

&lt;&lt; Return to Report Menu

Year: 2020

View Report

1 of 1 Find | Next

## 2020 Presbytery Statistical Report

<b>Presbytery</b>	<b>Redstone</b>		
<b>Address</b>	1004 Mt Pleasant Rd Box #1147, Greensburg, PA 15601		
<b>Phone</b>	724-837-6737	<b>Fax</b>	724-837-4112
<b>Email</b>	<a href="mailto:secretary@redstonepresbytery.org">secretary@redstonepresbytery.org</a>		
<b>Web Site</b>	<a href="http://redstonepresbytery.org">redstonepresbytery.org</a>		
<b>Membership</b>			
Prior Active Members	9634	Adjusted membership	9599
<b>Gains</b>		<b>Losses</b>	
Certificate	38	Certificate	18
Youth Professions	22	Deaths	250
Professions & Reaffirmations	30	Deleted for any Other Reason	344
<b>Total Gains</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>Total Losses</b>	<b>612</b>
<b>Total Ending Active Members</b>	<b>9077</b>		
<b>Baptisms</b>			
Presented by Others	24	Average Weekly Worship Attendance	1881
At Confirmation	1	Female Members	3217
All Other	5	Friends of the Congregation	392
		Ruling Elders on Session	438
		Do you have Deacons? Yes / No	31 / 14
<b>Age Distribution of Active Members</b>		<b>People with Disabilities</b>	
25 & Under	999	Hearing impairment	210
26 - 40	1191	Sight impairment	106
41 - 55	1414	Mobility impairment	222
56 - 70	1966	Other impairment	276
Over 70	1872		
<b>Total Age Distribution</b>	<b>7442</b>		
<b>Christian Education</b>			
Birth - 3	55	Grade 7	45
Age 4	43	Grade 8	55
Kindergarten	49	Grade 9	43
Grade 1	44	Grade 10	39
Grade 2	48	Grade 11	29
Grade 3	44	Grade 12	24
Grade 4	51	Young Adults	121
Grade 5	58	Over 25	370
Grade 6	63	Teachers/Officers	204
		<b>Total Christian Education</b>	<b>1385</b>
<b>Racial Ethnic</b>			
Asian/Pacific Islander/South Asian	18	Native American/Alaska Native/Indigenous	4
Black/African American/African	15	White	7316
Middle Eastern/North African	1	Multiracial	19
Hispanic/Latino-a	17		
		<b>Total Racial Ethnic</b>	<b>7390</b>
<b>Financial Data</b>			
Annual Income	8,122,402	Mission Expenses	591,343
Annual Expenses	7,092,422	Personnel Expenses	4,136,090
		Facilities Expenses	1,456,355

*Presbytery of Redstone*  
**Income and Expense Statement**  
 GENERAL FUND 01, February 2021

