The outstanding event in Phoenix on border and immigration issues is just around the corner. April 15-17 to be exact.

So, now is the time to be making plans to participate in “Crossing Borders: Encountering God” – and to register.

Registration is through the Synod website: www.synodsw.org. Registration, meals, and lodging at the Phoenix Airport Hilton is $275. Registration for commuters (meals but no lodging) is $140.

In the planning stages for over a year, the event promises to bring perspectives to one of the most vexing issues before the American public – perspectives that are not found in the national media.

This bi-national event brings noteworthy speakers not only from this country but also Mexico – and not just from the Presbyterian denomination but also the Methodist denomination.

How often have you heard someone speak from the perspective of a Presbyterian Church leader in Mexico?

Do you know what U.S. immigration policy is?

Can Biblical perspectives on immigration help inform discussion in our churches?

With recent immigrants in the communities in which nearly all our churches are located, how can a multi-cultural congregation be built?

Participants will be able to choose to attend four small-group workshops out of the nearly 20 being offered.

Spirit-filled and life enriching worship services will create the foundation for discussions and presentations.

Option: Trip to Douglas, AZ, and Agua Prieta, Mexico

Prior to the Immigration and Border Event is an optional trip with Frontera de Cristo to Douglas, Arizona, and Agua Prieta, Mexico, to learn about the border first-hand with Mission Co-Worker, Mark Adams and the staff of Frontera de Cristo.

Dates are April 12-15.

The cost of $200 provides transportation from Phoenix, plus lodging in Douglas and Agua Prieta. An additional fee of $135 provides lodging at the Phoenix Airport the night before the Crossing Borders: Encountering God, Immigration and Borders issues event.

On the morning of the 15th there will be an opportunity to meet with Phoenix day laborers and to hear their stories.

Conversation with Bruce Reyes-Chow for pastors under 45

April 14-15 (noon to noon) pastors under the age of 45 in the Synod of the Southwest have been invited to a special conversation with Bruce Reyes-Chow, moderator of the 218th General Assembly.

Of the event he says, “Through open discussion, interaction, prayer and worship, we’ll engage with such issues as the impact of culture on church, claiming authority in an aging denomination, finding ways to nurture the joys of particular ministry and ministry within the complexities of the PC(USA).

“This will be a time to engage in some open and honest conversations as we think about the future of the church.”

For listing of workshops see the next page
Workshops at Crossing Borders: Encounter God

Following is a listing of the 20 workshops that will be available to participants at the Border and Immigration Issues event.

1. “How Faith Communities Can Make a Difference for Refugee Families” – Donna Buckles, OGHS connection

Learn how churches can assist refugees in beginning a new life and help them navigate our culture and systems. This hands-on ministry helps refugees become self-sufficient and integrated into our communities.


Many Christian denominations have written policies around the issue of immigration reform, and some of its leaders have made public their support for reform. The presenter will review the common foundations for their call to change immigration policies and practice, along with the ongoing efforts to unify the Church’s voice. It is also important to review why this issue can sometimes be a battle between pulpit and pew.

3. “Ministry with Immigrant Hispanic Congregations” – Rev. Mauricio Chacon (en español e ingles)

4. “Ministry with Immigrant Middle Eastern Congregations” – Rev. Fakhri Yacoub, Richmond, VA (in Arabic and English)

5. “Equipping Congregations for Immigrant Ministry” – Rev. Angel Suarez, Immigrant Ministries Staff, PCUSA (en español e ingles)

New immigrants from around the world continue coming to the U.S.A. in growing numbers. They provide a multicultural opportunity for membership growing in diversity and inclusiveness.

6. “Gather all Nations and Tongues: Immigrants, Crossing over and the making of a Multicultural Church” – Rev. Raafat Girgis, PC(USA) Office of Multicultural Ministries

In this workshop participants will explore the blessings of diversity brought by immigrants and discuss several innovative approaches to mission, witness and church growth that build on partnership with the immigrant groups with intentional and conscious celebration of their differences rather than similarities.

