

Monthly Mod Musings

By John A. Bolt, Moderator, Presbytery of West Virginia, 2026

Ready, set, go!

With the election of Sarah Sanderson-Doughty as connectional presbyter on February 21, all the pieces are now in place for the Presbytery of West Virginia to start running with the new strategic plan. (If you need a refresher on exactly what that is, read the full plan or the summary.)

For those who weren't there, there were a couple of words and themes that were often repeated: grief and connections. Grief over those programs and individuals being lost, and the importance of connections to our future.

If you hang around the Presbyterian Church for any time at all, it won't be long before you hear it referred to as a "connectional church." It is built into our DNA, or at least we think it is.

But just what does it mean to be connectional? You won't find it spelled out in either part of our constitution: the Book of Order or the Book of Confessions, but it still runs through our veins.

There is probably no one better than the Rev. Gradye Parsons, stated clerk of the General Assembly from 2008 until his retirement in 2016, to explain this.

Writing for The Presbyterian News Service after his retirement, Parsons said, "[T]he connectional life of our church is not wholly based on our polity. (I hope people who know me were sitting down when they read that sentence.)

"Our connectivity is based in our relationship to each other as we live out our communal worship – a worship that has us confess together before we all, with educated brains, engage the Word; a communal worship where we come to the table together and meet the Christ who has died for us all; a communal worship where we all pledge to raise our child together."

“The PC(USA) is a church made up of a variety of people and places. We are urban and rural. We are small and large. We have fancy worship and simple worship.

“But my six months on the road researching [Our Connectional Church: The Hopeful Future of the PC(USA)], and 39 years of ministry, have shown me there is an ethos (beyond polity) that serves to nurture us in a very strong way that, in turn, connects us at a whole different level. ... [a] church where grace rules and gratitude flows into service.”

Last December, in a retreat with members of the Leadership Team and committee/commission chairs, we were asked to list some of the presbytery’s key characteristics. There were several, but by far, the one most often identified was “relationships,” which is nothing more than another word for connections.

At the same time, many of us expressed concerns that too many of our PWV connections have deteriorated for a variety of different reasons, and as a result, we are not as strong as we might be – and I would offer – as God wants us to be.

So, we pledged to repair, even create if need be, those connections/relationships. You will see that playing out in many ways as the year goes on.

I hope that we can be successful in strengthening our connections with each other, small churches and large churches, financially strapped churches and wealthy churches, red churches and blue churches, rural churches and city churches, former northern churches and former southern churches.

“May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant [us] to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together [we] may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 15:5-6)