	Current Period	Year to Date	Annual Budget	Annual Budget YTD Percentage	Prior Year
<b>INCOME</b>					
<b>CONTRIBUTION INCOME</b>					
<b>UNRESTRICTED</b>					
			\$325,000.00		
Church Comm/Lgr Church	20,724.41	36,076.07	0.00	0.00%	52,988.47
Pd to Prior Yr Commitment	0.00	420.00	0.00	0.00%	0.00
Individ Comm/Lgr Church	142.50	642.50	0.00	0.00%	276.00
Presbyterian Fdn Cont	85.70	85.70	0.00	0.00%	85.46
<b>Subtotal Unrestricted</b>	<b>20,952.61</b>	<b>37,224.27</b>	<b>325,000.00</b>	<b>11.45%</b>	<b>53,349.93</b>
<b>TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED</b>					
			45,000.00		
Pine Springs Camp	100.00	100.00	0.00	0.00%	0.00
Resource Center	294.03	294.03	0.00	0.00%	293.52
PDA - Directed	120.00	220.00	0.00	0.00%	1,510.00
Sudan Projects	2,537.68	3,182.68	0.00	0.00%	1,139.38
Ministry Student Aid	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00%	580.00
PMA - Directed	340.00	440.00	0.00	0.00%	1,170.00
Synod Mission	300.00	300.00	0.00	0.00%	300.00
I.P.L.F.	1,650.00	2,900.00	0.00	0.00%	0.00
<b>Subtotal Temporarily Restricted</b>	<b>5,341.71</b>	<b>7,436.71</b>	<b>45,000.00</b>	<b>16.53%</b>	<b>4,992.90</b>
<b>Subtotal Contribution Income</b>	<b>26,294.32</b>	<b>44,660.98</b>	<b>370,000.00</b>	<b>12.07%</b>	<b>58,342.83</b>
<b>INVESTMENT INCOME</b>					
Investment Income	0.00	0.00	51,000.00	0.00%	0.00
<b>INTEREST INCOME</b>					
Investment Interest	0.00	0.00	5,000.00	0.00%	0.00
<b>MISCELLANEOUS INCOME</b>					
			6,000.00		
Oil & Gas Lease	10.54	21.77	0.00	0.00%	21.30
Preaching/Consulting	225.00	225.00	0.00	0.00%	4,696.32
Miscellaneous Income	138.03	3,388.03	0.00	0.00%	113.96
Payroll Protection Loan	16,100.00	16,100.00	0.00	0.00%	0.00
<b>Subtotal Miscellaneous Income</b>	<b>16,473.57</b>	<b>19,734.80</b>	<b>6,000.00</b>	<b>328.91%</b>	<b>4,831.58</b>
<b>RELEASE FROM RESTRICTIONS</b>					
<b>TEMP RESTRICTED RELEASE</b>					
RFR SCLD	-263.20	-263.20	0.00	0.00%	0.00
RFR Enabling Min. Network	-2,000.00	-2,000.00	0.00	0.00%	0.00
RFR Resource Center	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00%	-77.25
RFR PDA - Directed	-120.00	-220.00	0.00	0.00%	-1,510.00
RFR Sudan Projects	-7,000.00	-7,000.00	0.00	0.00%	0.00
RFR PMA - Directed	-340.00	-440.00	0.00	0.00%	-1,170.00
RFR Synod Mission	-300.00	-300.00	0.00	0.00%	-300.00
RFR I.P.L.F.	0.00	-496.50	0.00	0.00%	0.00
<b>Subtotal Temp Restricted Release</b>	<b>-10,023.20</b>	<b>-10,719.70</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00%</b>	<b>-3,057.25</b>
<b>Subtotal Release From Restrictions</b>	<b>-10,023.20</b>	<b>-10,719.70</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00%</b>	<b>-3,057.25</b>
<b>RELEASED FROM RESTRICTION</b>					
Released from restriction	10,023.20	10,719.70	0.00	0.00%	3,057.25
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>42,767.89</b>	<b>64,395.78</b>	<b>432,000.00</b>	<b>14.91%</b>	<b>63,174.41</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>					
<b>MISSION PARTNERSHIPS</b>					

*Presbytery of Redstone*  
**Income and Expense Statement**  
GENERAL FUND 01, February 2021