7. “Responding to Immigration From Living on the Border” – Rev. Mark Adams and Elder Angel Valencia, Co-directors, Frontera de Cristo, Douglas, AZ and Agua Prieta, Mexico

8. “Discovering Presbyterian Border Ministry” – leaders from PBM sites and Phro. Ramón García, PBM president (en español e ingles)

A brief overview of PBM, its objectives, and history.

9. “Café Justo/Just Coffee – Just Trade and the Coffee Bean” – Adrian González and Daniel Cifuentes (en español e ingles)


This workshop will engage many issues involved in awakening a church to its multicultural reality through a narrative process.

11. “Living Witness in Phoenix: Under the eye of Joe Arpaio”—Alfredo Gutierrez, former state assemblyman in Arizona (en español e ingles)

A picture into immigration realities in Phoenix in the time of Sheriff Joe Arpaio.


Presenters will provide updates on the “Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors” Act.


This workshop will attempt to shed some light on the vastly diverse peoples of the Middle East, the causes that compel their migrations, and their immigrant experience in the United States.

15. “Palestinian and Jewish Narratives of Dispossession, Displacement, Migration, and Yearning” — Noushin Framke

This workshop will summarize the narratives of both peoples, and give a brief overview of the history and factors that fuel the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.


17. “Immigrant Detention Centers and the Church’s Witness” – Panel discussion led by Rev. José Olagues

Florence AZ, within an hour’s drive from Phoenix, is the home to a daily population of over 2,000 immigrants who, after being arrested, are held pending immigration legal proceedings.

18. “PCUSA and Immigration” – Julia Thorne, attorney in the PC(USA) Office of Immigration Issues


This workshop explores the mission implications that emerge out of the presence and life of Christian communities from Africa, Asia, and Latin America in U.S. contexts.

20. “Migrant Resource Centers and Shelters” – led by bi-national team and coordinated by Migrant Resource Center of Agua Prieta

Santa Fe Westminster is Multicultural Church
Story Winner for 2009

Santa Fe Westminster is one of six winners in the 2009 Multicultural Church story contest sponsored by the Multicultural Ministries division of the General Assembly Mission Council.

The church received a prize of $1,000.

The story of Westminster traces its beginnings to 1893 when it was organized as the La Iglesia Segunda Presbiteriana (Hispanola) de Santa Fe.

Its history is sketchy until 1928 when it was reorganized as the “Spanish Department” of Santa Fe First, the oldest protestant church in New Mexico and Arizona.

It continued to use the sanctuary of First church on Sunday afternoons until the 1950s. Under the leadership of pastor George Simmons, a building was constructed on W. Manhatten and the congregation changed its name to Westminster.

At that time English began to be used in portions of the service.

Today the congregation has 81 members with a mixture of 54% Hispanic (Spanish, Mexican, and Latino), 44% white (Anglo), 1% Native American, and 1% African-American.

To be found in worship are Hispanic families that lived in the area long before New Mexico became a state, Anglos who have embraced Northern New Mexico’s culture, Mexicans, Guatemalans, Hondurans, Brazilians, African Americans, Native Americans, Mexican-Americans, homeless people and well-to-do.

Current pastor is the Rev. Chester Topple.
Synod votes to send overture to 219th General Assembly

Meeting February 19-20 in Tempe, Arizona, commissioners from the four presbyteries in the Synod of the Southwest, voted to send an overture to the 219th General Assembly meeting this summer in Minneapolis concerning the roles of synods in the denomination.

Prompted by two other overtures heading to the Assembly concerning synods, this overture calls for a special committee “...to explore and examine the roles and relationships of synods and presbyteries within the Presbyterian Church (USA) – to each other, to the agencies of the General Assembly, and to congregations.”

An overture approved by the Presbytery of New Hope in North Carolina, calls for an amendment to the Book of Order that would eliminate synods entirely. If approved by the General Assembly, presbyteries would vote on the matter in the next year.

The Synod of the Rocky Mountains has submitted an overture to amend the Book of Order to allow synods to change their functions.

Rationale for the Synod’s overture includes the statement: “The question of the future of middle governing bodies [synods and presbyteries] is not a question about only one type of governing body but about the governance and mission system of the entire PCUSA. To make deliberate changes to any one part of the system will have implications for the other current partners. Such change urges serious conversation about historic practices as well as present and future needs.”

