and helping the presbytery journey into this new structure, Bolt is confident that this is the right move for the Presbytery of West Virginia to be “relevant and effective in the coming years.”

“To be a part of that is a great honor and privilege,” Bolt said. “To hear the words, ‘well done, good and faithful servant’ at the end of my tenure is all I can hope for and that the Presbytery of West Virginia will be on solid footing and headed faithfully into the future of the church, whatever that may end up being.”

HAVE YOU SEEN OUR PASTOR FEATURES? [CLICK HERE](#) TO VISIT OUR FACEBOOK PAGE AND READ THEIR STORIES!



THE WARMTH OF GOD'S LOVE

Over a decade ago, an outreach committee for First Presbyterian Church, Fairmont, came up with the idea to help others by hanging coats on their fence. Those in need could come take a new or lightly used coat without asking any questions. Today, this ministry serves 500-600 people annually.

Providing winter coats during the cold months and lighter jackets and raincoats during the spring and fall, what started with winter coats grew to a year-round ministry. First Fairmont always accepts donations so that they can survey the gaps in their inventory

prior to their busiest months and have seen everyone from members of their congregation and friends to local businesses support this effort. Through this outreach effort, they saw another need, one for shoes.

"Our congregation began looking for ways to provide shoes for the children in need. We started this annual, apple butter making event on a family's farm in 1987," said Terril Burner, chair of the outreach committee. "It made sense that after we make the apple butter, we host a sale to



VOLUNTEERS AT FIRST FAIRMONT PREPARE TO DISTRIBUTE SHOES.



THE OUTREACH COMMITTEE HAS PROVIDED THIS NEED FOR CHILDREN RANGING FROM NEWBORN TO 18 YEARS OLD. ANNUALLY, FIRST FAIRMONT PURCHASES BETWEEN 450-550 PAIRS OF SHOES.

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”

support our children’s shoe ministry. This year, our apple butter sale was in October and sold 438 pints.”

For children to receive a pair of shoes, parents must fill out an application. There is a limit for one pair of shoes per child annually. The outreach committee has provided this need for children ranging from newborn to 18 years old. Annually, First Fairmont purchases between 450-550 pairs of shoes.

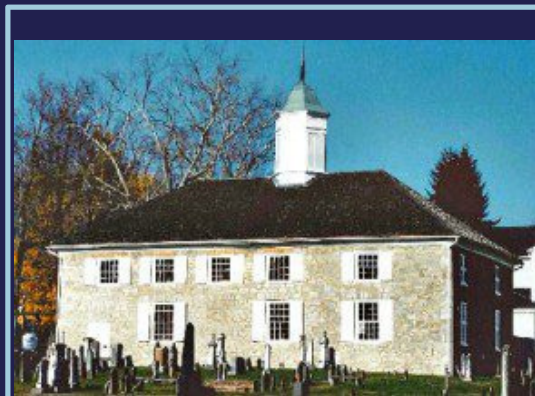
“The joy it brings to know we are impacting so many people with the basic need of a coat or pair of shoes is rewarding,” Burner said. “We distribute coats and pray they feel our Savior’s arms around them; or a pair of shoes and remind them that the Lord guides their steps. The world can be cold, but we are providing them warmth that comes from the love of God.”

First Presbyterian Church, Fairmont, appreciates donations for these ministries and accepts coats and shoes, or financial support for these projects, all year. For more information, contact the office at office@firstfairmont.net.



VOLUNTEERS SHOPPING FOR THE APPLICANTS
BOOTS AND SNEAKERS.

A HUGE THANK YOU TO OLD STONE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, THE REV. JULIE OLT AND HER STAFF FOR THE HOSPITALITY AND CARE THEY DEMONSTRATED AT NOVEMBER'S STATED MEETING. IT WAS WONDERFUL TO BE WITH SO MANY PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT CONGREGATIONS WITHIN OUR PRESBYTERY!



PAYING IT FORWARD

In 2009, the Polly Dodson Sunday School Class at Village Chapel Presbyterian Church in Charleston, West Virginia, started a discussion. What would it look like to help others in need? As a group known for strongly gravitating toward acting out their faith, they wondered about the impact of hosting something like a yard sale, but where they did not charge money. Someone recalled the movie *Pay It Forward*, and thus, began an annual ministry that many in the community anticipate.

Initially, the Pay it Forward No Sale Yard Sale was hosted the Saturday prior to Thanksgiving, but in recent years, the event has been held in October.

"The idea was to host the event close to Thanksgiving to give thanks and assist people looking for items to gift for Christmas," said the Rev. Dr. Todd Wright, minister at Village Chapel. "So many individuals have hectic schedules close to the holidays, so we moved the date of the event."