03/15/2021 09:20 AM

Page: 2

	Current Period	Year to Date	Annual Budget	Annual Budget YTD Percentage	Prior Year
SUDAN	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$16,000.00	0.00%	\$0.00
Sudan - Restricted	7,000.00	7,000.00	0.00	0.00%	0.00
Subtotal Sudan	7,000.00	7,000.00	16,000.00	43.75%	0.00
PINE SPRINGS CAMP	0.00	0.00	38,000.00	0.00%	0.00
PSC - Shared	2,750.00	5,500.00	0.00	0.00%	5,500.00
Subtotal Pine Springs Camp	2,750.00	5,500.00	38,000.00	14.47%	5,500.00
SYNOD MISSION	0.00	0.00	1,000.00	0.00%	0.00
Synod - Restricted	300.00	300.00	0.00	0.00%	300.00
Subtotal Synod Mission	300.00	300.00	1,000.00	30.00%	300.00
PRES MISSION AGENCY	0.00	0.00	32,000.00	0.00%	0.00
PMA - Shared	1,600.00	3,200.00	0.00	0.00%	3,200.00
PMA - Restricted	340.00	440.00	0.00	0.00%	1,170.00
Subtotal Pres Mission Agency	1,940.00	3,640.00	32,000.00	11.38%	4,370.00
PRES DISASTER ASSISTANCE	0.00	0.00	3,000.00	0.00%	0.00
PDA - Restricted	120.00	220.00	0.00	0.00%	1,510.00
Subtotal Pres Disaster Assistance	120.00	220.00	3,000.00	7.33%	1,510.00
Subtotal Mission Partnerships	12,110.00	16,660.00	90,000.00	18.51%	11,680.00
<b>COMMITTEE EXPENSES</b>					
<b>COUNCIL</b>					
Council Expenses	0.00	0.00	1,500.00	0.00%	0.00
Presbytery Mtg Expense	62.04	62.04	900.00	6.89%	81.78
EQUIPPING LEADERSHIP	0.00	0.00	6,000.00	0.00%	0.00
Equip Leadership - Shared	0.00	750.00	0.00	0.00%	750.00
Subtotal Equipping Leadership	0.00	750.00	6,000.00	12.50%	750.00
ENGAGING CONGREGATIONS	0.00	0.00	6,000.00	0.00%	0.00
ENABLING MINISTRY NETWORK	0.00	0.00	6,000.00	0.00%	0.00
En Min Net - Restricted	2,000.00	2,000.00	0.00	0.00%	0.00
Subtotal Enabling Ministry Network	2,000.00	2,000.00	6,000.00	33.33%	0.00
Christian Associates	0.00	0.00	1,500.00	0.00%	0.00
Website	0.00	0.00	180.00	0.00%	0.00
COMMUNICATION EXPENSES			500.00		
CE - Shared	47.70	254.29	0.00	0.00%	180.09
Subtotal Communication Expenses	47.70	254.29	500.00	50.86%	180.09
Subtotal Council	2,109.74	3,066.33	22,580.00	13.58%	1,011.87
COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY					
Committee Expense	700.00	1,700.00	500.00	340.00%	0.00
COMMITTEE ON PREPARATION					
Committee Expense	0.00	0.00	1,000.00	0.00%	0.00
Subtotal Committee Expenses	2,809.74	4,766.33	24,080.00	19.79%	1,011.87
<b>OPERATIONS</b>					

*Presbytery of Redstone*  
**Income and Expense Statement**  
GENERAL FUND 01, February 2021