Other statements in the rationale for the overture say: “It is the responsibility of the General Assembly to oversee synods, but there has been no review process of synods in almost 40 years.”

“Following reunion in 1983, the General Assembly appointed a special committee on boundaries. The work of that committee was solely to adjust boundaries with overlapping presbyteries of the two former churches. The committee was not given the task of addressing roles and responsibilities, and did not do so.”

“Synods and presbyteries have evolved significantly over the last 40 years. No two synods or presbyteries operate in identical fashion, nor do they relate to each other in identical ways.”

Elder Conrad Rocha, Albuquerque, will be the overture advocate for the Synod during the General Assembly. The meeting was held at Mission del Sol Presbyterian Church in Tempe. Worship was in the new $2+ million sanctuary that had just been dedicated the previous Sunday.

Per Capita Assessment Increases

Commissioners voted to increase the Synod’s per capita assessment by $1, to $7. Decreasing membership across the Synod is making it ever more difficult to maintain the Synod’s current responsibilities.

Approve Personnel Policies

Revisions to the “Personnel Policy/Employee Handbook” were approved by commissioners.

Global Mission Trip

Commissioners agreed that the next global mission trip would be to the Middle East in late 2011 or early 2012.

Partnering with Café Justo provides economic gains

Dan Abbott of Café Justo/Just Coffee reported to the commissioners that 28 of the 164 churches in the Synod partnered with the coffee cooperative by selling coffee and/or serving this coffee.

Income to the coop in 2009 from these churches was some $50 thousand. If the coffee had been sold at free market prices, income would have been only some $7 thousand.

The churches purchased 6,702 pounds of roasted coffee. About 8,400 pounds of green beans were purchased from Chiapas.

As a result of this, the 60 coffee farming families participating in the coop no longer have a need to migrate. He challenged more churches to partner with the coop and sell and serve this coffee.

Abbott reported that the coop now has 12 employees making wages double the market rate.

Herman Waetjen and Sam Hamilton-Poore will lead 2010 preaching seminars

The Synod of the Southwest will again this year sponsor two Biblical preaching seminars for pastors within the Synod of the Southwest.

The Rev. Dr. Herman Waetjen, Emeritus Professor of New Testament, San Francisco Theological Seminary, will lead a seminar on preaching the parables, August 2-8 at Ghost Ranch Abiquiu.

The Rev. Sam Hamilton-Poore, Director of the Program in Christian Spirituality, San Francisco Theological Seminary, will lead a seminar on spirituality and preaching October 4-7 at Ghost Ranch, Santa Fe.

Through a grant from the General Assembly Mission Council, cost for each of the events is only $100.

Further information on the seminars is forthcoming. Registration for each of the events will again be through the Synod website: www.synodsw.org.
China trip teaches Patience

Participants on Synod Mission trip sense there is hope in waiting

(In October, 18 persons from around the Synod of the Southwest participated in a Global Mission Experience sponsored by the Synod. Destination was China. Here the Rev. Seth Finch, associate pastor of Albuquerque Covenant, shares some of his reflections on the experience.)

Many people have been asking about my experience with the church in China, and I have tried to answer as best as I could, but there is so much to tell. One thing that has been on my mind about this trip is waiting.

If there was any downside to this trip it was the waiting. Waiting on planes (then more waiting on planes after we missed the ones we were waiting for); waiting for the plane to land—especially after being on it for 12 hours straight; waiting on windy bumpy bus rides; waiting on a large group of American tourists that all moved at different paces; waiting on crowds of people (crowds in China tend to be much bigger than here—after all there are 1.3 billion people over there). There was a great deal of waiting to do, and it wasn’t always easy to be patient.

And look at this—I get back to the United States just in time to start the church season of waiting—Advent. Here we wait with anticipation on Christmas. We wait for gatherings of family and friends; we wait for Christmas goodies and holiday feasts; and of course, we wait for the coming of the Christ child.

And the wait seems to get harder each year since retailers seem to roll out the decorations and Christmas music earlier and earlier.

What I think I did learn is that some people have had to deal with a lot harder waits than I have. One of the pastors that I met while in China was a man named Jong Guanlou.