Two of the most popular areas to shop are the ones with Christmas decorations and children's toys and clothing. The church sees both parents and grandparents at the event. On average, the event sees 50 shoppers, but during times of crisis, like the Covid pandemic and in recent years with the economy in crisis, Village Chapel sees more. What began with 20 volunteers from the Polly Dotson Sunday School class now has more help from various areas of the church.

"We see a lot of people get blankets and coats. We have had people who have lost everything from fires or floods who are shopping to replenish household goods like pots and pans," Wright explained. "Kids having to move home because of job loss or addiction, and then we see parents and grandparents wondering how to afford Christmas. Being able to help them has meant a lot to Village Chapel."



AN ENJOYABLE DAY OF SHOPPING AT VILLAGE CHAPEL'S PAY IT FORWARD EVENT.

With trial and error, the group has discovered the best event strategy is to set up tables with labels as to what should go where. One week prior to the event, church members gather each evening for two hours to organize the donations.

Wright recalls some memorable moments from the events. One being a church member named Candy, who was a great personal shopper. Telling individuals she had the perfect item, she would turn one piece of clothing into an entire outfit, down to the shoes.

Another year, Wright recalls a member who donated her wedding dress, still in the keepsake box. As Wright was standing near the donuts and coffee, a man noticed the dress and asked Wright if he thought the dress would fit his girlfriend.

"He said, 'I know it sounds strange, but we have been waiting to get married until she finds a dress.' I helped him sneak it out to his car," Wright said. "The Pay it Forward event has had people approach us and ask if we are the 'nice church that helps people'. Becoming known as a church that helps people is truly gratifying."

Village Chapel begins collecting items for the sale each fall a few weeks prior to the event. During this period, items can be dropped off during business hours.

BEE-COMING A FOOD RESOURCE

A decade ago, First Presbyterian Church of Williamstown saw a need for a food ministry at a local elementary school. Today, they are serving 65 families each week, which consists of approximately 246 people.

Through partnerships with Waverly Activity Center and Crossroads Church, along with support from other local churches and service organizations, First Presbyterian Williamstown provides grocery food items for their Bee Bag Elementary School food program. With 25-30 volunteers from their congregation, First Presbyterian Williamstown applied for a Hunger Grant through the Presbytery of West Virginia to continue purchasing grocery items and providing their bi-monthly food pickup for families.

“We had this idea to expand and start doing more,” said Rev. Elizabeth Campbell-Maleke. “With rising food costs, we also saw that a grocery food program would help stretch food budgets further and we have had a greater impact than the individual snacks.”

Through this, the ministry has already expanded with the addition of providing menus and recipes. There are various locations to pick up groceries and a volunteer who works at a magnet factory had magnets made with all the pickup dates throughout the year.

“We see this as a neighborhood program, and we care for the families exactly how we would want to be treated. Everyone is appreciative and many choose to serve and give back in their own way, although this is not required,” Campbell-Maleke explained.

Building community trust, Campbell-Maleke has been able to establish pastoral connections with families who confide in her, and at times, are interested to know more about the church and its ministries. With support from other congregations, community members, and community organizations, First Williamstown is thankful to receive a hunger grant through the Presbytery of West Virginia to further advance this ministry.

“We are grateful for the support the grant from the Presbytery provided,” said Rev. Campbell-Maleke. “During these hard times, it is paramount that we utilize these resources to help show others the love of God.”

Churches interested in applying for a Hunger Grant may do so by using the application on the [Presbytery of West Virginia’s website.](#)



PICTURE OF CHURCH VOLUNTEERS TAKEN BY GAYLE MCCORMICK AT MARTIN LUTHER KING JR SERVICE DAY IN JANUARY 2025. FOOD COLLECTED WAS USED IN THE BEE BAG FOOD PROGRAM AND ALSO SHARED WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS IN PARKERSBURG AND WILLIAMSTOWN.

WESTMINSTER FOUNDATION: SHARING CHRIST ON CAMPUS



For more than 100 years, The Westminster Foundation of West Virginia has existed “for the promotion of religion and morality among the Presbyterian and other students of West Virginia University, and of other institutions of learning supported by the State of West Virginia” and, as its founding documents say, “for the promotion of the moral and religious education, training and welfare of Presbyterian and other students of West Virginia University and of other institutions of learning supported by the state of West Virginia.”

The Rev. Will Myers, campus minister at West Virginia University (WVU), believes the Westminster Foundation reaches 500 students annually across the state.

“At WVU, we engage with students in many ways, often providing them food,” Myers said. “If I count our food ministries, it is 100 students, but there are 20-25 who are directly and relationally involved.”

Westminster Foundation members agree that while the intangibles of their legacy are impossible to measure, their goals have shifted to supporting the challenges and pressures college students face and providing immediate spiritual, emotional and communal needs.

The needs and purposes of campus ministry are far different today than they were in the 1900’s. Recruiting future church members is no longer the primary goal, but it’s helping students cope with the stressors and pressures of daily life. Despite the shift in goals, they continue to be grounded in Reformed tradition.

