

Frequently Asked Questions

How did the Matthew 25 vision come about?

The 222nd and 223rd General Assemblies (2016 and 2018) challenged the PC(USA) to embrace Jesus' call in Matthew 25:31–46 to take our living faith into our communities and the world. As a Matthew 25 church, we are called to live out true discipleship by acting boldly, compassionately and fearlessly serving people who are hungry, oppressed, imprisoned or poor. We joyfully share this vision and invitation with you!



What exactly do we have to do to become a Matthew 25 congregation or mid council?

To some degree, many churches are already doing the work of Matthew 25. We hope that by partnering with mid councils and congregations, we can together multiply and intensify our loving commitment to radical and fearless discipleship. The first step is simply to sign up to become a Matthew 25 church or mid council at pcusa.org/matthew25.

When you sign up, you will be asked to embrace one or more of the three areas of focus — building congregational vitality, dismantling structural racism and eradicating systemic poverty.

Then as you live out your commitment, we ask you to share the story of impact that your pledge has made: how your congregation has changed, how you've discovered new passions and vitality, how your members have been re-energized as disciples ... so like in the early church, your renewed faith will fan the flames and encourage other congregations to also embrace our common mission.

How do I share our story of impact?

Visit the Matthew 25 website at presbyterianmission.org/matthew-25-sharing-our-stories/. The form will prompt you for photos, videos and other content that will bring your story alive. You may be contacted by the Presbyterian News Service for more information.

Does my church still have to sign up to be a Matthew 25 congregation if our mid council has already signed on?

Yes. When a mid council signs on, they are committing to help spread the invitation. Their goal is to have 20% of the congregations in their presbytery or synod sign on. So it is important that each congregation make that commitment themselves. You can do that at pcusa.org/matthew25.

Why is the goal to sign up 20% of all congregations/mid councils as Matthew 25 churches?

Twenty percent is the social science benchmark for success in any project. It is the tipping point that causes an idea or practice to spread and result in a movement.

What is congregational vitality all about?

Vitality isn't a number. It's not about how many members you have, or how large your budget is, or even how many baptisms you celebrate each year. Rather, it's a mindset and commitment to re-energize and live out your church's faith in your community and the world. Vitality is a passion for following Jesus—growing in faith and discipleship, embracing people beyond your church walls, working for justice and reconciliation, and serving your neighbors in need. It's a way of life that sees with Christ's eyes and uses your collective gifts to really make a difference. Of course, every community is different and faces its own challenges. Growing in vitality always requires prayer and discernment to figure out how you are called.

We believe that "Where Christ is, there is the true Church" (F-1.0303). Matthew 25 shows us that Christ is with people who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, or in prison. If we wish to serve Christ, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) must be with these same people in our witness, work, and worship. In this mission we encounter Christ, the life of the world, and congregations find true vitality.

If my church is participating in the Vital Congregations pilot program, aren't we automatically a Matthew 25 church?

The Vital Congregations initiative is one way a congregation who has committed to becoming a Matthew 25 church can address the issue of congregational vitality. However, it is important that each congregation make the commitment to be Matthew 25 congregations themselves. You can do that at pcusa.org/matthew25.

The text of Matthew 25 doesn't explicitly mention racism. How does the focus of dismantling structural racism fit in?

In Matthew 25 Jesus addresses the nations and focuses on “the least of these,” revealing his concern for groups of people who experience marginalization because of how others respond to their most basic needs—food, water, clothing, welcome, healing, and freedom. Harsh judgment is pronounced on those who lack compassion and fail to act justly towards people who are marginalized. Today in our country people of color are among the most marginalized communities because of racism. Studies on racism reveal people of color are disproportionately impoverished, imprisoned and denied access to economic and educational benefits enjoyed by white Americans. It is also worth noting that the Greek word for “stranger” in Matthew 25 is *xenos*, the root of our word “xenophobia,” meaning hatred or prejudice toward people from other cultures or countries. Racism violates God’s command to love one another. Matthew 25’s principle to treat marginalized people with love and justice is the basis for the lofty goal to dismantle the sinful practice of systemic racism. When you embrace anti-racism work, you are pledging to stand up and find inspired ways to chip away at this terrible injustice in our world.

What does “systemic poverty” mean?

When we describe a problem as systemic, we mean that it pervades our entire culture and is deeply ingrained in the structures of society. In our country, people who are poor tend to stay poor because the deck is stacked against them at every turn. To embrace the Matthew 25 vision to eradicate systemic poverty means that we aspire to address the root causes of poverty in our communities and world. For example, many churches have food pantries and that is a much-needed blessing for their members and communities. However, to address the root causes of poverty, we must work at what is creating the situation of poverty and hunger to begin with – the laws and policies that are unjust and exploitative of people who are poor. It means combatting greed. It means tackling injustices in housing, health care, education, access to food, environment, zoning and many other issues. It means appealing to legislators, community leaders and visionaries to make a difference. It means boldly standing up for people who don’t have a powerful voice themselves. Again, Jesus urges us to open our eyes and hearts — and then take action.

Is Jesus talking about systemic poverty in Matthew 25, or just ordinary acts of kindness?

The prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures demonstrated a clear concern for condemning and correcting unjust systems. Jesus stands firmly in this prophetic tradition when he expresses his solidarity with people who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, or in prison. Furthermore, in this scene of final judgment, Jesus is addressing the “big picture”—all the nations and peoples of the world; in this context he would seem to be referring not only to individual actions, but to larger social structures that affect people who are poor.

We are already very busy and active in our community. Why should we sign up for “one more thing”?

Very simply, there is power in unity. By accepting the Matthew 25 invitation, you are helping to strengthen the work and witness to Jesus Christ in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and you help us become a more unified and relevant presence in the world. The Matthew 25 vision also demonstrates our understanding as Presbyterian Christians that we are “saved to serve.” By committing to become a Matthew 25 church, you are responding to Christ’s urgent call to be a church of action, where God’s love, justice and mercy shine forth and are contagious. Our re-energized faith can unite and connect all Presbyterians for a common and holy purpose to continue the mission and ministry of Jesus in the church and in the world.

"FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS"

ADDRESSING RACISM AND THE CHURCH

A

CONFESSION

AND

CALL TO ACTION

IN THE PRESBYTERY OF REDSTONE

PRESBYTERY OF REDSTONE COUNCIL

August 25, 2020

"In each time and place there are particular problems and crises through which God calls the church to act. The church, guided by the Spirit, humbled by its own complicity and instructed by all attainable knowledge, seeks to discern the will of God and learn how to obey in these concrete situations."