03/15/2021 09:20 AM

Page: 3

	Current Period	Year to Date	Annual Budget	Annual Budget YTD Percentage	Prior Year
<b>LEGAL AND AUDITING</b>					
Audit	0.00	0.00	6,000.00	0.00%	0.00
PCUSA Meetings	0.00	0.00	4,500.00	0.00%	0.00
Property/Comp. Insurance	0.00	951.50	3,656.00	26.03%	0.00
Worker's Compensation	0.00	425.00	821.00	51.77%	607.00
Telephone	248.91	497.82	3,800.00	13.10%	487.72
Postage	0.00	221.80	1,000.00	22.18%	330.00
Office Supplies	415.16	771.56	5,500.00	14.03%	1,469.03
<b>RESOURCE CENTER</b>			500.00		
RC - Restricted	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00%	77.25
<b>Subtotal Resource Center</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>500.00</b>	<b>0.00%</b>	<b>77.25</b>
<b>LEASES</b>					
Copier Lease	150.00	300.00	0.00	0.00%	450.00
<b>Subtotal Leases</b>	<b>150.00</b>	<b>300.00</b>	<b>3,000.00</b>	<b>10.00%</b>	<b>450.00</b>
<b>SERVICE FEES</b>					
Bank Fees	55.00	55.00	0.00	0.00%	2.00
Misc. Service Fees	7.50	7.50	0.00	0.00%	0.00
<b>Subtotal Service Fees</b>	<b>62.50</b>	<b>62.50</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00%</b>	<b>2.00</b>
<b>UTILITIES</b>					
Gas	529.18	938.15	2,000.00	46.91%	848.96
Electric	87.89	245.34	1,500.00	16.36%	297.17
Water	0.00	45.00	350.00	12.86%	0.00
Sewage	35.00	105.00	350.00	30.00%	0.00
Trash Collection	23.12	46.24	800.00	5.78%	37.62
<b>Subtotal Utilities</b>	<b>675.19</b>	<b>1,379.73</b>	<b>5,000.00</b>	<b>27.59%</b>	<b>1,183.75</b>
<b>MAINTENANCE</b>					
Custodial Services	0.00	40.62	1,500.00	2.71%	193.75
Yard Maintenance	0.00	0.00	1,000.00	0.00%	0.00
Parking Lot Maintenance	812.50	812.50	1,000.00	81.25%	0.00
Building Maintenance	548.88	548.88	1,000.00	54.89%	596.75
<b>Subtotal Maintenance</b>	<b>1,361.38</b>	<b>1,402.00</b>	<b>4,500.00</b>	<b>31.16%</b>	<b>790.50</b>
<b>Subtotal Operations</b>	<b>2,913.14</b>	<b>6,011.91</b>	<b>38,277.00</b>	<b>15.71%</b>	<b>5,397.25</b>
<b>PRESBYTERY STAFF</b>					
<b>EXECUTIVE STAFF</b>					
<b>EXECUTIVE PRESBYTER</b>					
EP Salary	5,865.84	11,731.68	70,390.00	16.67%	11,731.64
EP - Board of Pensions	1,426.70	2,853.40	18,500.00	15.42%	3,071.00
EP - Continuing Education	0.00	0.00	1,500.00	0.00%	0.00
EP - Travel	0.00	0.00	4,750.00	0.00%	0.00
EP Travel - Shared	215.04	215.04	0.00	0.00%	410.55
EP Travel - Restricted	263.20	263.20	0.00	0.00%	0.00
<b>Subtotal Ep - Travel</b>	<b>478.24</b>	<b>478.24</b>	<b>4,750.00</b>	<b>10.07%</b>	<b>410.55</b>
EP - Professional Expense	142.94	168.65	1,825.00	9.24%	210.05
EP - Deferred Comp / 403B	726.07	1,452.14	8,712.81	16.67%	1,452.12

*Presbytery of Redstone*  
**Income and Expense Statement**  
 GENERAL FUND 01, February 2021

03/15/2021 09:20 AM

Page: 4

	Current Period	Year to Date	Annual Budget	Annual Budget YTD Prior Year Percentage	
Subtotal Executive Presbyter	8,639.79	16,684.11	105,677.81	15.79%	16,875.36
<b>STATED CLERK</b>					
SC - Salary	0.00	0.00	1,300.00	0.00%	0.00
Subtotal Executive Staff	8,639.79	16,684.11	106,977.81	15.60%	16,875.36
<b>SUPPORT STAFF</b>					
<b>ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT</b>					
AA - Salary	2,397.12	4,794.24	28,765.24	16.67%	4,794.20
AA - Board of Pensions	455.23	2,570.94	23,500.00	10.94%	4,334.52
Subtotal Administrative Assistant	2,852.35	7,365.18	52,265.24	14.09%	9,128.72
<b>ASSISTANT CLERKS</b>					
Recording Clerk Salary	0.00	0.00	1,300.00	0.00%	0.00
Associate Clerk Salary	0.00	0.00	1,300.00	0.00%	0.00
Subtotal Assistant Clerks	0.00	0.00	2,600.00	0.00%	0.00
Subtotal Support Staff	2,852.35	7,365.18	54,865.24	13.42%	9,128.72
<b>EMPLOYER PAID FICA TAXES</b>					
Employer Paid FICA Taxes	632.12	1,264.24	7,585.38	16.67%	1,264.24
Subtotal Presbytery Staff	12,124.26	25,313.53	169,428.43	14.94%	27,268.32
<b>APPORTIONMENTS</b>					
GA Per Capita	7,208.34	14,416.68	86,500.00	16.67%	0.00
Synod Per Capita	1,958.34	3,916.68	23,500.00	16.67%	0.00
Subtotal Apportionments	9,166.68	18,333.36	110,000.00	16.67%	0.00
<b>RESTRICTED EXPENSE</b>					
I.P.L.F.	0.00	496.50	0.00	0.00%	0.00
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>39,123.82</b>	<b>71,581.63</b>	<b>431,785.43</b>	<b>16.58%</b>	<b>45,357.44</b>
<b>TRANSFER ACCOUNTS</b>					
<b>TRANSFER FROM OTHER FUNDS</b>					
Cash Transfers In					
CTI - New Covenant	\$0.00	\$2,624.29	\$0.00	0.00%	\$0.00
<b>TOTAL TRANSFERS</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>2,624.29</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00%</b>	<b>0.00</b>
<b>EXCESS INCOME\EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$3,644.07</b>	<b>-\$4,561.56</b>	<b>\$214.57</b>	<b>-2,125.91%</b>	<b>\$17,816.97</b>