“This is important because there is a significant amount of misinformation and misrepresentation of Christian teachings,” said Foundation board member John Bolt.

“Reformed theology is comfortable with, even encouraging of, asking questions and expressing doubt – a key appeal for college students and young adults tired of being told what they “must” believe.

As authors the Revs. Ted V. Foote Jr. and P. Alex Thornburg, say in *Being Presbyterian in a Dysvangelical America*, “God’s love is not earned, not deserved, and not created and distributed like a commodity by any specific human or church/faith community.”

On Marshall’s Huntington campus, the impact the Rev. Chris Bailey has had on the LGBTQA+ community is tremendous.

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“For many of our students, particularly those who identify as LGBTQ+, Marshall UKirk offers a safe space for students to explore their faith more deeply,” Bailey, campus minister at Marshall UKirk, said. “Not only students who are typically excluded from ministries are invited to participate, they are encouraged to lead and serve.”

While the Westminster Foundation employs full-time campus pastors at WVU and Marshall, it financially supports other campus ministries at Fairmont State University/ Pierpont Community College, West Virginia University Institute of Technology (Beckley Presbyterian Church), West Liberty University (Christ United Methodist Church, Wheeling), Shepherd University (Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church). Davis & Elkins College, a Presbyterian-affiliated college in Elkins, has a partnership with the foundation.

Bailey and Myers understand that their presence and availability impacts students, as a familiar face and simple, “how are you doing?” can encourage students to feel included and supported.

“We're the pie on the windowsill. We try to offer something sweet and filling for the spirit. Some days we're somebody's whole meal, some days we're just dessert. Some days we feed the regulars inside the house, some days we feed someone new outside of the house,” Myers said. “We provide continual support and care for the students, no matter how well we know them or how they reach out to us.”

Noting the impact involvement and investment make, there are many simple ways to get help campus ministry thrive.

“You can connect incoming students with church members based on their specific campus ministries, consider serving on the Westminster Board and/or local Campus Ministry Committees, or make financial contributions to support our ministries,” Bailey said. “On average, the cost to send one student to the college conference at Montreat is about \$300. Weekly dinners and coffee outreach efforts are \$80.”

For more information or to become involved, contact the Westminster Foundation of West Virginia office in Morgantown at westfoundwv@gmail.com or by phone at 304.292.4061.

THOUGHTS FROM OUR LEAD PRESBYTER AND STATED CLERK

Have you ever played the children's game, telephone – the one where the first person in a group of people shares a statement that is passed one by one around the group with the last person sharing the statement aloud? The statement shared aloud rarely reflects the statement of the person who began the game. While I am sure that those gathered for the Presbytery meeting on Saturday at Old Stone Presbyterian Church were careful listeners and some even took notes, I want to share my remarks following my nomination and election as Lead Presbyter and Stated Clerk.

Thank you for electing me to lead this presbytery. I am both honored and humbled. The search committee and I began a conversation with questions, they asked questions and I asked questions – from our visions of the ministry ahead and the stories that we want to share about the Presbytery to what will you do in the first six weeks and how will you build trust.

The search committee and I began a conversation; that conversation now moves forward adding the voices of the Leadership Team, committee leaders, and staff. The conversation now includes the voices of all of our churches and your voices. While I very much want to hear the voices added to the conversation, conversation is not enough.

More than 26 months ago, at my commissioning as the Transitional General Presbyter, Dave Lee used the passage from Joshua 1: 6-9; they are words to the leader Joshua – the passage includes the words, “Be strong and courageous” – they tell us to listen for God, follow God, lead the people to prosperity and success. This Presbytery has discerned God's call in its work of the strategic plan. The Lead Presbyter is to do this: lead the presbytery to fulfill the vision to which God is calling. God is calling all of us to be strong and courageous – to show up and do the work that God is calling us to do together.

This work will take all of us. It is the work of helping our congregations and leaders to deepen their faith and expand their toolboxes for ministry and mission. It is the work of equipping committees and congregations to be partners – to learn to collaborate with finite resources (including staff time, finances, and volunteers). It is the work of creating space for God to speak to us – our congregations and our Presbytery – to hear and discover what God continues to say to us and where God continues to lead us.

It is hopeful work. In the first interview with the search committee the theme of hope showed up. The Holy Spirit continued to weave Hope throughout all of our time together, each interview and conversation. So this is where I will begin my work as Lead Presbyter, over the next few months I want us to engage in a broad conversation about Hope – to think about what the Bible has to say about Hope, to think about the role of Hope in the Good News of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, to think about the ways Hope undergirds our ministry and mission. I invite you to enter into this space, this conversation. Let's see together how God is calling us to orient ourselves to God's hope.

Grace and Peace,
Maureen Wright



Happy Thanksgiving

from the Presbytery of West Virginia

Thank you for the piece you share
in magnifying the message of
God's goodness.