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Steve's Slant

By now most of you know that Sunday, June 12th, will be my last time in the pulpit before I take a two-month sabbatical. I greatly appreciate the generosity the Session has shown me in response to my request to take some extended time away this summer. I also appreciate the kind and generous support many of you have shown me upon learning this news.

So, first, thank you! I will admit, at this point in the proceedings I welcome the opportunity to take some extended time away. But please know this: my hope, plan and intention is to come back in August refreshed and restored, fired up and ready to go, as we head into our next programmatic year, starting in September.

Before I go, I would like to offer a few thoughts here about two specific matters. They are hard topics, and I'm reluctant to address them just before I leave. But they are weighing heavily on my heart and I suspect they may be weighing heavily on yours, as well.

The first is congregational safety.

Regrettably, mass shootings are now a common occurrence in the United States. As we all know, they are not only happening in schools but in other places where large crowds congregate.

I use that word intentionally because, for reasons that defy comprehension, several of these shootings have occurred in churches, in places ranging from South Carolina to California. (Race has been identified as a factor, which at this point in our nation's history only makes them more incomprehensible.)

We have talked at the staff and Sessional levels about the need to develop a safety plan for our congregation, one that not only covers the possibility of a mass shooting, but that covers other scenarios, as well, such as severe weather events or a medical emergency during worship.

Yesterday at our weekly staff meeting, Donna, Sarah Grace and I revisited this topic, brainstorming some basic and obvious steps we can take, that we need to take, to make us all safer on Sunday mornings.

But we need to go beyond basic and obvious steps. So, before I leave, I am going to invite our Session members, and our ministry teams, to include this topic – developing a comprehensive safety plan -- in their agendas over the summer.

I think it is important that all of our leaders and ministry teams spend some time brainstorming ideas about what a safety plan needs to include in order to be comprehensive. (Of course we welcome ideas and suggestions from everyone!) My hope is that when I return in mid-August, we can immediately start collating these ideas, and then turn them into a concrete, specific, actionable plan, as expeditiously as possible.

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Church contacts:

Church Office 298-9092

Church Administrator; Donna Eagle Joslin 771-2097 e-mail= deagle@Warren-Wilson.edu

Minister; Rev. Dr. Steve Runholt 712-7803 e-mail= srunholt@Warren-Wilson.edu

Associate in Ministry; Rev. Sarah Grace Montgomery 704-962-8975

e-mail= sarahgmontgo@gmail.com

Director of Music, organist; Joel P. Rogers= joelprogers1967@gmail.com

Treasurers; Leslie Sayyar, 333-8867 e-mail= treasurerwwpc@outlook.com

Brent Roberts, 919-844-6311 email= brentbroberts@icloud.com

Bookkeeper; Barbara Escalante e-mail= bookkeeperwwpc@outlook.com

Please call 828-298-9092 to speak with us or leave a message for us at the church. Thank you!

June Birthdays!

Emma Eagle Joslin	June 1	Marc Mullinax	June 2
Mary Fran Spencer	June 6	Fran Roberts	June 13
Nancy Garrison	June 16	Anne Dale	June 17
Fitz Legerton	June 20	Gina Marvin	June 22
Kristin Williams	June 25	Jackie Wintle	June 25
Owen Montgomery	June 26	Steven Hamilton	June 27



The Warren Wilson Book Group will meet at noon on Thursday, June 9 on the porch of Fellowship Hall. Bring your own lunch to enjoy from 12-12:30. Our discussion of *The Personal Librarian* by Marie Benedict and Victoria Christopher Murray will begin at 12:30. Judi will be leading the discussion. New members are always welcome!

OUR HEALING PRAYERS GO OUT TO: Kip Smith, Tacci's father; Milt Butterworth, Sandee, and family; Fran Roberts; Shane Reece, Nancy Garrison's son; Pat Wilson's son, Kell; Gina Marvin; Brooks and Carol Lee Joslin, Blake's parents; Erika Lytle; Jackie Ligon Cole; Rick Garrison; Fran Roberts' sister-in-law, Linda Briggs; Flo Bishop; Jon Hettrick and his family; Jon's mother, Marjorie Hettrick; Mark Laabs, friend of the Griswolds; Kim Reece, daughter of Nancy and Rick Garrison.



Picnic

Save the date...Sunday July 3, All church picnic

Please bring a dish to share! Congregational life will provide the meat, buns, and lemonade. Seating will be on the porch and outside.