("The Confession of 1967," Part II, "The Ministry of Reconciliation," Section, A, "The Mission of the Church," Paragraph 4, "Reconciliation in Society." In Book of Confessions)

"God's redeeming work in Jesus Christ embraces the whole of man's life: social and cultural, economic and political, scientific and technological, individual and corporate...It is the will of God that his purpose for human life shall be fulfilled under the rule of Christ and all evil shall be banished from his creation.

With an urgency born of this hope, the church applies itself to present tasks and strives for a better world. It does not identify limited progress with the kingdom of God on earth, nor does it despair in the face of disappointment and defeat. In the steadfast hope, the church looks beyond all partial achievement to the final triumph of God."

("The Confession of 1967", Part III, "The Fulfillment of Reconciliation", 9.54, 9.55 in The Book of Confessions)

CONFESSION

When one part of the body suffers, we all feel it.

For all those who suffer injustices because of the color of their skin

We say their names...

For those who died unnecessarily and for those who endure indignities

We say their names...

For those whose pain we have failed to see and the lament we did not hear

We say their names....

For when one part of the body suffers, we all feel it.

We join our voices with our siblings of color to amplify as one the cry against injustices

We confess our own sin of racism, whether deliberate or unintentional, conscious or unconscious

We sin both against God and against neighbor who we treat as "other"

We dehumanize those who are God's image and in so doing degrade ourselves as well

We fail to acknowledge in word and deed that the lives of our Black siblings do matter...

They must matter to us, they must matter in our society because, most of all, they matter to God.

We confess our own sins of commission...

when we participate in acts of bias and where we protect the benefits of advantage based upon race.

We confess our sins of omission...

when we fail to cry out against injustice, neglect to resist evil and ignore the demands of discipleship

As communities of faith, we have not always visibly demonstrated God's rule on earth as it is in heaven...

Our words and actions or lack of them have not followed the One,

who inaugurated a reign from above which is a kingdom of every nation, race and tribe..

By God's grace, we are called to take up our cross and follow him...

Through personal engagement and institutional participation, we offer ourselves as living sacrifices, praying and acting that our God will transform us and this world in love and justice.

We call upon our pastors, our congregations, and all those who follow Jesus, whether in our sanctuaries or in our neighborhoods, in our prayer groups or in our policies, in our gatherings or in our government, to name those who suffer among us

to learn from those who experience injustice based upon race

to risk giving up power and all those things we take for granted

to engage the differences among us that make up this God-imagined humanity

to speak words of challenge to the powers and authorities

PRAY IT NOW...THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN.....

PROCLAIM IT NOW... THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN....

ENACT IT NOW.... THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN....

EXPECT IT NOW.....THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

CONTEXT

“In each time and place there are particular problems and crises through which God calls the church to act. The church, guided by the Spirit, humbled by its own complicity and instructed by all attainable knowledge, seeks to discern the will of God and learn how to obey in these concrete situations.”

(“The Confession of 1967,” Part II, “The Ministry of Reconciliation,” Section, A, “The Mission of the Church,” Paragraph 4, “Reconciliation in Society.” In Book of Confessions)

We have seen firsthand what we have failed to notice and acknowledge before. We have witnessed the tragic suffering and death of people of color through abuse of power and authority. No longer can we turn away. No longer can we rationalize that it is merely the bad actions of some exceptional few. The problem of racism, as evidenced in the excessive use of force by those in whom we have called to protect and serve, is only one expression of this sin in our society.

The Presbytery of Redstone seeks to follow Jesus in the participation of the mission of God’s reign where love and justice are the norm. Faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ requires our response -- our action. In our personal relationships, congregational ministries or for the common good, we oppose racism in all its forms as inherently antithetical to our God and to the image of God found in all humanity. We stand in solidarity with our siblings who are people of color suffering violence at the hands (knees) of those who act on our behalf. We join with our siblings in amplifying our voices to resist practices and policies, structures and institutions that have deliberately targeted or unconsciously demeaned people based upon race. By God’s grace, in following Jesus, we offer ourselves in humble service to learn from others, to aspire to speak in the name of our God and to act faithfully so that the good news in all its fullness may be made known, in peace and in justice.

As the pinnacle of God’s good creation, human beings were formed as the very image of God. All of humanity bears that image regardless of race, gender, or other distinctions. As God’s image, we were given the responsibility to love God exhibited specifically in our care for each other and for the earth. Intended to develop the world for God’s glory and honor, cultures, institutions, and societal structures were and are expected to love and serve God and neighbor. While we fully affirm the universal nature of God’s image in the human family, we also value any differences resulting from culture, race, and nationality. Our God is the God of all races, all nations, all peoples; no single group, faction, or country owns this God. God’s people come from every tribe, race, and nation.

Yet, we know our story reflects our fallen nature and our rebellion against God. This fracture is found not just in our relationship with God but marks all the relationships we have and all the structures and institutions we build. Our relationships with each other are broken, characterized by our own misuse of power in practices and policies. Our institutions have been developed and maintained to serve only ourselves and our own preferred groups. The sin that separates us from our God also separates us one from another. Within our own history, such brokenness has often been organized around and based on race. Even in our own day, we carry the effects of such differentiation based upon race in intrinsic connections to status and power.

Thanks be to God, that we have not been left to our sin. By God’s grace, in the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ, we have been called to love and serve both God and neighbor. By the Word and the Spirit, the power of sin and death with all its expressions in brokenness and injustice is and will be conquered. The good news of the gospel is that in Jesus Christ, God’s grace-filled promise draws us into covenantal fellowship with God and into God’s multi-ethnic family where barriers are broken down. Through this promise, God’s people are called and have been entrusted with the agency of this reconciliation to God and to one another. As communities of

faith, hope, love, and witness, we are called to demonstrate in word and deed that God's reign has come and is coming. These expressions of both personal and public transformation include our relationships with each other, nurture of faithful discipleship, and advocacy within and for the public good.

Therefore, in this time and place, we bear the responsibility to act faithfully as individuals, as congregations and as a presbytery. May we be renewed in our highest calling to love the Lord our God with our heart, mind, soul, and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves. And, may the Spirit of God empower us beyond just feeling remorseful or merely invoking symbolic statements of unity. May we seek the hard and faithful work of hearing the cries of those for whom justice is denied, acting then upon our confidence in God's transforming power to redeem and restore that which has been corrupted and lost. May we seek, with humility, to act in ways that follow the paths of redemption and restoration, no matter what it may cost us or how our own lives might need to be restructured. May we embody and enact for the world the signs of God's new creation that has and is coming. May we pray and act, proclaim and call for God's will of mercy, love and justice be done on earth as it is in heaven.

"God's redeeming work in Jesus Christ embraces the whole of man's life: social and cultural, economic and political, scientific and technological, individual and corporate...It is the will of God that his purpose for human life shall be fulfilled under the rule of Christ and all evil shall be banished from his creation.

