

A Word from our General Presbyter

Ed Thompson

Every year has its highs and lows. 2017 was tough on my wife and me as it marked the death of my mother-in-law, the last of our four parents to pass away. I am still tickled, though, by the card on the flowers the staff sent to us that read “From your friends in the Presbytery of VW.” I’m still not sure whether the florist was dyslexic or if the car culture of Michigan somehow overwhelmed their sense of spell.

There were numerous highlights during the past 12 months, things that have stuck with me that bring me joy and a feeling that I’m in the right place. Here, in no particular order, are 10 of the events that I will remember from 2017.

- 1) **Rededication of the sanctuary at Eleanor** – I think it was right before Easter in 2016 that a water cooler on the second floor of the church started to leak. You wouldn’t think it would cause all that much damage, even though it ran all night, but it took about \$100,000 to do all the repairs. (That, my friends, is one of the reasons you have insurance.) It looked good before. Now, it looks great. And it was a great day. Lots of special music. Lots of food. Lots of people. It was a wonderful celebration.
- 2) **Beth Stone’s ordination** – Normally after the prayer of ordination, members of the commission come up to congratulate the new minister. Somehow, there was a miscommunication, and everyone in attendance came up to congratulate Beth. We were singing a hymn and it all seemed very magical, very special, very holy. It wasn’t planned but it worked, and it was the right thing to do.
- 3) **John Vest’s program at the November 2017 presbytery meeting** – I’ve heard a lot of speakers at presbytery meetings over the years. This was probably one of the best. Yes, we’ve got to work on the PowerPoint and presentation, but the content was superb.
- 4) **Preaching at Clifton** – One of my favorite things to do is to worship with the churches in this presbytery. I often get to preach, and I enjoy doing that. What made this experience at Clifton memorable was that following worship there was a potluck dinner, as well as a time for people to ask questions. The food was good, but what I remember was the Q&A. That was fun.
- 5) **Bluestone Fall Gathering** – They asked me in the spring if I would lead a study on prayer at the Bluestone Fall Gathering. At the time, it seemed like a long way off. There was very little on my calendar. Sure, I can do that. As the day approached, my calendar got more crowded and what I thought would be my preparation time got squeezed. But God is good and I should say that prayers are answered and it all worked. There was a good crowd, a good mixture of age groups, as always good food, and just a good time.
- 6) **Study of Unbinding the Gospel at Williamstown** – Several times, I had offered to come to churches and lead a study of this book, which is one of the best I’ve read in the past decade. Finally, Elizabeth Campbell-Maleke took me up on this. My fall calendar was pretty open at the time, so I was able to agree to be in Williamstown on Wednesday nights for 7 out of 8 weeks. We had about a dozen people from three different churches attend. They seemed

to enjoy it, and even though my October ended up being far busier than I thought it would be, I enjoyed it too.

- 7) **Laura Brekke's installation at Davis & Elkins** – Robbins Memorial Chapel at D & E is a unique space. It's round. It provides a sense of intimacy. You can do great things there, but at times, it can feel cramped. Someone – maybe Laura, maybe Tina Vial – had the idea that we could have everyone in attendance take part in a laying on of hands. It made sense in theory. On the day of the event, I was nervous. But it worked. Obviously, not everyone could actually place their hands on the new chaplain. However, we were all connected, and Laura was at the center of a great cloud of witnesses. It was a great day.
- 8) **Program at the May Presbytery meeting** – Someone told me that they were looking forward to a program on the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation as much as they would have looked forward to having root canal surgery. The day far exceeded that minimal expectation. It was fun. It was clever. Some of us learned things. Others were reminded of things we had been taught in seminary. I found the participation of a Roman Catholic priest in the worship service to be particularly touching and more meaningful than I would have thought. It was a good day.
- 9) **Staff Study of Waking Up White** – The co-moderators of the General Assembly, Denise Anderson and Jan Edmiston, urged Presbyterians to study this book, which is about the experience of a white woman coming to terms with the reality of racism. Her story could have been mine. It touched each of us in different ways and lead to some great discussions. I had never done this before at presbytery staff meetings, but it worked so well we'll try it again this coming year with the book Always With Us? What Jesus Really Said about the Poor, another book recommended by our co-moderators.
- 10) **David Pettry's Funeral** – David was a Commissioned Ruling Elder who had served at Colcord, Clear Creek, and Marsh Fork for almost 20 years before he died of cancer in October. The funeral home at Whitesville was packed, and Joan Stewart did a tremendous job in leading us in worship as we celebrated David's life and ministry and gave witness to the resurrection.

I could easily double this list, as the 150th Anniversary celebration of the First Presbyterian Church of Weston, Craig Butler's funeral, and the luncheon put on by the Board of Pensions for retirees, among others, were all great events, as were a number of different worship services and even some committee meetings.

What were the highlights of your year? What are you looking forward to in 2018?