**Redstone Presbytery**  
**Commitment to Larger Church**  
**February 28, 2021**

	2021 PLEDGE	TOTAL PAID	% Payup as of 2/28/2021	Unpaid Pledge Balance
Adah, Palmer	500.00	41.67	8%	458.33
Apollo, Poke Run	3,660.00	178.00	5%	3,482.00
Avonmore	1,000.00	233.00	23%	767.00
Belle Vernon, First	4,000.00	1,000.00	25%	3,000.00
Belle Vernon, Harmony	1,000.00		0%	1,000.00
Belle Vernon, Marion	2,150.00	500.00	23%	1,650.00
Belle Vernon, Rehoboth	6,000.00	500.00	8%	5,500.00
Bolivar	1,500.00	125.00	8%	1,375.00
Brownsville, Calvin	1,020.00		0%	1,020.00
Brownsville, Ft. Burd				-
Brownsville, Hopewell				-
Colver				-
Cresson	1,400.00	350.00		1,050.00
Dawson, Tyrone				-
Delmont				-
Derry	500.00		0%	500.00
Dunbar, First		1,275.00		(1,275.00)
Dunbar, Laurel Hill				-
Ebensburg	1,000.00		0%	1,000.00
Fairchance				-
Farmington	1,800.00	1,800.00	100%	-
Fayette City, First	202.50		0%	202.50
Fayette City, Little Redstone	2,000.00	2,000.00		-
Greensburg, First	30,000.00	5,000.00	17%	25,000.00
Greensburg, Maplewood	6,000.00	1,000.00	17%	5,000.00
Greensburg, Westminster	8,400.00	700.00	8%	7,700.00
Irwin, First	25,000.00	4,166.66	17%	20,833.34
Irwin, W. Hempfield	6,000.00		0%	6,000.00
Jeannette	2,400.00	400.00	17%	2,000.00
Johnstown, Bethany	1,620.00	405.00	25%	1,215.00
Johnstown, First	6,000.00	600.00	10%	5,400.00
Johnstown, Second	3,600.00	600.00	17%	3,000.00
Johnstown, Westmont				-
Lake Lynn	1,500.00		0%	1,500.00
Latrobe, Main St.	26,500.00	2,210.00	8%	24,290.00
Latrobe, Spring St.				-