With an urgency born of this hope, the church applies itself to present tasks and strives for a better world. It does not identify limited progress with the kingdom of God on earth, nor does it despair in the face of disappointment and defeat. In the steadfast hope, the church looks beyond all partial achievement to the final triumph of God."

("The Confession of 1967", Part III, "The Fulfillment of Reconciliation", 9.54, 9.55 in The Book of Confessions)

CALL TO ACTION (Within the Presbytery)

- **Commit the Presbytery portion of Peace and Global Witness offering to facilitate Anti-Racism workshops within the Presbytery.**
- **Direct one of the offerings annually of the Presbytery gatherings toward a project that addresses racial inequity concerns in our region.**
- **Begin Presbytery gatherings with a land acknowledgement to honor the original inhabitants in the region in which we are gathering as the Church.**
- **Form a task force under the authority of the Council to address Anti-Racism initiatives within and for our Presbytery and in our region.**

CALL TO ACTION (Within your Congregation)

- **Engage one another in personal conversations about the particular realities of racism.**
- **Focus some of your Christian formation programs on issues of racism (PCUSA Resources, Book studies, etc.).**
- **Personally, engage in active participation to learn from siblings who are people of color.**
- **Consider joining as a Matthew 25 congregation and make dismantling racism one of your priorities.**
- **Organize for yourself and/or others some form of the 21-day Racial Equity Habit-Building challenge.**

RESOURCES

Presbyterian Study, Training and Discussion Materials

- **Matthew 25: Dismantling structural racism** (www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/matthew-25/racism/)
- **PC(USA)'s Facing Racism website and resources** (<https://facing-racism.pcusa.org>)
- **The Racism Study Pack –The Thoughtful Christian** (www.thethoughtfulchristian.com)

Books

Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson

Rediscipling the White Church: From Cheap Diversity to True Solidarity by David Swanson

Waking up White, and Finding Myself in the Story of Race by Debbie Irving

White Too Long by Robert Jones

White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism by Robin DiAngelo

I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness by Austin Channing Brown

How to Be an Anti-Racist by Dr. Ibram X. Kendi

Dear Church: A Letter from a Black Preacher to the Whitest Denomination in the U.S. by Lenny Duncan

White Ally Toolkit Workbook by David Camp

Films/TV series

- 13th (Ava DuVernay)
- American Son (Kenny Leon)
- Blindspotting (Carlos López Estrada)
- Clemency (Chinonye Chukwu)
- Fruitvale Station (Ryan Coogler)
- I Am Not Your Negro (James Baldwin doc)
- If Beale Street Could Talk (Barry Jenkins)
- Just Mercy (Destin Daniel Cretton)
- King In The Wilderness
- See You Yesterday (Stefon Bristol)
- Selma (Ava DuVernay)
- The Hate U Give (George Tillman Jr.)
- When They See Us (Ava DuVernay)

Policy Statements in the PCUSA

“On the Church in this Moment in History,” approved by the 224th General Assembly (2020)

“Facing Racism: A Vision of the Intercultural Community” — PC(USA) churchwide antiracism policy, approved by the 222nd General Assembly (2016). | [Companion study guide](#).

The Confession of 1967—added to the Book of Confessions by the General Assembly(1967).

The Belhar Confession – added to the Book of Confessions by the 222nd General Assembly (2016). | [Study guide](#).

Church _____

Pastor or Associate Pastor _____ Full or Part Time _____

(include % if part-time; effective salary pro-rata)

(*For Installed Teaching Elder, Effective Salary, Board of Pensions dues, SECA offset, Study Leave, Vacation and Mileage reimbursement are requirements; For Pastors serving under contract (TE or CP), all are required except Board of Pensions, but it is recommended that provision for insurance and retirement be addressed)

2021 Terms of Call	2020 Presbytery Minimum	2021 Presbytery Minimum	Our Church
1. Base Salary	\$38,061.14	\$38,061.14	
2. Housing Allowance or Manse, including utilities (minimum of 30% of Salary/Deferred/ Allowances-total-1,3,4,5,7)	\$11,418.34	\$11,418.34	
3. Deferred Compensation [Tax Deferred Annuity]			
4. Un-vouchered allowances, gifts from employer, bonuses, etc.			
5. Other allowances, including; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • forms of compensation such as medical deductible/ medical expense reimbursement allowances (NOT paid through a group benefit plan) • insurance premiums for additional insurance coverage provided for individual employees. 			
6. ONE TIME Moving Expenses (if church paid or reimbursed) this total may need to be included in the total salary reported to the IRS. (Please review with your accountant)			
7. SECA <u>above</u> the normal 7.65% offset			
TOTAL EFFECTIVE SALARY (total of 1,2,3,4,5,7)	\$49,479.49	\$49,479.49	
8. Board of Pensions Dues (percentage calculated exclusive of moving expense): Pension (11%), Disability (1%) and Medical Coverage (25%) - Total (37) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post Retirement Dues - 12% 	\$18,307.41	\$18,307.41	
	\$5,937.53	\$5,937.53	
9. Social Security Contribution (7.65% of Effective Salary)	\$3,785.18	\$3,785.18	
10. Additional Group Plan Coverage Premiums			
11. Mileage Reimbursement (At current I.R.S. rate)			
12. Study Leave/Reimbursement (cumulative to 6 weeks plus \$3,000)	2 weeks +\$1,000.00	2 weeks +\$1,000.00	
13. Vacation (accrued quarterly, but not cumulative across years without permission)	4 weeks - 4 Sundays	4 weeks - 4 Sundays	
14. Other Professional Expenses:			
Book Reimbursement			
Pastor's Professional Expense			
Vouchered Reimbursements			
Initial Moving Expenses (based upon revision of the tax code, moving expenses may be considered additional income by the IRS. Please check with your own accountant)			
TOTAL COST TO CONGREGATION	\$72,572.08	\$72,572.08	

The Pastor and the congregation agree to the above terms and to abide by any policies of the Presbytery of Redstone regarding compensation, any form of leave (vacation, study, medical, etc.) and expenses.

Clerk _____ Pastor _____

Rev. Dawn Sherwood

Rev. Sherwood returns to Redstone Presbytery having serving her first call as an ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament at the Emmanuel United Presbyterian Church in Eighty Four, PA. She was ordained by Washington Presbytery in 2016 following her inquirer and candidacy status in our Presbytery.

Dawn graduated from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in May, 2016. Prior to attending seminary, she served as the choir director of the West Hempfield Presbyterian Church. She has also worked as a substitute music teacher in the Norwin, Penn Trafford, Hempfield and Latrobe school districts along with doing private music lessons.

Serving the larger Church, she was a commissioner this past summer to the 224th General Assembly. Presently, she is the Vice Moderator of Washington Presbytery and has also served as Chairperson and committee member of their Committee on Preparation for Ministry.