He had to wait in a labor camp for 13 years during the Cultural Revolution after he was arrested for being a pastor. Can you imagine? Jong Guanlou was not the only one either—the whole church basically had to quietly wait during the Cultural Revolution—had to wait to proclaim the gospel once again.

Today, Jong Guanlou is the head of a booming church outside of Xi’an. In fact, all the churches in China seem to be booming. Three new churches open their doors every single day in China.

In just the last 10 years, the church has grown from 1 million to 20 million people (it’s been a very long time since our churches were growing like that). The two churches we attended while there each had six services with thousands of people at each one.

Now I am not saying that the wait the Church in China experienced was a good thing, or that it was even responsible for the boom now happening. But what is important about this is the realization that the gospel message tells us that with waiting comes hope.

If the church can survive a wait like the wait during the Cultural Revolution and come out the other side growing like it has, there is hope in the midst of any kind of wait. Not just hope for our advent wait, but hope for waits beside a hospital bed; hope for waits on news of a job or a promotion; hope for waits on new life and new beginnings.

Waiting is not fun, but the Advent message is one of a hopeful waiting. Whether we are talking about Magi waiting on a king, a young couple expecting a child waiting for a place to stay, a people waiting for a savior, we find that there is hope in the waiting.

Post Easter Pastor’s retreat

Pastors at times lament a lack of personal time for their own spiritual development during Lent. Therefore Ghost Ranch is offering a week especially for pastors and others who desire some private retreat time after Lent. “Come to Catch Your Breath” is being offered April 5-11, as part of the Casa del Sol spirituality program. Leader will be Anne Bateman Noss. There is scholarship aid available. Call 505-685-4333 for more information.
New Church efforts Moving forward in Synod

In keeping with the goal of the PC(USA) to develop multicultural and racial/ethnic congregations, three efforts in the Synod of the Southwest are taking strides forward.

The three are the Presbyterian Middle Eastern Fellowship in Tucson, Camino de Vida in Albuquerque, and La Iglesia del Pueblo in Las Cruces.

- Camino de Vida got its start when the Rev. Guillermo Yela became organizing pastor of this Southwest Albuquerque ecumenical effort and began work last summer.
  - After walking the streets of the area, getting to know people, and developing small Bible study groups, the first event was held in December with some 300 persons in attendance.
  - Regular worship services are to begin after further arrangements have been made, such as acquiring hymnals and a sound system.

- The Middle Eastern Fellowship in Tucson has been gathering for worship and fellowship at Tucson Northminster under the leadership of the Rev. George Bitar for many months.
  - Most recently the Rev. Fahed Abu-Akel, moderator of the 214th General Assembly (2002) and current moderator of the National Middle Eastern Presbyterian Caucus, visited the group and led worship.
  - Christians in the Middle East trace their roots to Apostolic times. Presbyterians are the largest protestant group in the area with mission work dating back 180 years.

- Iglesia del Pueblo, under the leadership of Rev. Wayne Hawkins, is in the process of signing up a group of persons who will become the charter members of an organized church by the end of 2010.
  - In the meantime, the problems of deportations or detentions of mothers, and the concurrent endangering of children who are citizens, is a focus of concern by the group.

December Fire devastates Tuba City manse

In a fire that presumably was caused by the rusting out of the fire place fire box in the manse of the Tuba City church, Pastor Norma McCabe lost most of her clothing and personal belongings.

She and her family have moved into the Maloney House on the church campus.

Because of water damage from the fire department’s efforts to control the fire, it is not known whether the manse can be rebuilt or repaired. There is insurance on the structure.

McCabe has no insurance to cover the loss of her personal belongings.

Presbytery of Grand Canyon immediately sent $1,000 and provided another $1,000 to pay for butane so that the church can be heated during the winter. Several congregations have received an offering to assist the church and its pastor.
Although these internally displaced persons face the same hardships as refugees who have had to cross borders, they are virtually invisible to the outside world.

Living in their home country, they are ineligible for much of the assistance the world recognizes as the right of refugees. Sometimes they are targets of a war by their own country’s government, sometimes only incidental victims.

This past year’s war in Pakistan alone has displaced millions. The crisis disrupts the lives of each family in ways they’ll deal with for the rest of their lives – losing homes, neighbors, sometimes family, livelihoods, and the security of routine.