**Redstone Presbytery**  
**Commitment to Larger Church**  
**February 28, 2021**

	2021 PLEDGE	TOTAL PAID	% Payup as of 2/28/2021	Unpaid Pledge Balance
Leisenring				-
Ligonier, Pleasant Grove	850.00		0%	850.00
Lower Burrell, Grace	10,000.00	1,666.66	17%	8,333.34
Lower Burrell, Puckety	9,000.00		0%	9,000.00
Masontown	500.00		0%	500.00
McClellandtown				-
Merrittstown, Dunlap's Ck.	300.00	300.00		-
Mt. Pleasant, Reunion	1,000.00	200.00	20%	800.00
Murrysville, First	8,000.00			8,000.00
Murrysville, Newlonsburg	23,418.00			23,418.00
Murrysville, Union		1,000.00		(1,000.00)
N. Alexandria, Community	5,000.00		0%	5,000.00
N. Alexandria, Congruity	6,000.00	890.00	15%	5,110.00
New Florence, Bethel	3,000.00	250.00	8%	2,750.00
New Florence, Trinity	3,825.00	318.75		3,506.25
New Kensington	5,500.00	878.33	16%	4,621.67
New Salem	3,000.00		0%	3,000.00
N. Huntingdon, New Hope	5,400.00	450.00	8%	4,950.00
Patton	4,208.00			4,208.00
Revloc	1,500.00	125.00	8%	1,375.00
Scottdale	500.00	60.00	12%	440.00
Smithfield, Grace Chapel	750.00		0%	750.00
Smock, Pleasant View	10,000.00		0%	10,000.00
Trafford, Level Green	3,960.00	5,080.50	128%	(1,120.50)
Uniontown, Tent	340.00	340.00	100%	-
Uniontown, Third				-
Uniontown, Trinity	7,000.00	1,432.50		5,567.50
Vanderbilt, E. Liberty	1,000.00			1,000.00
West Newton, Sewickley				-
W. Newton, Sewickley UP				-
West Newton, United				-
<b>Totals</b>	<b>258,803.50</b>	<b>36,076.07</b>		<b>222,727.43</b>

## PASTOR GETAWAY DAY.....

### GETAWAY DAY

Leave it behind for a day....

- Leave the Zoom calls behind
- Leave the social isolation keeping you home
- Leave behind the "Groundhog day" cycle...different day, same things
- Leave your cell phone in your car

AND JOIN US FOR  
GETAWAY DAY....  
A DAY AT PINE  
SPRINGS CAMP

### A DAY OF RESPITE, REFLECTION, AND RENEWAL....

- Just for pastors
- Opportunities for structured or spontaneous fun
- Enjoying the outdoors
- Fellowship with colleagues in a safe way
- All day Campfire (and s'mores)
- Lunch at the Chrysalis outdoor tent
- Labyrinth and Scripture nature walk

### WHAT: A DAY OF FUN AND RELAXATION

**WHEN: APRIL 5; 10:00 a.m.—4:00 p.m.** (come early, stay late); Lunch provided

**WHERE: PINE SPRINGS CAMP....**Jennerstown, PA  
(While we be making outdoor use of the facility, there will be indoor locations for restrooms/other needs and/or inclement weather.)

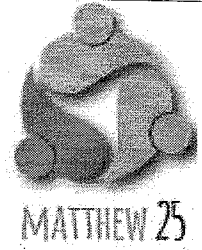
**WHO: Any Pastor** (TE, CP, etc.) in Redstone and surrounding presbyteries

### WHY: BECAUSE WE ALL NEED IT.

Not only the normal fatigue of church leadership during liturgical seasons(Lent), but exacerbated by the amount of energy and effort during this pandemic season (turning into the Covid era), we need a break... It's a break not just from the routine, but a break from the "normal" that has become ours....We need a renewed normal....Sometimes, that only happens by stepping away from everything (even if it is only for a day)

**NO COST OR REGISTRATION BUT LET US KNOW YOU ARE COMING IF YOU ARE ABLE AT THE PRESBYTERY OFFICE.**

## Frequently Asked Questions



### How did the Matthew 25 vision come about?

The 222<sup>nd</sup> and the 223<sup>rd</sup> 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](http://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/](http://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](http://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 (USA) 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](http://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 the 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 antiracism 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 (USA) 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.

## **Six surprises about Biblical spirituality**

by Jim Farrer for the Healing Prayer Ministry Network

Spirituality is in vogue today. According to one survey 82 percent of Americans report that they want to become more spiritual. However, the term spirituality lacks precise definition.

In current society religion is often seen as living by the rules of an outdated system. In contrast being spiritual relates to having the freedom to search anywhere and come up with one's own mix of ideas.