Rev. Sherwood is being presented with a call from the First Presbyterian Church of Jeannette and will be examined in the September 22 meeting of the Presbytery of Redstone.

Church First Presbyterian Church of Jeannette

Pastor or Associate Pastor Rev. Dawn R. Sherwood Full or Part Time _____

(include % if part-time; effective salary pro-rata)

(*For Installed Teaching Elder, Effective Salary, Board of Pensions dues, SECA offset, Study Leave, Vacation and Mileage reimbursement are requirements; For Pastors serving under contract (TE or CP), all are required except Board of Pensions, but it is recommended that provision for insurance and retirement be addressed)

2020 Terms of Call	2019 Presbytery Minimum	2020 Presbytery Minimum	FPCJ 2020 Proposal
1. Base Salary	\$37,314.85	\$38,061.14	\$ 39,000
2. Housing Allowance or Manse, including utilities (minimum of 30% of Salary/Deferred/ Allowances-total-1,3,4,5,7)	\$11,194.46	\$11,418.34	\$ 15,600
3. Deferred Compensation [Tax Deferred Annuity]			
4. Un-vouchered allowances, gifts from employer, bonuses, etc.			
5. Other allowances, including; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • forms of compensation such as medical deductible/ medical expense reimbursement allowances (NOT paid through a group benefit plan) • insurance premiums for additional insurance coverage provided for individual employees. 			
6. ONE TIME Moving Expenses (if church paid or reimbursed) this total may need to be included in the total salary reported to the IRS. (Please review with your accountant)			
7. SECA <u>above</u> the normal 7.65% offset			
TOTAL EFFECTIVE SALARY (total of 1,2,3,4,5,7)	\$48,509.31	\$49,479.49	\$ 54,600.00
8. Board of Pensions Dues (percentage calculated exclusive of moving expense): Pension (11%), Disability (1%) and Medical Coverage (25%) - Total (37) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post Retirement Dues - 12% 	\$17,948.44	\$18,307.41	20,202.00
9. Social Security Contribution (7.65% of Effective Salary)	\$3,710.96	\$3,785.18	4,176.90
10. Additional Group Plan Coverage Premiums			
11. Mileage Reimbursement (At current I.R.S. rate)			
12. Study Leave/Reimbursement (cumulative to 6 weeks plus \$3,000)	2 weeks +\$1,000.00	2 weeks +\$1,000.00	2 weeks +\$1,000.00
13. Vacation (accrued quarterly, but not cumulative across years without permission)	4 week-4 Sundays	4 weeks - 4 Sundays	4 weeks - 4 Sundays
14. Other Professional Expenses:			
Book Reimbursement			
Pastor's Professional Expense			
Vouchered Reimbursements			
Initial Moving Expenses (based upon revision of the tax code, moving expenses may be considered additional income by the IRS. Please check with your own accountant)			
TOTAL COST TO CONGREGATION	\$71,168.71	\$72,572.08	\$ 79,978.90

The Pastor and the congregation agree to the above terms and to abide by any policies of the Presbytery of Redstone regarding compensation, any form of leave (vacation, study, medical, etc.) and expenses.

Clerk _____ Pastor _____

Statement of Faith

Dawn R. Sherwood

1 I believe that God created heaven and earth. I believe that Christ and the Holy Spirit were with
2 the Creator in the beginning, and form the Trinity, the God-head.

3 I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and God Incarnate. I believe that Jesus was born
4 among the Jews to fulfil prophecy *and* to share in our suffering. I believe that Jesus Christ is the
5 Word (*logos*) of God. I also believe that Jesus Christ is the true light which enlightens everyone.
6 I believe the Creator sent Jesus Christ to draw us closer to Him. Through Christ there is grace
7 and truth – from his fullness, we have received forgiveness and reconciliation with God.

8 I believe Christ's crucifixion, death, and resurrection represent the death of death, the sacrifice
9 when we had none worthy to give, and finally the settling of a debt that we had no way of
10 repaying. Yet, through these actions we are closer to being in right and just relationship with
11 God, bringing us back to the original plan that God had for us. Through Christ, we are
12 transformed so that we look at the world in a way that God would look at us, seeing the good.
13 Christ's faith in us saves us from death, and our faith in Christ gives us the freedom to choose the
14 fruits of the Spirit rather than the temptations raised by the powers of evil.

15 I believe the Holy Spirit is the presence of God that lives within us and is the source of our faith.
16 Through the water of Baptism, we are also baptized by the Holy Spirit, being marked as Christ's
17 own. Awareness of the Spirit is also the awareness of the faith in Christ, the faith that unifies the
18 faith community. When a person is aware of the Spirit of Christ within the bread, the cup, and
19 the baptismal water, there is a joy that is experienced by the entire community that becomes
20 evident as the communion meal is shared and as a new believer is baptized. Both sacraments are
21 signs of our ongoing covenant with God.

22 I believe that Scripture is the living word inspired by God. It was written to a culture of a certain
23 time and place in such a way that it remains relevant in the present. I believe that we may
24 discern God's will through Scripture and through prayer with the help of the Holy Spirit.

25 I believe the church universal is the Body of Christ and Christ is the Head. As Paul taught in 1
26 Corinthians 12, each of us has been given a spiritual gift to contribute to the church in the same
27 way that each body part has its own function. In addition, each of us has been given grace
28 according to the measure of Christ's gift." (Eph. 4:7)

29 Although Christ claimed victory over sin and death, the battle is not over. We have seen the
30 Kingdom of God through Jesus Christ; however, it has not yet reached fruition. We await
31 Christ's return and the resolution to the new creation.

32 "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet come to believe." (John 20:29) This is the hope
33 and promise for us all. The Holy Spirit has put the truth in our hearts without our needing to see
34 concrete evidence. In gratitude for this gracious gift, we pass it on, sharing the love and joy of
35 our Lord and our God. Amen.



pine springs camp

FALL FAMILY CAMPGROUND HARVEST EDITION



September 18-20 * September 25-27

October 2-4 * October 23-25

COST: \$80 FOR AGES 9 AND OLDER

\$60 FOR AGES 8 AND UNDER

Come and grow!

A WAY TO GET AWAY TOGETHER AS A FAMILY



We are excited to be offering four more of the Family Camp (Ground) Harvest weekends. Our Summer Family Camp (Ground) Weekends were a huge success, and it was great hosting families.

Our Harvest Edition will include seasonal activities like hayrides, pumpkin carving, along with adventure activities, hiking, games and campfires. Join us as a family, invite another family from your neighborhood or church and celebrate fall safely in the beautiful Laurel Highlands!

