

Care for Congregations Report

Spring 2025

Care for Congregations

- The Presbytery of the Northern Plains has introduced two initiatives to support congregations in financial sustainability: the **Board of Pensions Assistance Program** and the **Per Capita Forgiveness Program**. These efforts address rising costs for pastors' benefits and lingering financial burdens from the pandemic, ensuring churches can continue their mission with confidence.

With pension costs increasing in 2025, the Presbytery's phased assistance program offers immediate relief and gradual adjustments to help congregations adapt. A **need-based scholarship program** will launch in 2028 to provide continued support.

The **Per Capita Forgiveness Program** allows churches burdened by past due payments to regain financial stability. Debt incurred before 2021 will be forgiven, and recent balances reduced by 70%, encouraging full participation in Presbytery life.

These initiatives reflect the Presbytery's commitment to faithful stewardship and pastoral support. Churches facing pension cost increases or outstanding per capita balances are encouraged to apply. For more details, visit the Presbytery website or contact pnpooffice@gmail.com.

- The C4C POD has initiated discussions regarding the **Congregational Care Pastor position**, which was established as a two-year temporary role to assess the needs of PNP churches and focus on rebuilding relationships with our congregations post-COVID. This temporary position is set to conclude in January 2026. As part of these discussions, we are exploring the potential for creating an Executive Presbyter position. A recommendation is expected to be presented by mid-2025.
- The C4C POD is exploring a **zero-interest loan program** to assist churches with essential projects and unexpected expenses, focusing on congregations with clear plans for long-term vitality in their communities. Funded through endowed resources, this potential program would be available to churches current on their per capita payments.
- Members of the Care for Congregations POD and Care for Pastors POD support the idea of a **POD merger**. We often have duties that overlap and require a great

deal of communication. With the resignation of Mary Holtey as chair for the Care for Pastors POD in February, this feels like the right timing for a merger. We plan to address this merger at the Fall Presbytery meeting. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to reach out to Sarah Bigwood (C4C chair), Bob Boyar (C4Pastors committee member), or Rusty Bender (Nominating chair).

- **Presbytery Minimums**

In 2025, we will encourage pastors and church leaders to submit their Terms of Call, allowing us to assess the current landscape and provide targeted education on congregational responsibilities towards pastors. Our ultimate goal is to ensure fair and equitable compensation for all pastors by the end of 2027.

Churches may submit Pastor's Terms of Call information using the following online form. <https://forms.gle/CTDduoPkMJXmqzh4A>

- The Presbytery has received a tax statement for a property they were unaware of in Pembina County. Working to determine the next steps regarding ownership and liability.
- Our bid for a **Lilly Grant** for the Presbytery of the Northern Plains was unsuccessful.

Angus (Tabor Presbyterian)

Russ Steer reported that they have a full-time pastor, James Crandall, CLP, through the Methodist Church. They host weekly services and on special occasions as well. Pastor Crandall moderates session meetings.

Argyle (Community Presbyterian)

The Argyle church was featured in the most recent Presbytery Newsletter. They just celebrated their 140th anniversary. The church is in good financial health with a small but growing membership. Argyle repainted the outside of their church and will receive a second coat this summer.

Arvilla (Arvilla Presbyterian)

The Arvilla Presbyterian Church, in partnership with Larimore United Methodist Church, had a meaningful Advent and Christmas season filled with mission and community activities:

- Collected groceries for a local Food Pantry. Christmas Eve offering went to the Larimore Food Pantry. Delivered over 60 shoebox Christmas gifts to children at Spirit Lake. Assembled and distributed cookie tins to shut-ins, individuals living alone, and residents at the local Good Samaritan nursing home. Supported Heifer International with a noisy offering. Held a Christmas Extravaganza on December 15, featuring carols, readings, skits, a potluck, and fellowship. Shared skits and readings with residents at the Good Samaritan nursing home.

The Arvilla and Larimore congregations worship together weekly, alternating between the two churches.