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY NEWS
HELPING BUILD HOUSES AGAIN AFTER A VERY LONG BREAK

Six church members along with Pastor Steve Runholt, and Betsy Warren, a retired Habitat employee and friend of our church, volunteered on May 20 and 21 to help build the next Habitat House of Faith in west Asheville's New Heights Neighborhood.

Because of the pandemic and changes in construction schedules, they were our first volunteers helping build a Habitat house since we worked on Presbyterian/Methodist House #28 in early September, 2019.

That's an interval of more than 980 days, but six more church members are scheduled to help build the four bedroom, two bath future home of the Coffey family on June 3 and 4.



**HELPING BUILD THE HOUSE OF FAITH on May 20 - l. to r., Ken Murchison,
Brent Roberts, Steve Runholt, Derron Daugherty**



HELPING BUILD THE HOUSE OF FAITH on May 21 - front row, l. to r., Habitat core volunteer Jerry Ray, Andrew Daugherty; second row, Betsy Warren, Construction Supervisor John McDermott; back row, Sally Broughton, Don Collins.

The House of Faith job site will be closed from June 7 - 20 for work by subcontractors, but volunteers will be able to help again during the weeks of June 21 and 28. If you are interested in helping during that time, contact Larry Griswold.

Pool Party

Pool Party for Hope For Tomorrow families at Christmount on Sunday, June 5. Pool open 3-5, after which pizza and dessert will be served.

CLERK'S REPORT

At its called meeting on 3 April, 2022, the Session:

1. Welcomed Michael Montgomery, Danny Starnes, and Arden Starnes who were meeting with Session to join Warren Wilson Presbyterian Church.
2. Heard each share their faith journey with Session at the request of Pastor Runholt.
3. Approved a motion by Ken Murchison to accept Michael into Warren Wilson Presbyterian Church upon receipt of membership transfer from Brevard - Davidson River Presbyterian Church and to accept Arden and Danny into Warren Wilson Presbyterian Church upon receipt of membership transfer from Mars Hill Baptist Church or by profession faith as appropriate.

At its stated meeting on 19 April, 2022, the Session:

1. Approved a recommendation from the Administrative Ministry Team that Pastor Runholt's request for a sabbatical leave of 8 weeks this summer be granted with plans and arrangements for his responsibilities to be covered as specified in his written request and other discussion at the meeting.
2. Heard reports from Sarah Grace Montgomery about having a youth acolyte active in our worship services again and that planning is ongoing for a youth Sunday in June and a vacation Bible school this summer.
3. Heard a report from Congregational Life working on a project to improve our contacts with members who have difficulty in getting to regular worship services.
4. Heard a written report from Vicki Collins about how our church is supporting the Afghan refugee siblings we have adopted.
5. Heard that church donations to One Great Hour of Sharing had reached \$1,400 as of 19 April and that the Session's target of \$500 in donations from the congregation toward the Presbytery's Medical Debt Relief fund to supplement the money already approved by Session has now exceeded \$500. (Continued)
6. Approved a motion accepting written procedures reviewed by Session regarding background checks for church staff, nursery workers, and any church person working with children or youth.
7. Heard and approved a report of a 2020 audit of our financial accounts with thanks to the audit team and Leslie Sayyar (treasurer), Barbara Escalante (bookkeeper), Brent Roberts (receiving treasurer), and John Laney (investments) for their good work with church finances.
8. Heard plans for getting volunteers for a personnel review team and a stewardship team recruited for 2022 and heard a report that our new payroll accounting system is now working well.

Bob Gambrell, Clerk

Personnel Review Team

Each year, WWPC completes a review of its entire staff — Steve, Sarah Grace, Joel, and Donna. Several years ago, the Session voted to conduct the review in the spring at the end of our normal program year. This year, the Administration Ministry Team named Derron Daugherty, Bob Gambrell, Beth Meriwether, and Ken Murchison as the action team to prepare the annual review for the church staff. To complete its work, the team needs your input from the entire congregation.

Please share with the team your words of praise for the work our staff has done in the past year and your suggestions as to how we can improve our ministry in the future.

The following questions may help individuals prepare their responses:

1. What staff members' work have you noted over the last year?
2. For each staff member you identify:

In what ways has the staff member assisted our ministry?

What strengths did he or she display in their work?

Can you suggest any ways in which the individual's support for our ministry might be enhanced?

These questions should not limit anyone's response. The team would like everyone's insights regarding what the staff has done well and how the church can improve. The team will also appreciate your general observations about our church – what is going well, what concerns do you have.