This fall, families will be staying in Creekside Cabins and the Elijah House Retreat Center, which means we can host 8 families per weekend. Each family will have their own cabin and restroom facility. We look forward to having all of weekends filled. Availability is on a first come, first served basis so don't wait to register. Please go to our website www.pinesprings.org or call the camp office at 814-629-9834 for more information.



Redstone Presbytery's purchase of a subscription to *The Parish Paper* INCLUDES:

1. **Permission to provide copies to our staff and to the congregations within our jurisdiction** in any of the following ways: email, postal, newspaper, newsletter, meetings, training events, and our website.
2. **Permission for each congregation within our jurisdiction** to (a) photocopy or electronically distribute for local use as many copies as it needs, (b) post them on its website, and (c) quote sentences and paragraphs.

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CARE, LEADERSHIP, AND SELF-RENEWAL IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

When the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic on March 11, it ushered in a prolonged period of uncertainty. Since that day it has appeared that this crisis will be one that ebbs and flows, requiring flexibility, endurance, and no small amount of creativity. A few strategies may help church leaders flourish in uncertain times.

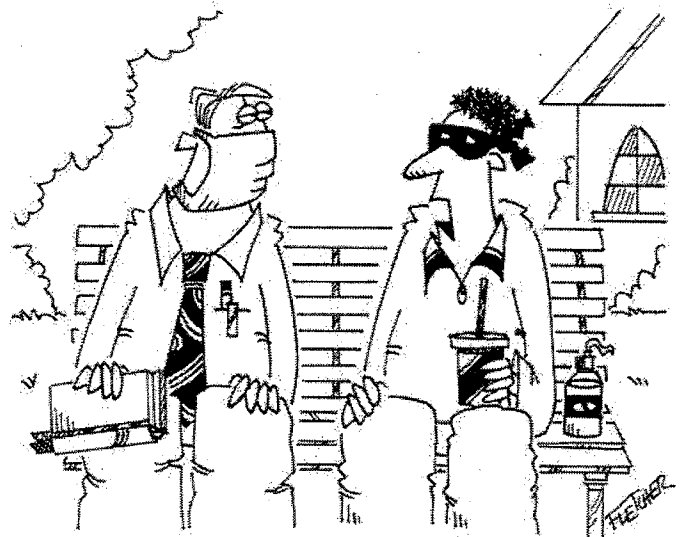
Focus on Caring and Leadership

As a caregiver, attend to personal crises as they emerge. Faced with uncertainty, church or community members may experience crises related to the spread of COVID-19, such as job loss, inability to travel to certain regions, or governmental orders to quarantine. It may evoke feelings of anxiety, helplessness, or despair. If the person is able to learn methods to reduce the anxiety, the crisis may abate, but if it increases, other coping strategies may be tried. If after trial and error, nothing works, and the person feels increasingly out of control, the pastor or a lay caregiver may get a call. Though the crisis may have been sparked by a definite event, it's important for the caregiver to focus attention less on what happened than on how it is being consciously or unconsciously interpreted.

Offer "psychological first aid." First, make psychological contact by showing respect, listening with genuine interest, and saying or doing something to express empathy with the person. Next, explore the dimensions of the problem (the immediate past and immediate future as it relates the current situation). This kind of exploration may be difficult for someone who feels overwhelmed by powerful emotions but focusing and going deeper may help the person gain some leverage over those emotions. Then discuss together the possible solutions, focusing on what to do next, not long-range answers. Finally, help the person take action. Determine whether the person can

take action independently or needs the caregiver to take action. Or could they do it together?¹

As a leader, attend to community crises by using conflict-management skills. Community crisis can be as challenging as personal distress, and how to handle it is often less clear. Conflict is dynamic, and if unmanaged it can quickly spiral out of control. Susan Carpenter and W.J.D. Kennedy, professional mediators, describe a "spiral of unmanaged conflict." It begins when community members encounter issues that make them anxious. Sides begin to appear as people form definite opinions and struggle to get accurate information about what's happening. Gradually, positions harden as people talk with those who agree with them rather than those with opposing views. Communication between the opposing sides stops as people become increasingly frustrated and angry and a



"BESIDES ALL THE STRESS AND ANXIETY,
I KEEP WONDERING HOW LONG
WE'LL HAVE TO WEAR THESE SILLY MASKS!"

sense of crisis emerges as residents lose hope in their ability to settle the dispute.

When faced with unmanaged conflict, the leader might be tempted by conventional methods such as the quick fix. The leader (a pastor, a community organizer, or a local politician) steps in, asks for the views of all parties, sifts through the material, weighs the trade-offs, and announces an immediate solution. The result is often that several parties to the dispute attack the solution. The leader is then forced to defend the solution or replace it with a new plan, which everyone then attacks, and the cycle continues. Simply examining the problem deeply is not enough. The analysis itself must include many different viewpoints or it will fail.

At this point, alternative conflict management methods prove useful. First, the leader plays the role of facilitator who brings parties together to help determine the best solution. Surprisingly, opening such a process gives the leader more, not less, control over the situation. Second, the leader focuses everyone's attention on addressing the problem itself rather than achieving victory over opponents. Third, all parties are encouraged to meet face-to-face to work out differences, including the people most affected by the decision, some of whom may have lacked a voice in the decision until now. Fourth, the leader invites all parties to work together to shape the process for making the final decision. Finally, decisions are reached by consensus so that the ultimate solution is one that everyone can accept. Though not all will be equally happy with the proposal, the group accepts that it is the best decision.²

Renew

Dealing with crises can be draining, and exhaustion can be a danger. In a book addressing preacher's burnout, Mike Graves offers advice for personal renewal.

- **Go for a walk**, perhaps on a route that is normally driven to work and pay attention to the trees along the way. Take a dog with you, or borrow one.
- **Take a nap**. Change your routine and go to a park or the beach to sleep in the sunshine. You can also read a book to children or grandchildren at naptime and then take a snooze as well.

- **Read a book**. A short story collection or poetry is perfect if pressed for time, but any new discovery after spending a half-day at that much-neglected bookstore in the neighborhood is a lovely way to renew your spirit.
- **Renew a friendship** by calling up a friend on the phone.
- **Play a game** of tennis or dominoes, or a board game, or "play hooky" and enjoy the day alone or with someone else.
- **Listen to music** via radio or streaming or compact disc, or dust off an old instrument and play it.
- **Explore movement** through yoga, the martial arts, swimming, or a bike ride.
- **Enjoy a meal** with family or friends, and do not neglect dessert, remembering that "stressed" spelled backwards is desserts.

Whatever the renewal plan, think of the days and weeks not as blocks of time dedicated either to work or play, but as a single continuum comparable to a Mobius strip, a single path with no border and no edge. Integrate work and play by finding time every day for play and refreshment and taking a playful approach to work whenever possible.³

Love Your Neighbor

Trying to be conscientious, leaders risk personal crisis as they deal with multiple challenges. The commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31, NRSV) suggests a better approach: care for the congregation and the community and the caregiver in equal measure. This way everyone may flourish.