Bdecan

Has six youth participating in Triennium.

Bismarck

FPC Bismarck received a Congregational Development Grant for \$2,000 to help with costs related to a professional recording and streaming system they recently installed in their sanctuary.

Bismarck, Mandan, and Glencoe

These congregations are in the initial stages of developing a shared Outreach Associate Pastor position to serve all three churches.

Casselton (Westminster Presbyterian)

In February, the Casselton church invited Rev. Deanna Reikow to provide training on strategies for more effective outreach and improved communication with both their congregation and the wider community.

Cooperstown (First Presbyterian)

First Presbyterian Church of Cooperstown hosted a Christmas program for Assisted Living residents, sharing plants and goodies. The congregation values its SAM preaching services and continues to pray for joys and concerns during worship. They held their Annual Meeting on January 26, 2025, following worship. At the meeting they committed financial support to Red Willow Bible Camp, Cooperstown Bible Camp, Churches United for the Homeless, Moorhead, Abused Persons Outreach Center for Giving Hearts Day, with \$5,000 designated for Dakota Regional Medical Center. Looking ahead, a February 15 meeting at Red Willow Bible Camp will explore the possibility of Ottawa and Sundahl Lutheran Churches joining Tri-County Ministry.

Crookston (First Presbyterian)

Crookston has a working relationship with the Lutheran Church in town and appreciates their Presbytery connections.

Devils Lake

Received advice on adjusting bylaws to manage the number of elders and deacons more flexibly, addressing challenges in leadership recruitment.

Dilworth (Presbyterian Church of Dilworth)

On February 16, Rev. Dan Billings visited the Dilworth Presbyterian Church. He waited in the parking lot from 9:30-10:30am and no one showed up. He assumes church was canceled due to extremely cold weather. Fargo Parish Associates The Revs. Cathie Bishop and Dan Billings, have agreed to take turns visiting the church in Dilworth.

East Grand Forks (Mendenhall)

In February, Mendenhall Presbyterian Church was mentioned in the Grand Forks Herald for their contribution to the East Grand Forks Childcare Fund. Session Clerk, Mary Barrett, was quoted as saying, “(Child care) is a thankless job, but it can also be a very rewarding job because they are taking care of our most precious commodity, which is our kids...So when this (donation request) came with our water and light bill we decided we

need to give back because child care is costly and it is time-consuming to get your license.” The article highlights the need in Northwest Minnesota for childcare. <https://www.grandforksherald.com/news/local/east-grand-forks-childcare-fund-committee-hopes-to-reach-grantable-funding-levels-in-2025>

Fairview (Community Presbyterian)

A live streaming service for Pastor Tim's worship was announced via Facebook.

Fargo

FPC Fargo was awarded \$175,000 grant from the National Sacred Places Grant. It will be used to repair or replace the limestone steps at their 2nd Ave. entry, clean and restore the façade which was damaged by a water leak, add exterior and interior lighting to the front of the church for safety and aesthetic purposes, and replace the sanctuary chillers which are at end-of-life. A capital campaign began in March 2025 to raise \$410,000 will address current maintenance issues and \$2,600,000 will fund an endowment that will support building maintenance and repairs. FPC-Fargo has 8 youth participating in Triennium this coming summer.

Fordville (First Presbyterian)

Deanna visited but found no one present (church meets occasionally, only four members). Park River church is connected.

Forest River (Community Presbyterian), Gilby (Gilby Presbyterian)

Pastor Jamie Norstog, CLP has resigned his position at the Midway Parish effective February 23rd. Deanna Reikow met with Jamie for an exit interview. Deanna will serve as Moderator for the Midway parish.

Grand Forks (First Presbyterian)

Granted \$3,965 in assistance through the new BOP Assistance Program for 2025. Has three youth and 2 adults participating in Triennium.

Grandin

Has 2 youth and 1 adult participating in Triennium.