Please address written responses to Ken Murchison at the church office (101 Chapel Drive, Swannanoa 28778) or place it in the AMT mailbox in the office. Alternatively, send email your response to ekmurchison@gmail.com. The team will keep your observations in confidence, but it does ask you to sign your comments. Anonymous comments are very difficult to evaluate.

If possible, please submit your responses to the team before the end of June so it can complete its report for the Session in a timely matter. The team appreciates your assistance in this most important process.

(Submitted by Ken Murchison)

WALK FOR YOUR NEIGHBOR

Mark your calendars for Sunday, October 9, 2022 when the Swannanoa Valley Christian Ministry sponsors the annual Walk for Your Neighbor. Allee Williams will be leading the WWPC congregation in our participation. Just as last year, money raised during the Walk will go to help our neighbors with food, clothing, medical bills, utility bills, and emergency gasoline needs. Last year, the Walk raised a record \$61,000.

The Walk begins at 2:00 PM at First Baptist Church in Black Mountain. You can choose to walk a mile, walk four miles, or just come with your contribution and enjoy the afternoon.



Summer Sermon Series

Dear Friends, I'm looking forward to leading worship and preaching during the summer while Steve is away on Sabbatical. For 5 weeks of the summer, I will be preaching and planning worship around the theme, "Come to the Water". This will be a short Worship Series starting Sunday, June 19 and will explore Biblical stories centered on water. Together we will explore stories including Creation, the Woman at the Well, Jonah, Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch and the miracle of Jesus walking on water. What do these water stories tell us about the divine One and about who we are as

disciples? Additionally, we will take these same stories and themes and explore them with the Children and Youth for Vacation Bible School the week of July 24. Let's dive in together this summer and explore our faith through the water of life that sustains us.

Peace, Sarah Grace

Youth and Children News

The Youth have been working hard to prepare for Youth Sunday on Pentecost (June 5)!

Here are some photos of their work creating some visual aids to celebrate the Spirit.

Please mark your calendars for Vacation Bible School coming in July! We will meet in the evenings July 25, 26, and 27 with a special activity in the works for after church on July 24.

CAMP GRIER! The Session has approved scholarship funds to help send kids to Camp Grier this summer. If you are interested in a week at Camp Grier, go to campgrier.org to see the summer schedule. Please let Sarah Grace know if your child plans to attend so that we can distribute the scholarships.





The Sunday school class making art for Pentecost/Youth Sunday.



Welcoming our Refugee Family

It has been about four months since we welcomed our Afghan refugee family. Elham and Farkhunda charmed us immediately. They were so young and so brave to be facing a whole new life in a strange country, starting with absolutely nothing.

They have accomplished so much in these few months. Now they have a safe and comfortable apartment, with a whole circle of American friends and playmates.

Elham is completing fifth grade in Black Mountain Elementary school, even making the honor roll! He finished a good season playing soccer with the Asheville Youth Soccer Association, and loves riding his bike and playing with neighbors. Many church members will remember the festive birthday party we hosted for Elham in April.

Farkhunda continues to work hard learning English with tutors and online evening classes from AB tech. Her English skills have clearly improved. Best of all, she has a full-time job at Highland Farms. Her employment is possible because they have day care from the YMCA. Elham will go to day camp all summer, and after school care when school resumes at Owen Middle School.

All this progress has been possible thanks to the generosity of our congregation and hundreds of miles of driving donated by our amazing group of Circle of Welcome volunteers. Still, we can certainly use more volunteers – just call or email Jamie Dale to sign up. Right now, we will need drivers to take them to and from day camp and work on Mondays through Fridays all summer.

In addition to church members, we have found overwhelming generosity from so many people in Swannanoa and Black Mountain. A partial list of supporters includes SVCM, the YMCA, Highland Farms, Asheville Youth Soccer, Black Mountain Schools, Pisgah Legal, Kiwanis, Mah A., our Warren Wilson student translator, and many other churches in the area also sponsoring Circles of Welcome like ours. God has truly worked through so many people.

Looking ahead, we still face challenges. In late summer or early fall, both Farkhunda and Elham will go to an asylum hearing in Virginia, which will determine their immigration status. This is a complicated and scary process, which will also entail considerable cost. The preparation for this has revealed heart-wrenching details about what they have been through, including sudden separation from their entire family.

Thanks to SVCM, they have secure housing until summer 2023, but they will need to find affordable housing later, which is no easy process in Buncombe County. (Continued)

When Farkhunda's English has improved, she will need a car and driver's license. If anyone has a used car to donate, or if you have leads on affordable and safe housing, please let us know.