1. David K. Switzer, *Pastoral Care Emergencies* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 36-48.

2. Susan L. Carpenter and W.J.D. Kennedy, *Managing Public Disputes: A Practical Guide for Government, Business, and Citizens' Groups* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 11-29.

3. Mike Graves, *The Fully Alive Preacher: Recovering from Homiletical Burnout* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 19-24.

HOSPITALITY: OFFERING A THIRD PLACE TO GATHER

The emergence of a novel coronavirus has led in some regions to measures such as social distancing guidelines and prohibitions against physical gathering. Whether meeting in person or online, church leaders can still plan with hospitality in mind. By exploring new models for gathering, paying close attention to relationships, and even redesigning physical space in some cases, the church can become stronger and more welcoming than ever.

What Is a Third Place?

For Ray Oldenburg, a sociologist, Americans have become too isolated, and “public life is populated with strangers more than ever before.” The stress of work life, including long commutes, has driven individuals to the privacy of home to relax and be entertained. What’s needed are more third places, beyond the home (first place) and work (second place), where relationships, shared experience, and belonging can offer renewal. In the past, the post office, the barber shop or beauty parlor, the tavern, and the drugstore lunch counter served this purpose.

Now people need places where they are encouraged to linger and talk with others, and where visitors are easily assimilated with the regulars.¹ In recent years, national franchises like Panera and Starbucks, as well as hotels, movie theaters, and fast food restaurants have responded to Oldenburg’s call by redesigning their businesses to offer a third place.

New Congregations Offer a Third Place

Beth Ann Estock and Paul Nixon describe several new models of the congregation that make informal gathering central. These include the **Simple Cell** (or house church) where people come together to do things weekly or monthly, such as watch a movie or study a book together. In the **Dinner Party**, groups share a meal, a few simple rituals, and conversation.

The **Community-Based Enterprise** brings people together through operating a business such as a coffeehouse church or bakery. Working can raise money to support the group, but primarily it serves as a gathering principle. The **Pilgrimage** draws groups together to faraway places such as the Iona community in Scotland, Israel, or Palestine. Likewise, in the **Same Time Next Year** model, church-based summer camps, yoga retreats, art immersions, or family camps become the occasional or annual destination for groups wanting to share their faith with each other. The **Community Center** is not a building, but a project or program developed after a series of meetings with neighbors, nonprofit organizations, and small businesses who identify common interests and pledge to collaborate.²



WE WANTED AN INFORMAL, SHARED EXPERIENCE
WHERE POTENTIAL MEMBERS WOULDN'T BE INTIMIDATED...
THIS MONTH'S BOOK IS, "THE CAT IN THE HAT".

Relationship First, Then Worship

Common to each of these models is the desire to build relationships with those who have little or no experience with the church. Informal gathering places offer the space to build a friendship with someone new and share stories of one's faith in a manner that highlights the give and take of a mutual relationship. This might include a mission trip serving the local community or a small group where everyone takes part in invigorating conversation. Contrary to popular belief, this relationship-building does not typically begin in a large public worship gathering on Sunday morning. If a new person comes to worship at all, this does not usually happen without a specific invitation (naming the date and time), and an offer to pick the person up. In most cases, the relationship with a trusted friend has already been developed well before the guest walks in the door.³

Hospitality at Worship Time

If a guest were to arrive with no prior connection to anyone in the congregation (a rare occurrence), what is the best-case scenario? Exterior signage makes the church easily identifiable from the road, and building entrances should be well-marked. A parking attendant helps the guest find a parking space, and a greeter says hello, offers a warm word ("Good to see you") and their name ("I'm -----"). If the person responds with their name, the greeter writes it down. It is important not to be too intrusive, however, so asking "What's your name?" is not recommended. If a system for recording names is in place, the guest can write down personal information on the attendance pad or a bulletin tear-off. Then, one person, designated the connector, gets to know the person and makes sure their needs are met, whether it's finding the nursery, locating a good seat, or sitting with the guest. During the meet-and-greet (which lasts no more than two minutes), this connector stays with the guest, and after the service introduces them to the pastor. By the end of the day, a gift has been delivered to the guest's door. Follow-up is critical to making the person feel welcome to attend again.⁴

Church Buildings Can Hold Third Places

Church buildings can be designed or renovated with third places in mind and designed for "zones of connection" which allow for a variety of styles of con-

necting. **Nooks** provide space on the fringe of the crowd where individuals can duck out for a private chat. **Clusters**, which can be chairs arranged to face one another, serve to break up large spaces into zones for smaller groups. **Edges**, which are neutral zones at the periphery of a large space highlighted by a change in design materials such as different flooring, ceiling, or seating, offer someone entering the room a vantage point to view what's going on. **Hot Spots** offer space to hold a quick conversation, and **Perches**, such as high-top tables with tall stools, or seating along the wall, are places to stay a while, hold a conversation, and watch what's happening in the room from afar. Through simple renovations, churches can increase the opportunities to gather, share experience, and build relationships.⁵

Hospitality Can Be Life Changing

Hospitality usually brings to mind the business of providing lodging, food, and drink. The word originally had to do with the treatment of guests (Latin, *hospes*). In fact, church has been in the hospitality business a long time, as attested by the story of Abraham and Sarah providing a meal to travelers in the heat of the day and receiving the divine promise that Sarah, despite her age, would give birth to a son (Gen. 18:1-15). In changing times, hospitality can be adapted to new forms, including the livestreaming of worship services. Whatever the format, when we offer a place for strangers and friends to gather, the effect can be life changing.

1. Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (Boston, MA: De Capo Press, 1999), xvi.

2. Beth Ann Estock and Paul Nixon, *Weird Church: Welcome to the Twenty-First Century* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2016), 84-156.

3. Bob Farr, Doug Anderson, and Kay Kotan, *Get Their Name: Grow Your Church by Building New Relationships* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), 1-25.

4. *Ibid.*, 83-91.

5. Derek DeGroot, *Creating Third Place Spaces at Church*. Aspen Group, undated. <https://info.aspengroup.com/creating-third-place-space-for-churches>

GETTING STARTED WITH LIVESTREAMING

Livestreaming an event, whether a worship service or Bible study, can seem like a daunting prospect. Simply explained, it's the process of sending and receiving video in real time over the internet. Like any process of this type, it can be explained in terms understandable to the non-expert or in the more precise terms of the technical deep dive. At the risk of oversimplifying, this article will describe in non-technical language the basics of the live-stream process, and the equipment required to get started.

How Does Livestreaming Work?