Hamilton (First Presbyterian)

Hamilton Presbyterian Church voted unanimously to close, with the only discussion being the exact closing date. The final worship service was held at 9 a.m. on February 23, 2025, with the church officially closing on March 1, 2025. The session plans to meet in February to facilitate the transfer of members to the churches of their choice. Interested buyers are working with church elders and Presbytery Treasurer, Sherri Stern. The church expects to be nearly out of funds by the time of its official closure on March 1, 2025. John Werth remains with the Bathgate church, which has been in a parish arrangement with Hamilton since the 1960s.

Dan Billings represented the Presbytery at the closing service for Hamilton on February 23, 2025. The Hamilton Church is gifting some of their paraments to the Minto Church. Their eight confessional banners represent The Nicene Creed through The Confession of 1967 and were made by Thelma Collins and Rhoda Enerson to celebrate the Hamilton

Presbyterian Church's 100th Anniversary in 1982. The Presbytery of the Northern Plains give thanks for the many years of faithful service and witness that Hamilton Presbyterian Church has offered to God and the wider community.

Hallock (First Presbyterian)

Rev. Marge Landwehr announced she's retiring in August 2025. Discussions about her transition are ongoing. Hallock Presbyterian has finalized an agreement to sell two parcels of land to local buyers, as previously approved by the Presbytery. Erik Younggren has retained legal counsel and, in accordance with legal requirements, is providing the church with five weeks (Sundays) of notice. A vote on the matter took place at the church's annual meeting in January.

Inkster

The Inkster congregation voted to dissolve. They have received permission to exercise a quitclaim deed on their property. A quitclaim deed is a document in which a grantor (the church) disclaims all interest in a parcel of real property and then conveys that interest to a grantee (the city/town). Typically, money is not exchanged in a Quitclaim Deed.

Langdon (Presbyterian Church)

Deanna met with Sue Kana-Mackey honoring her with a gift. Pastor Sue is planning to move towards retirement in two years and has let them know that. The Church is doing well financially but low attendance in the winter because most fly south for the winter. They are looking to ways to get their name out in the community more. They are responding well to Sue's challenges for the future. Their per capita is up to date and she is always at Presbytery with an elder.

Mandan

See Bismark/Mandan for more information. The Mandan church has nine people participating in Triennium this summer.

Moorhead (First Presbyterian)

Rev. Robert Drake left his position at the end of the year. The Session dissolved the relationship in December. Outstanding obligations to Rev. Drake's pension were settled in the first quarter of 2025. Sarah Bigwood is serving as Moderator. The Session members are engaging in critical Adaptive Conversations during this transition. The FPC-Fargo lay preachers have been providing pulpit supply. Jamie Norstog has agreed to provide long-term pulpit supply this spring and summer. FPC-Moorhead has 3 youth participating in Triennium this coming summer.

Park River (Federated Church)

Park River church is growing and at the end of 2024 had a significant budget surplus. This church is engaged in various mission activities and enthusiastic about joining the Presbytery's Spring Youth Retreat.

Portal (First Presbyterian)

The Care for Congregations POD has made concerted effort over the past two years to

make contact with this church to no avail. It is our understanding that the yoked congregations are currently operating without a pastor.

Walhalla (Park Center Presbyterian)

Pastor Martha preaches once a month. Presently, Tom Brussegard has been preaching there twice a month. Martha won't be there March or April during Lent and Easter.

West Fargo

Community Presbyterian Church of West Fargo has extended a call to a candidate, who has accepted the terms. The candidate will preach at CPC on March 30, followed by a congregational meeting. We anticipate being able to share the candidate's name with the Presbytery at the April meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rev. Sarah M. Bigwood".

Rev. Sarah Bigwood

POD Members: Rusty Bender, Sarah Bigwood (chair), Dan Billings, Cathie Bishop, Bob Boyar, and Deanna Reikow. Advisors: Ellen Misialek (bookkeeper) & Sherri Stern (treasurer).