

# THE KISKI WEEKLY



## From the Desk of Rev. Dr. Angela Cowser, Training Presbyter

This Fall, a small group of folks embarked on a training series title, “Trauma Informed Preaching.” The teaching lessons were designed and developed around the work of Karen A. McClintock, “Trauma-Informed Pastoral Care” and Sarah Travis, “Unspeakable: Preaching and Trauma Informed Theology.” Travis asks, “How do we preach the good news in the face of traumatic events, offering words that are authentic and substantial, not just nice words that skip like flat stones across the surface of a pond? The goal is clear, to preach the gospel and the redeeming power of God’s love, but getting there in a way that communicates empathy and builds trust is the challenge.”

Therefore, our lessons focused on defining trauma along with the different types of trauma experienced by people who walk through our sanctuary or pastor office doors as well as how to build an atmosphere in our respective churches that provides a safe place for violated and vulnerable people to bring their whole selves. We wrote and preached trauma-informed sermons. We discussed the biological, psychological, financial, spiritual, vocational, legal, familial and communal effects trauma has on the victim and their wider communities. Lastly, we worked on a pastoral prayer for a young lady who - in 2023 - without cause - was pushed onto the NYC subway tracks as a speeding train headed her way. The link for this particular case study is: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6v7qneFBV40>. The details mentioned in this 2-minute video form the basis for the pastoral prayer listed below for Yunan and for us.

Eternal God - Alpha and Omega - the beginning and the end - who from the beginning has seen all trauma - God who has witnessed all trauma, God who feels ALL trauma, Jesus who wept over Lazarus' death, and the Holy Spirit who loves without fear or favor

Thank you for: Yunan Shu, for the unnamed faithful who risked their lives to save Yunan's life; for the witnesses who called 911; for the swift, skillful EMT's, nurses and doctors who tended to Yunan; for the watchful police who quickly caught the perpetrator, for the prosecutors who successfully prosecuted the case; for the judge who judged fairly; for the friends and family who support Yunan in her recovery, for the people in this church (insert church name) who continue to pray for Yunan's full and complete recovery.

To our sister Yunan,  
For your strength, courage, and perseverance; for your anger and rage at the injustice of it all; for your resilience and your faith in God and in the goodness of God.  
We give you thanks O God.

(continued on page 2)

## In this Issue

Page 2: From the Desk of Angela Cowser continued; November Stated Gathering

Page 3: Events around Kiski, Good News Board, Upcoming Presbytery Events, BOP Info for Pastors

Page 4: Mandated Reporting, Clearances, Birthdays, Rwanda Partnership, Presbyterian Women

Page 5: Clerk of Session Corner - 2026 Terms of Call & Contracts; 2026 Board of Pensions Rates; 2026 Per Capita Rate; Financial Information; Annual Statistical Reports

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## From the Desk of Rev. Dr. Angela Cowser (continued)



We recognize the effects of this life-changing trauma on you, and on your whole community - we imagine that you may have had to relocate; you may have had to change jobs. We don't really know the depths of this life-changing trauma on your friends and family; your career; your relationships; your finances; on your mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health.

You have told us that you have lost your sense of safety and security - anywhere, and that you are fearful for your life - everywhere.

We are grateful that you have chosen us – (insert church name) - as a place of safety - for healing and hope.

Help us ALL to be as courageous and as vulnerable with our own traumas as Yunan has been with hers.

Deepen our compassion and understanding of how trauma - which is an encounter with death - SHAKES US TO OUR VERY CORE.

Unleash your ministering angels and unshackle our imaginations, let your healing power flow in us as we create new ways to minister to our own hurts and traumas, to our sister Yunan, and to our traumatized families and communities.

All of this we pray in the name of Jesus, who is our Wounded Healer, to the legions of Ministering Angels who tend to us when we are in trouble, to the Holy Spirit who is our Courageous Warrior, and to our Creator God, who makes all things new. AMEN.

## Recap of November 1<sup>st</sup> Stated Presbytery Gathering

On Saturday, the Presbytery gathered at United Presbyterian Church in Blairsville. We were welcomed warmly by the elders & deacons of the church, who provided a lovely light breakfast including pans of homemade cinnamon rolls! Together, we opened our time with worship with wonderful music provided by Pam Lewis, Cindy Borbonus, & members of the Otter Creek Brass. Rev. John Manon, pastor of United, offered the message from Ephesians 1.17-22 about having our eyes truly opened.

Business before the presbytery included hearing about the presbytery's investment strategy from Rev. David Hanna, member of the Organization Commission, followed by a second read & adoption of the 2026 Operating Budget. We were blessed to have our treasurer, Frank Orzechoski with us, having traveled in from the Philadelphia area. We also elected the following folks to serve beginning in 2026 - Ruling Elder Carol Hickman & Rev. Niki Atkinson to 3 year terms on the Organization Commission; Rev. John Hopkins to 3 year term on Congregation & Pastor Formation Commission; Rev. Dave Koehler & Ruling Elder Carrie Martin to serve as commissioners to the 226<sup>th</sup> General Assembly next summer; & Ruling Elder Matthew Gress to serve 3 year term as Synod Commissioner. The 2026 nominating committee was elected - Rev. Marty Neal, Ruling Elder Randy Stear, Ruling Elder Marsha Adams, & Deacon Vivian Shaeffer.