Think of livestreaming as a journey from sender to receiver with three parts: 1) capturing content, 2) encoding it, and 3) distributing it to the viewer over a stable internet connection. It begins with a camera and microphone, which is built into many smart phones, tablets, and laptop or desktop computers. The video and audio signals travel via ethernet cable or Wi-Fi to an encoder contained in a software program available for free or as a paid subscription, or a hardware device. Next the content is encoded, converting the raw video and audio to a format that can be streamed over the internet, and then distributed to the viewer via an open platform such as Facebook Live or YouTube Live or through a closed-platform service that requires a subscription and may restrict who can view it.

Capturing Content

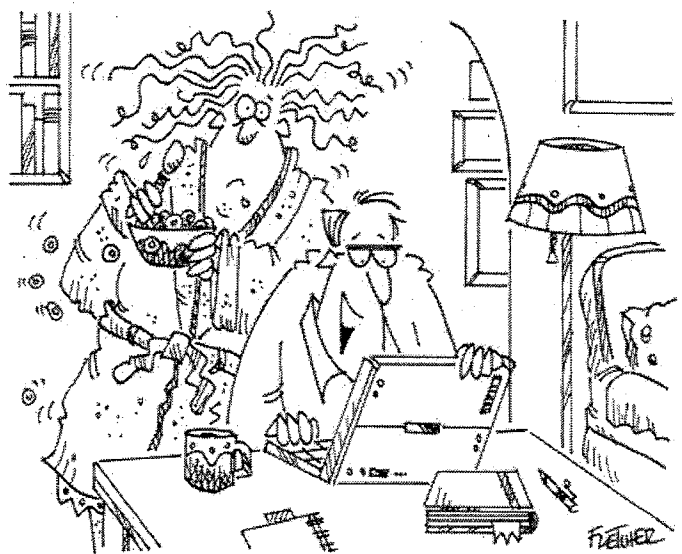
Built-In Camera

The easiest way to capture the video and audio for live-streaming is by using a smart phone, tablet, or laptop that has a built-in camera and microphone. Most people are familiar with hand holding a smart phone or using a selfie stick in order to shoot video, but for the purposes of livestreaming worship, more stability is needed. This can be attained by mounting the camera on a small tripod. Although the camera on most smart phones is quite good, the audio can sound tinny without an external microphone attached. Search the internet for tools

to adapt mobile devices for shooting video (search term: "smartphone video kit with tripod and microphone"). Additionally, laptops have poor quality audio that would benefit from the addition of an external microphone.

Stand-Alone Camera

Here several options are available priced low to high. At the low end is a dedicated livestream camera such as the Mevo Start Live Streaming Camera (about \$400). More costly is a professional video camcorder capable of livestreaming, with the least expensive models ranging between \$1,300 and \$2,000 for the Canon XA Series of cameras, with JVC offering JVC GY-HM250 4K UHD Streaming Camcorder for about \$1,700 and the JVC 4K UHD House Of Worship Streaming Camcorder Version for about \$2,300. Note: these camcorders require the purchase of a separate video capture device to feed the video signal to a laptop. A third option is the PTZ (or pan-tilt-zoom) camera, so called for its ability to pan left to right, tilt up and down, and zoom in from across the room. The



"...AND THANKS TO THE CAMERA AND MICROPHONE BUILT INTO MY COMPUTER, THE WHOLE CONGREGATION CAN SEE AND HEAR US RIGHT NOW!"

camera is operated by remote control, and some models allow the operator to dial in a number of preset positions, which allows for multiple camera shots with a single camera. The camera is small and can be mounted on walls, ceilings, or any number of discrete locations. The PTZOptics Gen 2 series costs between \$1,700 and \$1,800.

A Stable Internet Connection

Before video content can be sent, a stable internet connection is required. For this reason, upload speed is important. Anyone who streams movies may be familiar with download speed, but upload speed has to do with sending data, not receiving it. First, make sure the computer is plugged into an outlet, not using battery power, otherwise it may run at 50% or 25% of normal speed. Second, use an ethernet cable that is Category 5 (Cat 5) or higher to hardwire the connection to the modem. While Wi-Fi can be used, an ethernet cable enables a better speed and more consistent signal. Finally, do a speed test using a free online speed testing site such as speedtest.net, speedof.me, or testmy.net. Most consultants recommend an upload speed of 5 Mbps or greater.

Encoding

Encoding is converting raw video to a format that can be delivered over the internet. Most mobile devices have a built-in encoder, but laptop and desktop users will require encoding software. Download OBS Studio, a free, open source software program, or use subscription software such as Wirecast, vMix, or Livestream Studio. A moderately powerful computer, at least 8 GB RAM is required, and 16 GB is preferable. Most encoding software options are able to also perform live video mixing, which is switching between multiple cameras or microphones in the midst of a livestream event.

Distributing

The final step on the livestream journey is the video platform that delivers the content to the viewer, called a Content Delivery Network (CDN). Among open platforms, Facebook Live and YouTube Live are the most popular, though Twitter and Instagram have livestream function as well. For those who are undecided between YouTube and Facebook, a service called Restream (\$20 per month) allows streamers to send the signal to both platforms at once. Closed platforms, such as Vimeo Livestream, Dacast, and Streamingchurch.tv, are available by subscription and allow control over where and how the stream is presented.¹

What about Video Conferencing?

For smaller groups or for more interaction, video conferencing platforms such as Zoom, Skype, Facebook Rooms, or Google Meet offer another option. Zoom, the most popular service, offers a free account for hosting meetings of up to one hundred participants and forty minutes duration, with paid plans (\$15 and \$20 per month) allowing more participants and offering more features. Whether free or paid, most video conferencing platforms offer features such as screen sharing, chat, and whiteboard. Unlike livestreaming formats, video conferencing allows persons without computer access to dial in. However, a video conference is not public like Facebook or YouTube, which can be discovered by social media users who are not already church members. In contrast, an email invitation with a link is required to participate in a video conference worship service, though a Zoom or other video conference can be configured to be pushed to Facebook or YouTube.

Here to Stay

According to a recent survey, the average consumer watches about ninety minutes of online video content per day. Eighty percent would rather watch a livestream video about a business or organization than read a blog or social media post. They feel it's more engaging to watch something live than pre-recorded.² This data may motivate church leaders to go deeper, learn more, and livestream more events as opportunities permit.

