

## A Word from our General Presbyter

Ed Thompson

Although I've spent a significant amount of time in both states – almost nine years in Kansas and 13 in West Virginia – I try not to compare them. Each state has its own strengths and challenges. One thing West Virginia has that Kansas doesn't, though, is a strong Council of Churches. When I first moved to Kansas, they did have a group called Kansas Ecumenical Ministries, which was the equivalent of a council of churches. I faithfully attended their meetings and watched as their executive director retired and was replaced by a student at the University of Kansas. The kid looked like Doogie Howser and made me feel old. For about a year, he did a great job, traveling the state and bringing people together. Then, all of the sudden, he disappeared, and the group fell apart.

Here in West Virginia, we have a strong Council of Churches, and they're doing some good things. Last year, they held a series of listening sessions around the state dealing with drug problems. Aaron Gooden put together a summary video on these events called "Substance Use Disorder Initiative Listening Event" that is really well done. I encourage you to watch it. You can find it on the West Virginia Council of Churches homepage at [www.wvcc.org](http://www.wvcc.org). It runs for 8 minutes and 34 seconds, so it's short enough that you could show it at a session meeting or even to a youth group.

One troubling conclusion is that the response of the faith community has been less than was hoped for, with one person saying, "I'm not accepted at church, but I am accepted at my recovery group." Unfortunately, it's not hard to imagine someone saying that.

The West Virginia Council of Churches is planning a Clergy Consultation on Substance Abuse on May 25 at West Virginia Wesleyan College in Buckhannon to help change that. Senator Joe Manchin is scheduled to speak. There will be regional small groups to discuss what churches can do to address this issue in their area. What looks like the best part of the day is a presentation on 12 Practical Steps – to let you know what you can do if someone comes to you wanting help. While it's possible that an addict might come to you directly, it seems more likely that a parent or grandparent would come looking for ways to help their child or grandchild.

A one-day event isn't going to make you an expert, but I think this event will help you be better prepared to address a problem that is affecting all parts of our state. Final plans are still being worked out. I'll include further information in the newsletter as it becomes available.

Another thing the West Virginia Council of Churches has been involved in is "The State of Appalachia: A Conference on the Condition of the Region's Economy & Environment". That event has its own website, [www.stateofappalachia.org](http://www.stateofappalachia.org), and will be held March 31-April 1 at Pipestem State Park. (See more information in the Upcoming Conferences section further down the newsletter.) Before anyone on the Nurture Committee has a coronary, I realize the Festival of Faith is April 1. However, I plan to be at the State of Appalachia conference Friday and attend the Festival of Faith Saturday, so it's possible to do both. That would allow you to attend panel discussions on "The Spiritual State of Appalachia," "The State of the Economy in Appalachia" and "The State of the Environment in Appalachia." Then, following dinner, there will be state caucuses and some musical entertainment. Registration deadline is March 15.

One thing that was reinforced by being away from West Virginia is that Appalachia has its own distinct culture. This event seems like a good opportunity to learn more about it and to be involved in planning for its future.