Thanks to gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) has responded to those whose needs remain hidden from the world. In collaboration with international partners, PDA has helped provide food, shelter, clean water, and other basic humanitarian needs to thousands of displaced families.

PDA is helping provide training so those returning home will have skills to rebuild their lives.

The recent devastating earthquakes in Haiti and Chile demonstrate how quickly lives of people can be turned upside down with unbelievable suffering and hardship.

Thanks to the generous giving of Presbyterians in the past to the One Great Hour of Sharing Offering, the denomination through its Disaster Assistance program has thus far advanced some $500,000 to ecumenical partners in Haiti for relief efforts.

PDA sent $25,000 immediately to partners in Chile to assess damage.

In this Lenten season, Presbyterians will again be challenged to make generous and sacrificial offerings to the One Great Hour of Sharing Offering that does so much in assisting those in need anywhere in the world.

In most churches this offering is received either on Palm Sunday or Easter.

For the past 20 years, some $8 million to $11 million has been raised each year in this effort.

As in the past, one third of the offering goes to Presbyterian Disaster Assistance that has been on the scene in Haiti and elsewhere in the world where disasters have struck.

Another third goes to the Presbyterian Self Development of People that seeks to give a “hand up” to people struggling to get on their feet and become self supporting.

It’s the working out of the old adage, “give a person a fish and the person will eat for a day, give the person a fishing pole, and the person will eat most every day.”

The final third of the offering goes to the Presbyterian Hunger Program that seeks to tackle the systemic problems that cause hunger and starvation to so many in the world.

Internally Displaced Persons a new reality

One of the new realities of the world is the growing number of internally displaced persons – mostly women and children.

The roots of war may be international, but the pain is very personal to millions around the world from Sudan to Sri Lanka to Pakistan whose flight never crosses into another country.
Albuquerque churches receive excellence award for Christian Education

Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education has announced that Albuquerque First and Second churches have received the W. T. “Tolly” Thompson Award.

The award of $1,000 is for Excellence in Christian Education in recognition of the Vacation Bible School program developed through the leadership of Libby Engdahl Whiteley, Certified Christian Educator at Albuquerque First.

The award winning program is featured on the Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education website (www.union-psce.edu), was announced at the school’s Board of Trustees meeting, at the Association of Presbyterian Christian Educators Annual Event, and will be announced at the 219th General Assembly in June.

Las Cruces First holds February Hymn Festival

Dr. Michael Burkhardt, renowned organist, composer and choral clinician, led a Hymn Festival February 14 at Las Cruces First.

The event was the inaugural event of “Music at First Presbyterian Church.”

Joining in the concert were the church’s Chancel Choir, the Doña Ana Youth Choir and the NMSU University Singers and instrumentalists.

The combined choirs presented one of Dr. Burkhardt’s compositions, Psalm 90 as well as arrangements of many familiar hymns.

Psalm 90 was composed for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Carthage Choir, Carthage College, Kenosha, Wisconsin. He is a graduate of the college and was on the faculty 2001-2007.

According to David Klement, director of music at the church, the concert series will “help spread the news about the welcoming church that is First Presbyterian.”

Memorial Services held for Bob Chapman, retired Grand Canyon Executive

Memorial services were held January 27 at Valley Presbyterian Church in Paradise Valley, Arizona, for the Rev. Bob Chapman who died in his sleep January 21.

Chapman was the first executive for Grand Canyon Presbytery and had retired in 1997.

A native of California, his earlier ministry included service as pastor of Fruitville Presbyterian Church in Oakland, CA, and then as an urban minister for the Presbyterian Church in Oakland.

In the Presbytery’s formative years, Chapman oversaw the growth of the Presbytery through the rapid expansion of new church development while building ministry bridges with Native American congregations all over parts of Arizona.

He was a pilot and made many trips north in the Synod/Presbytery-owned airplane (a plane purchased with Betty Crocker coupons).

In recent years he had suffered from Parkinson’s disease, and yet kept as active a life as he could. He is survived by his wife, Carol, three married children, and their families.