Resources

- "How to Live Stream A Sunday Service," PTZOptics, video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vRFhC3jFyZ8>
- "How To Live Stream Video: A Beginner's Survival Guide," Ephan Video, <https://www.epiphan.com/blog/how-to-live-stream-for-beginners/>
- "Live Streaming Setup For Small Churches," Jake Gosselin, video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9TKsLQYagYA&t=39s>
- Paul William Richards, *Helping Your Church Live Stream*, Self-published. Available in hard copy on Amazon or as a free PDF download at <https://ptzoptics.com/church-book/Technologies for Worship magazine, Special Edition, Streaming Handbook, http://online.tfwm.com/>

1. For a comparison of streaming platforms, see "7 Best Platforms to Live Stream Your Church Service in 2020," Dacast, <https://www.dacast.com/blog/7-best-live-streaming-services-for-your-church/>

2. Amir Shahzeidi, "Top Ten Online Video Trends to Leverage in 2020 [Infographic]," January 2, 2020, *Digital Doughnut*, <https://www.digitaldoughnut.com/articles/2019/december/top-10-online-video-trends-to-leverage-in-2020>.

HOW TO FOSTER DEEP LISTENING AMID POLITICAL DIFFERENCE

Honest conversation about all matters, even politics, must be part and parcel of a Christian response to daily life, say Sarah Stewart Holland and Beth Silvers. Holland and Silvers came to this view after extensive dialogue over their own differing political views. Holland, a liberal, and Silvers, a conservative, knew each other as sorority sisters at Transylvania University in Kentucky, and later began having Facebook discussions after the 2016 presidential election. They now co-host a podcast called “Pantsuit Politics” in which they hold “grace-filled” discussions about politics, democracy, and values they hold dear.¹

What Can Churches Do?

Yet churches in our time confront a dilemma not faced by many previous generations: the divided nature of American culture. It affects how congregations order their life in worship, fellowship, study, and community outreach. Though church and state remain separate in American society, what happens in our divided society spills over into church life. How can churches and church leaders navigate the tricky waters of political difference without harming relationships in the process?

Hold a deliberative forum to explore options for churches engaging a divided society. Deliberation is a style of conversation that considers issues in depth in a group setting, employing careful listening to others for better understanding. “The Church’s Role in a Divided Society,” a guide developed by church leaders and the Kettering Foundation, outlines three options for churches with regard to political differences: 1) “the church as refuge,” which asserts that churches should focus more on spirituality and faith than social issues, 2) “the church as mediator,” which asserts that the church should actively engage the differences that people bring in order to gain a better understanding, and 3) “the church as prophetic

voice,” which holds that the church only lives out its mission by becoming an agent of change to improve society. Convene a group of church members to carefully explore the benefits and drawbacks of each option. The goal is not to change minds but to explore the value commitments of congregants in a way that deepens understanding.²

What if it is not possible to convene in person? One model developed by Kettering is centered around texting and online polling to forge consensus around difficult public issues. In this model, called Common Ground for Action, a moderator with a computer convenes a group in widely dispersed locations to deliberate through texting. Participants, anonymous to each other, exchange opinions throughout the event, and the moderator conducts online surveys before, during, and after the meeting, displaying results in graphic form in real time. More recently, Kettering has responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by



“AT THIS CHURCH, WE FOCUS ON SPIRITUALITY RATHER THAN SOCIAL ISSUES...SO, LET’S PRAY THAT GOD WOULD HEAL YOUR OBVIOUS CONFUSION ABOUT EQUAL RIGHTS, IMMIGRATION, AND GLOBAL WARMING.”

offering Zoom versions of the in-person deliberative forum, using texting and surveys for participants to state opinions about a topic and using Zoom to talk through the issues.³

Preach about a pressing social issue, invite small groups to explore the issue further, and then give a sermon in response to the dialogue. This “sermon-dialogue-sermon” model offers a “dialogical lens” for preaching and Scripture interpretation. The pastor begins by introducing an issue in the first sermon and, instead of taking a stand, explores the issue in its complexity, considering a wide range of voices. Later, small groups of diverse individuals engage the issue in more depth, brainstorming three approaches to the issue and then weighing the pros and cons of those approaches. The final sermon offers a “communal prophetic proclamation” that expresses the different perspectives that were explored in the group, the shared values that it revealed, and possible next steps the group could take to move forward on the issue.⁴ If it’s not possible to meet in person, hold discussions after the worship service via Zoom, using a feature called “Breakout Rooms” to break one large group into subgroups of three or four persons.

Offer the online course, *Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace: Guide to Civil Discourse for Groups*. This resource, released in 2020 by The Episcopal Church’s Office of Government Relations and its Department of Faith Formation, is available online for free. (The course is also available for individuals.) The five-part curriculum covers: civil discourse in context, tenets for civil discourse, values-based conversations, the complexities of policy, and sacred space for debate. The purpose of the course is to help anyone engage with others who hold a different view in a dialogue about the values that underlie these opinions. Each part utilizes three to six video lectures that are from five to seven minutes in length and are designed to support a fifty-minute class session.⁵

A Spiritual Imperative

The desire to assemble and debate are not only central to the American experience, they are integral to the Christian faith as well. As Holland and Silvers acknowledge, “love of the neighbor” implies not demonizing them, whether over tax policy or reproductive rights, and “turning the other cheek” implies

not using the community of likeminded individuals as a base to launch attacks on those who disagree. Likewise, being “the hands and feet of a loving creator” means not opting out of issues like roads and bridges, school curriculum, or war and peace. Agreement over how to structure community life cannot be had without conversation. In Holland and Silvers’ words, “Learning to have healthy conflict with each other over political challenges is of utmost importance; in fact, it is a spiritual imperative.”⁶

Other Resources

Judy Apps. 2019. *The Art of Conversation: Change Your Life with Confident Communication*. West Sussex, UK: Capstone.

The Listen First Project seeks to bridge social divisions “one conversation at a time” by partnering with a variety of businesses, schools, and other organizations to sponsor conversations that teach better listening. <http://www.listenfirstproject.org/>

Better Angels works to reduce polarization between conservative and liberal Americans and build alliances through Red/Blue workshops and ongoing partnerships between workshop graduates. <https://www.better-angels.org/>

Amanda Ripley, “The Least Politically Prejudiced Place in America,” *The Atlantic*, March 4, 2019, describes the upstate New York city of Watertown, centering on a longtime friendship between two Presbyterian women with differing political views. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/03/watertown-new-york-tops-scale-political-tolerance/582106/>

1. Sarah Stewart Holland and Beth Silvers, *I Think You’re Wrong (But I’m Listening): A Guide to Grace-Filled Political Conversations* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2019).

2. Resources available at Baylor University Public Deliberation Initiative, <https://www.baylor.edu/pdi/index.php?id=966987>.

3. “CGA and Zoom Technologies: Deliberation in the Era of COVID-19,” Maura Casey, June 6, 2020, Kettering Foundation, <https://www.kettering.org/blogs/cga-and-zoom>.

4. Leah D. Schade, *Preaching in the Purple Zone: Ministry in the Red-Blue Divide* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019).

5. <https://www.churchnext.tv/library/instruments-of-peace-a-guide-to-civil-discourse/109671/about/>.

6. Holland and Silvers, 2-6.