One of the most exciting things was the examination of Stephanie Backus, candidate to serve as pastor for the Communities of Faith (Shelocta, Trinity, & Crete). Wonderful questions were asked of Stephanie & she shared her statement of faith with us. It was a unanimous vote to welcome Stephanie as a minister member, pending the vote of the congregations on November 16<sup>th</sup>. Stephanie will be ordained as a Minister of the Word & Sacrament by Pittsburgh Presbytery & we look forward to her arrival.

A big thank you to the wonderful folks at United Presbyterian Church for their generous & warm hospitality!

## Good News Board

Have some good news to share?

Email us at [orgpresbyter@kiskiphy.org](mailto:orgpresbyter@kiskiphy.org)

- **Calvary** celebrated their 218<sup>th</sup> anniversary on November 2<sup>nd</sup>.
- **Cross Roads Community** is hosting their 16<sup>th</sup> annual free Thanksgiving dinner this month.
- **Crooked Creek** has adopted a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class this year as one of their outreach programs. They help with supplies, indoor recess, & buy student book for the year.
- **Crooked Creek** celebrated 200 years in September.
- **Trinity** celebrates the days of detouring are over! The Clarksburg bridge is now open & the church is now easier to find.
- **Shelocta** held their annual Rwanda fundraiser with a breakfast & basket raffle. The funds raised (\$1,035.00) will go to our sister church, Kirwa, for their needs. A special raffle was held for a handmade quilt made by one of our pulpit supply ministers & gifted to us to help raise funds.
- **Shelocta's** deacons held their annual Harvest Home Collection of collecting paper products to be distributed to the Shelocta/Armstrong Township food bank participants in November.
- **Shelocta** has plans to adopt a family from Salvation Army's Adopt a Family for Christmas. They will provide gifts & all items needed for a Christmas meal.

## Attention Pastors!

The Board of Pensions Open Enrollment is now active through November 7<sup>th</sup>. All pastors and employees who are enrolled in the medical plan need to log into Benefits Connect to complete their choices. If you have questions regarding BOP medical plans, please reach out to the Board of Pensions at 800-773-7752 or [memberservices@pensions.org](mailto:memberservices@pensions.org)

## Lost Item from Saturday

If you are missing a Presbyterian Planning Calendar from Saturday's gathering at Blairsville, it is there in their church office!

## Upcoming Events Around Kiski



- Shelocta Community is holding a special day of remembrance (**Saint Sunday**) on November 9<sup>th</sup> to remember congregational members, families, & friends who have moved onto the Church Triumphant.

**Christmas Concert**

Get into the Christmas Spirit with a free evening of holiday music with Chad Toland!

**Dec. 6**

- LIVE MUSIC BY CHAD TOLAND
- BASKET RAFFLE
- 50/50 RAFFLE

- Starts at 6pm
- Music at 7pm
- Free Shuttle

Contact below for tickets  
Apollo United PC  
401 First St.  
M-F 9am-2pm  
724-478-4807

Indigo Market  
2107 River Rd.  
Sun-Sat 7am-2pm

Apollo United Presbyterian Church  
401 First St. Apollo

A Love Offering will be taken for our musician and Food4Kids.

Contact below for tickets  
Quality Life Services  
151 Good View Dr.  
M-F 8am-4:30pm  
724-727-3451

Bolling Springs PC  
1668 PA-56  
Tues/Thur 3pm-6pm  
724-478-1523

## Presbytery Upcoming Events

November 8<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup>: Erin working remotely from Ohio; Angela working remotely from Tennessee

November 9<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup>: Erin & Angela at Mid Council Leader Gathering, Louisville, KY

November 12<sup>th</sup>: ~~10:00am or 6:00pm~~ Treasurer Training with ~~Kimberly Warner, bookkeeper~~ **Cancelled due to lack of interest - contact Kimberly if you have individual questions**

November 18<sup>th</sup>: Formation Commission & Organization Commission meetings (at office & via Zoom)

November 19<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup>: Erin at Mid Council Financial Conference, Chicago, IL

November 24<sup>th</sup> - 29<sup>th</sup>: Erin on vacation

November 24<sup>th</sup>: Advent Lectionary Group begins (Zoom)

## Mandated Reporter Trainings

A reminder that the Book of Order does require that elders, ministers, & volunteers (Sunday school teachers, VBS workers, anyone who is working directly with children) every **36 months** (G-3.0106). This is a change from the past, when it was every 5 years, which is still the requirement for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Mandated Reporter training takes about an hour & a half. There is the option to do Zoom for these. The Zoom link will be emailed to all registered participants on **the day of the training**.