Carolyn Atkins, Menaul Historical Library founder, dies at 90 in California

Memorial services were held at Albuquerque St. Andrew Church in January for Carolyn Chaney Atkins, founder of the Menaul Historical Library. She was 90.

A tireless advocate for the preservation of Presbyterian History and a mission advocate for the Presbyterian Church (USA), she was also the first woman president of the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia.

She edited 12 books on the history of Presbyterians in the Southwest. In 1985 she compiled the Historians’ Handbook, a guide for those interested in preserving the history of the Presbyterian Church.

Ghost Ranch fossil find sheds light on evolution of dinosaur

In a December 2009 issue of Science a team of paleontologists introduced the Triassic dinosaur *Tawa Hallae*, an animal that may answer longstanding questions about the earliest years of dinosaur evolution.

The fossils were discovered in the fossil-rich, Late Triassic beds at Ghost Ranch Abiquiu only recently. This find is described as some of the most complete and best preserved dinosaur skeletons from this time period.

The fossil skeletons are two to four meters in length. The animals lived some 220 million years ago.

Many years ago fossils of Coelophysis, the official New Mexico state dinosaur, were also discovered at Ghost Ranch. “Tawa gives us an unprecedented window into early dinosaur evolution, solidifying the relationships of early dinosaurs revealing how they spread across the globe, and providing new insight into the evolution of their characteristics,” says Sterling Nesbitt of the University of Texas at Austin, the lead author of the magazine article.

The article says that *Tawa* possesses features that appear in its contemporaries and features that do not, a finding that helps unite all Triassic carnivorous dinosaurs into one group, the theropods, the same group that includes *Tyrannosaurus rex*, and now includes birds.

Dinosaurs are thought to have originated in what is now South America and soon diverged into several varieties before dispersing across the Triassic world more than 220 million years ago.
The “Greening” of St. Mark’s

“Water is such a precious part of God’s creation, yet thousands of gallons of water flow from our buildings and our parking lots into the sewer system. As a desert-dwelling community of faith, we cannot perpetuate this sin against God’s earth” – so writes the Green Team of Tucson St. Mark’s.

Through the dedicated labors of its “Green Team,” St. Mark’s Church in Tucson has a vision for making its campus more welcoming to visitors, friends, members, and the community and increasing the church’s environmental sensitivity and sustainability.

The church plans to resurface its parking lot with a porous substance, “GravelPave2,” instead of oil-based asphalt. Utilizing environmentally-sustainable materials to create a firm and stable surface, this product simultaneously allows storm water to percolate into the ground to replenish the water table.

Compared to a traditional asphalt surface, which needs to be replaced periodically, “GravelPave2” surfaces are very low maintenance. Thus, over time, this investment will contribute to financial, as well as environmental, savings.

Desert-friendly trees and plants will help transform St. Mark’s “face” to its neighbors from a “heat island” to a bit of Eden – cool, refreshing, inviting, and much kinder to the earth.

The congregation already recycles and uses mostly permanent dishes (since a new dishwasher was installed), drink Café JustoPo, use earth friendly tp and pt and cleaning products.

Menaul School holds anti-racism training for students and staff

Under the leadership of the Rev. Eric Law, Kaleidoscope Institute, Menaul School in Albuquerque held anti-racism training for students and staff in January.

Law’s program intentionally includes a strong Biblical and theological reflection and leadership skills component. It goes beyond awareness to teaching leaders specific skills with which they can create a more inclusive community as they exercise their leadership.

Helping facilitate small group discussion was the Rev. Mark Koenig of the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program.

The Rev. Buddy Monahan, school chaplain, had the idea for this training that was funded through the Teaching of the Bible Grant of the PC(USA).

“It was very nice to have the grant so that we could enter into the planning and execution with the luxury of doing it right,” Law said.

“Usually schools like Menaul don’t have the funding to make such a comprehensive training possible. Thanks to the grant, I was able to spend several days at the school in December actively listening in order to reflect the school’s many strengths, concerns, and issues in our collective learning experience in January.”

The school hopes to become an established center in New Mexico for cultural proficiency (a positive term for ‘anti-racism’).

Presbyteries call Watson as new Regional Presbyter

In separate and joint meetings on February 27, the Presbyteries of Sierra Blanca and Santa Fe voted to call the Rev. Sallie Watson as Regional Presbyter/Stat- ed Clerk for the two entities.

