

Monthly Mod Musings

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

And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. (Acts 2:6)

Chances are many, if not most, of us heard this scripture on Pentecost (May 24). Even if not, there's little doubt you've heard it more than once as Acts recounts the birth of the church.

Also, you're almost surely familiar with the saying: "Your actions are speaking so loudly I can't hear a word you're saying!"

In that vein, it occurred to me recently that maybe we've thought about "language" in a narrow context, that is, too literally. That's hard to acknowledge as someone who had two careers with words as the primary tool.

Perhaps we've talked a good game but failed to follow our words with actions.

Maybe we've finally figured that out.

Church membership in the United States has declined for decades. Even if you just go back to 2007, the first year the [Pew Research Center](#) conducted its [Religious Landscape Study](#), the share of adult U.S. citizens identifying as Christian has fallen from 78 percent in 2007 to 62 percent in 2025.

It's gets even worse. Two other long-term studies – the General Social Survey and Gallup – peg the high point of Americans claiming Christianity at a consistent 90-some percent in the '50s and even into the '70s. The real decline started in the mid-1990s.

There have been some hints, however, that at worst, the decline has stabilized, and at best may even be on the rebound.

I want to believe that the reason for the stabilization and possible rebuilding is because more and more individuals, congregations and denominations are

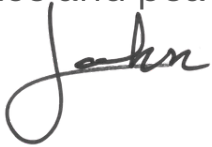
recognizing that Christianity is not only about **saying** what we believe, but also actually **showing** how those beliefs – and their implied responsibilities – are driving actions.

Or put another way, we're getting better at practicing on Monday what we preach on Sunday.

Research seems to agree. A review of several studies and surveys on the topic offers some reasons, including post-pandemic reevaluation of life, priorities and mortality; desire for real, embodied community, as opposed to digital; a sense that churches feel stronger, more vital and **more welcoming** (emphasis added); and belonging, identity formation and stability for young adults.

What are you seeing in your own areas? If you're willing, drop me an email at moderator@wvpresbytery.org – or better yet, come to the next presbytery meeting bolstered with something to lift up during Good News from the Pews.

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jackson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".