

Temporary Presbyter's Report – September 2020

2020 has proved to be a challenging year in every way. In the midst of the world-wide pandemic, the work of the church has continued, and in many ways grown deeper. I thought you might want to obtain a glimpse of what has been happening in Albany Presbytery in recent months.

Ministers Zoom Calls

Since April there have been 25 weekly Zoom calls to support our ministers who are actively serving a church. Topics that have been discussed include: how to address the pressure of additional work (and new work) as well as the real threat of burnout; preaching prophetically in a time of societal conflict; becoming a Matthew 25 church; how to support Black Lives Matter in your community and resources for educating church members on racial justice; how to effectively use the Internet to keep the congregation connected; planning if and when to reopen the church building for worship.

Racial Justice

The presbytery has established a racial justice resource page for congregations to utilize. A number of our pastors and churches were involved in protests both in villages and cities around the Capital District to protest the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery. There has been a book study lead by Rev. Kate Kotfila that involved ministers and lay people in discussing the effects of systemic racism; and how white people need to face their culpability in oppressing our brothers and sisters of color. While some of our congregations have become (or are working on becoming) Matthew 25 churches, we have much work to do in our presbytery to educate and motivate our church members to confront the ugly and demeaning reality of racism in our society.

Support of Ministers and Congregations

In July COMAC sent notes of appreciation and gift cards to ministers serving churches during this pandemic. In April the Trustees offered financial support of congregations who needed it. This included forbearance of three months of basic witness support, the ability to extend loan payments for three months and bridge loans if congregations needed it to support the church during the early stages of the pandemic. Assistance in the amount of \$36,000 was extended to five of our churches.

In August the Trustees announced a matching grant program to assist congregations to purchase, install and utilize technology for providing hybrid/on-line worship. The grants are up to \$5,000 in funds that match the congregation's investment. To date four churches have applied and a number of other congregations are in process of completing their installation of necessary hardware and software. We expect the grant application to remain open through the end of 2020.

Other Items

Since the last presbytery meeting much of my time has been involved in supporting the trustees, many of our committees and individual ministers. With the well-deserved retirement of Dan Rogers, I picked up a number of responsibilities that he had been doing that were previously done by the presbytery executive. My recent goal has been to better understand how the needs of the presbytery will be addressed by the new Administrator position that the Personnel Committee will be developing in the next several months (after the Communications Manager position has been filled).

Impressions

I continue to be impressed by the giftedness and commitment of the ministers who serve Albany Presbytery. Whether the congregation be small or large, our minister servants have demonstrated a profound commitment to nurture their people in new and challenging ways during this pandemic. I urge you to remember your minister – in fact, all of our ministers – in your prayers - that they may find times of refreshment and rest in the midst of demanding schedules and responsibilities. Pray for their health and for their safety as they address in prophetic ways the truths of Scripture in our needy society.

Respectfully submitted,

RE Bill Henderson
Temporary Presbyter