Finally, Farkhunda's most important dream has been to go to college, and with her intelligence and energy, she will surely succeed.

With God's help, we will be with her and Elham all the way. (Submitted by Vicki Collins)

Steve's Slant continued...

The second topic that has been weighing heavily on my mind is COVID. Starting in late April, and as experts predicted it would, the latest variant wave arrived in Buncombe County. For the first time in many months, we started to see a steady rise in the number of new cases.

On one hand, this rise is discouraging news. But if we look at the data a little more closely, two pieces of heartening news quickly emerge.

First, the number of new cases fell yesterday for the first time in six weeks. This is obviously a good thing. It's too soon to tell if this drop will continue and become a trend. But even if it does not, the really encouraging news is that the rate of hospitalizations and deaths has actually *fallen* throughout this entire period, even as new case rates rose.

Which I believe points to a still larger point. In his State of the Union address in March, President Biden noted that thanks to vaccinations and boosters COVID is far less dangerous than it was two years ago.

He also noted that we now have effective and widely available therapeutics when people do get sick. So, taking these two important pieces together, the president assured the country that we no longer need to fear COVID, at least not in the way we did in March of 2020. He then went on to urge Americans to resume living our normal lives.

All of that to say three final things.

First, even though COVID is, by all practical measures, less dangerous than it was before the advent of vaccines and therapeutics, this virus is still with us. People are still getting sick from COVID. And while hospitalizations may be down, the symptoms can still be decidedly unpleasant.

Two, and because of that, our in-person worship team will continue to meet regularly to consider what kinds of safety protocols and precautions make the most sense for us during this phase of the pandemic.

Three, I do think it's smart, starting right now, to practice safe and sensible health and safety precautions, particularly when gathering in large groups, indoors. We have not reinstated our mask requirement during worship, but I have noticed more people are wearing them again voluntarily during our services, and I think that is probably wise.

Also, if you're able to do this, I think it might help bolster everyone's safety to test at home before you come to worship. To help with this, you can now quickly and easily order up to eight free at-home test kits at [COVID.gov](https://www.covid.gov).

And with that, I close with the promise to keep you all in my prayers while Robyn and I are away, even as I ask you to keep us in yours.

Thank you and God bless you!



A note from the desk of . . .

Byron A. Wade, General Presbyter

Buffalo, NY. Laguna Woods, CA. Uvalde, TX. Tulsa, OK. As of this morning, I awoke to hear of two more shootings. One was in Iowa in a church parking lot where three people, including the shooter, died. The other was in Racine, Wisconsin, during a funeral in a church cemetery. These are just some of the ones we have heard publicly. As a nation, we are at the point whether you are grocery shopping, attending school, worshipping in church, or even attending the funeral of a loved one that nowhere is safe.

This morning's New York Times Morning Brief begins with the title, "Again and again and again." The authors go on to state "Shootings that kill multiple people are so common in this country that they often do not even make national news. They are a regular feature of American life." We are getting to the point where I feel we are becoming desensitized to the gun violence that is happening on a daily basis. Even more frustrating is that our elected lawmakers cannot agree on a solution to the problem. There seems to be a resignation that nothing will change and that the cycle of violence will continue.

I am reminded that this weekend begins the season of Pentecost. We remember the story in Acts 2 when the Holy Spirit fell on the people in Jerusalem. Everyone was amazed that others were speaking in native language of each. It is from this day that God's Holy Spirit is present among us to guide and direct us. I believe despite the anger, grief, sorrow, discontent, and resignation to current circumstances, that God's Holy Spirit continues to be present in our lives. Because of that, I have and I hope you will have hope. A hope that one day sensible gun control laws will be passed. A hope that one day people will not be afraid of leaving their homes without thinking that this is their last day on earth. A hope that one day our churches and schools will be safe places to gather. A hope that will move us to love one another instead of choosing violence.

Please pray for those who are affected by gun violence. Most importantly, I ask that after you rise from your prayers that you will be directed to act to make our world a more humane place.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Byron". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and personal.

Byron Wade
General Presbyter



June

At Warren Wilson
Presbyterian Church we are
mothers and fathers, single
and married, gay and
straight, young and old,
black and white,
prosperous and poor,
uncertain and sure, broken
and whole - and everything
in between. Together we
are the many faces of
humanity, yet as a joyful,
caring and loving
community of faith, we are
committed in our diversity
to be one in Christ!

Warren Wilson Presbyterian Church
101 Chapel Lane
Swannanoa, NC 28778

The Extended Family