Watson is a native of Dallas and lifelong Presbyterian. She received her Bachelors degree from Austin College in 1978.

After a stint in advertising where she worked for the Dallas Times Herald and two advertising agencies, she entered Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary where she earned the master of Divinity degree in 1987.

In 2007 she earned the Doctor of Ministry degree from McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago.

Sallie has served a number of churches in Texas, California and Utah in both called and interim positions. Most recently she has been Interim General Presbyter for Presbytery of Arkansas.

Keep the Synod informed about what’s going on in your Presbytery and local church!

Send information to Ray Kersting, editor sfrkerst@grappawireless.com
Holy Conversation leads to Holy Actions

15-month series of gatherings winding down in March

(In the fall of 2007, the Synod of the Southwest sponsored a very popular and meaningful seminar, “Leading Change in the Church” with Gil Rendle. To respond to requests for more on the general topic, the Synod sponsored a 15-month series of events for churches in the two states. Final gathering is set for March. Following are reflections from two churches that participated in the series.)

Almost two years prior to the first retreat, Orangewood Presbyterian Church in Phoenix saw a need to change the way it connects with its local community.

This realization came via the mission study preceding the call of an associate pastor for Youth and Community Outreach. Fast forward two years later, to the first of the four retreats, not six days after the new pastor had been ordained, and he found himself in the midst of a planning process for how to call forth the leaders from the congregation to undertake this transformation.

The Holy Conversation retreats have provided the framework for shaping the work we are doing. It has been a key resource in how to analyze both our own church and our local context as we seek to build better relationships within our community.

Often the biggest challenge an organization faces when it wants to grow, is “where to begin?” Through the retreats and leadership of Stephanie Lutz Allen, we leapt over that first hurdle, and have been sent forth with the tools we need to continue.

One of the key facets is the ‘experiment’ model, where the organization doesn’t wait for all the research and planning to be finished before it starts ‘acting’.

The idea is that through small, even temporary, experiments and hands on applications of your findings, you are able to learn more, and accomplish more than through a traditional ‘analyze, plan, then act’ model. Some of our experiments have led to a community garden and a new ministry to the homeless.

Another major benefit of the retreats is the connections we made through the other participating churches. It is comforting to know that we aren’t the only congregation in the Presbytery facing these challenges; and it’s been interesting to see how other faithful Presbyterians demonstrate their leadership.

Over all, the program has been immensely helpful as we seek to improve the way our church reaches out to the local community. --Tully Fletcher

When Synod invited Laguna to participate in a 15 month period of “Holy Conversation” there was some skepticism. And that skepticism was justified for it has not been an altogether easy process. Possibly because we all prefer to “let sleeping dogs lie.”

But, we have found, it was an important process for Laguna to be involved. In a couple paragraphs it is impossible to share what it has meant for our congregation. In fact, at this point we are not sure yet what the final outcome/impact will be.

The four two-day meetings were only the beginning. Between each of the meetings the teams returned back to the real world of their churches and communities and worked on discerning what God was calling us to do and be where we were.

Like Jesus’ call to his disciples it meant that we were challenged to give up some of our old ways and to find new ways of doing God’s mission. Not an easy challenge to meet.

Our team met, prayed and discussed where we had been as a congregation over the past 131+ years and where we were today.

We talked with past members, current members and people in the community trying to find out how others saw us. Some of what we heard was not pleasant but it was all helpful.

Now we are in the process of pulling all of this together to see if we can discern where God expects us to be going over the next few years. Will we be willing? Will God be satisfied? We don’t know yet, but we are moving ahead.

It has been a journey. And like all journeys, it has been easy moving at times; at times it has been like a steep mountain with no trail.

But, it has been helpful as we struggle to discern what God wants from us at Laguna Pueblo. And with God’s help our journey will end with satisfaction knowing that we are carrying out God’s plan for us. --David Preininger

Participants in the a Holy Conversations, Holy Actions retreat break-out to discuss points being made by the presenter, the Rev. Stephanie Lutz Allen.

Stephanie Lutz Allen, presenter

The retreats have provided the framework for shaping the work we are doing