If your church is interested in hosting a Mandated Reporter Training, please contact Erin Kobs, Organizational Presbyter & Stated Clerk (orgpresbyter@kiskipby.org)

## Clearances

- **Mandated Reporter Training** (Child Abuse Prevention) - all ministers, elders, deacons & volunteers who work with children. Certificates are good for 36 months.
- **Boundary Training** - all ministers & elders. Must be done every 36 months (according to the Book of Order)
- **FBI Fingerprint Clearance** - all ministers. Certificates are good for five years (in accordance with PA state law & Presbytery policy)
- **PA State Police Clearance** - all ministers & those who work directly with children. Clearance is good for five years (PA state law), but are highly recommended to be done every 3 years for protection of our churches.

## Presbyterian Women Upcoming Events

- Synod of the Trinity PW Gathering is from July 16-18, 2026, held at Antiochian Village, Bolivar, PA. The theme is Find Joy in the Journey! Join us! All sisters welcomed!

## Birthdays



Pastors with November birthdays:

- November 5<sup>th</sup> - Matthew Gress (CP, Crete)
- November 16<sup>th</sup> - Bill King (Retired)
- November 17<sup>th</sup> - Marty Cartmell (St. Benedict & St. Paul's)
- November 28<sup>th</sup> - Erin Kobs (Org Presbyter & Stated Clerk)

## Need Something? Call Us!

Have a question? Need some information about an upcoming event? Looking for a particular resource?

If you are in the need of something, please call us here at the Presbytery Office. We will make sure that you are put in touch with the correct person to answer your questions whether it is the Formation Commission, the Organization Commission, or our two Presbyters (Training Presbyter or Organizational Presbyter/Stated Clerk). We are here to help & want to make sure that you are getting the correct information.

## Rwanda Partnership News

Our Rwanda Partnership will be celebrating it's 20<sup>th</sup> year in 2026. In honor of that, two things will be happening.

- In June 2026, we will be hosting a trip to Rwanda for interested folks. The trip will be June 1<sup>st</sup> -11<sup>th</sup>, with an opportunity to visit parishes that are sponsored by our congregations. The trip is limited to 8 folks. If you are interested, there is an [application](#). Applications are due to Mark Phoebus by November 30, 2025.
- A fundraiser contest to purchase 10 motorcycles for pastors in Rwanda in order for them to get to their churches or visiting parishioners. Each motorcycle is \$2,000. The church who raises the most money per member (according to their 2024 statistical report) will win the Philippian Prize (a gift from Rwanda). Raising only \$10 per member could just do it! Funds must be submitted to the Presbytery Office by June 1, 2026.



## Presbytery Directory

Need to access the Directory? [Click here](#)

The directory is under password. If you need the password, call Cheryl at the office

# Clerk of Session Corner



Here is important information for clerks of session of our congregations

## 2026 Terms of Call & Contracts

The 2026 Terms of Call & Contract forms are now in fillable PDFs on the [Kiski website](#). All forms are due by January 30, 2026. The original form must be mailed to the office - no scanned copies via email or photos will be accepted. After they are signed off by the Organization Commission, the original forms will be sent back to the church for your records.

2026 Minimum Terms of Call (as set at September 13<sup>th</sup> Stated Gathering)

- Without a manse - \$55,550
- With a manse - \$55,500 (\$42,692 salary & \$12,808 manse value)

## 2026 Per Capita Rates

**Presbytery:** \$27.00

**Synod of the Trinity:** \$2.40

**General Assembly:** \$11.26

**Total:** \$40.66

Remittance forms will be arriving via email along with a letter shortly.

## Church Financial Leadership

Church Financial Leadership Academy has 3 financial videos – good for sessions, auditors, and treasurers. They can be found at [www.churchfla.org](http://www.churchfla.org). These videos are between 5-6 minutes long & are very informative.

They are: Principles of Financial Reporting, Narrative Budgets, & Reading Church Financial Statements.

You will need to register in order to view the videos. Registration code is PCUSA.

There are also a lot of other useful information around finances available on their website.

## 2026 Board of Pensions Rates

### Congregational Pastor Package

- Pastor only (required for installed pastors) - 17.5% of effective salary
- Additional optional coverage:
  - Pastor & spouse - 17.5% + \$12,250
  - Pastor & child(ren) - 17.5% + \$9,950
  - Pastor & family - 17.5% + \$22,200

### Transitional Pastor Package

This is only available to those who were in the package in 2025 & this package will go away in 2028

- Pastor & family - 37% of effective salary

## Annual Statistical Reports

It is just about that season again! Please be on the look for information on how to file your annual statistical report in your email or via mail in the coming weeks. I would advise clerks to begin gathering the necessary information in preparation of filing your report.

## Stewardship & Financial Resources

We are gauging interest in churches & sessions who might be interested in information & seminars regarding church stewardship, financial planning, or year end giving. The Presbyterian Foundation offers a wide variety of resources & seminars. If we have interest, we will reach out to Rev. Ellie Johns-Kelly, who is our Ministry Resource Officer for the Foundation. If your church is interested, please send an email to [kiski@kiskipby.org](mailto:kiski@kiskipby.org).