### **1. The Bible prefers other words**

Eugene H. Peterson in *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places* (p. 40) says that the main Old Testament phrase for living appropriately before the God of the Bible is "the fear-of-the-LORD" which occurs at least 138 times. Psalm 24:6 calls our response "seeking God's face."

Surprisingly in the Bible much of responding to God is described in ordinary ways. Abraham is to "walk before God." (Genesis 17:1) Young Samuel is called upon to listen. In the Beatitudes we are to "hunger and thirst for God." Mary of Bethany sits at Jesus' feet. In Matthew 11:29 the apprentices are to learn from Jesus and find rest. In I Thessalonians 3:8 we are to "stand firm in the Lord."

### **2. Contract or covenant**

Much of spirituality within the church, other religions and the New Age movement is perceived as a contract: If I do \_\_\_\_\_, then God/the gods will do \_\_\_\_\_. In Islam one only needs to do four things regularly. Also, if time and money permit one can go on a pilgrimage to Mecca.

When pagan witches cast a particular spell they expect a certain spirit or power to come and carry out that wish or task. Unfortunately, Christians, as well, can fall into the belief that salvation depends more on their actions than what God in Christ has already accomplished.

The Biblical God is a covenant god. In this covenant: Because God already accomplished salvation; therefore, I/we receive the gift and respond with thanks and a changed life. In Ezekiel 36, one might circle all the "I" phrases spelling out what God does on behalf of his chosen people. In Ezekiel 37:26f God declares: "I will be their God and they shall be my people." Ephesians 1:4 reads: "... he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world..." Titus 3:5 proclaims: "He saved us not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to His mercy."

If at least 51 percent of our salvation is not accomplished by God in Christ, then we are living by religiosity and works righteousness and not by God's gracious gift.

### **3. Keeping it simple**

While many perceive that the Bible is full of confusing and complicated "dos and don'ts" careful comparisons show quite the opposite. The PBS series *The Long Search* which explored religious experiences around the world revealed that in Hinduism there are 330 million or more gods or facets of gods from which to choose..

When I heard that Shirley MacClaine received information from a 35 thousand-year-old spirit, I was taken aback. Then I realized that even by NASA's current scientific "guesstimates" our Creator God is

13+ billion years old. Too bad Shirley deals with such an inexperienced spirit and in fact an often inept one.

G.K. Chesterton commented that when people choose not to believe in (the true) God they do not believe in nothing but are capable of believing in anything. Ephesians 4:4 reminds us that the God of the Bible makes spirituality simple. There is one body, one spirit, one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all.

#### **4. Spiritual high**

Many New Agers are on a frantic search for the real God. Even popular Professor Andrew Weil of the University of Arizona College of Medicine snorts the secretions of a special toad from the Sonoran Desert in order to get an hallucinogenic high. The Bible teaches us about the Most High God, (Genesis 14:19) the Holy One who deems to be in our midst. (Hosea 11:9) This God continues to search for us and is breaking through to people of many religions in their dreams and visions.

When St. Brendan was sent from the Holy Isle of Iona to evangelize the Pictish leader, King Brude asked: "If I commit to the Gospel of Jesus what shall I discover?" Brendan responded: "You will discover wonder upon wonder and every wonder true."

Today church members report that their real thrills come when someone new commits to Christ, when lives are turned right side up and when they observe demons cringe and go to the feet of Jesus.

#### **5. Spirit, Bible and church community**

Over the course of church history some enthusiasts have gone overboard by listening to what they determined was the voice of the Spirit in their heads. The genius of the 16<sup>th</sup> century reformers such as Luther and Calvin was to check what the spirit seemed to be doing with the Holy Scriptures and with the Church of Jesus Christ through the ages.

#### **6. Poor in spirit**

But rather than the constant yearning for a psychedelic or spiritual high, Jesus says: "Blessed are the poor in spirit." William Barclay translates the word "poor" as the need of the destitute with their only resources the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. What we are given is a joy that is not quenched even in the dark valleys of life and death.

Lesslie Newbigin in *The Good Shepherd* (p. 140) reminds us: "The church is not an organization of spiritual giants. It is broken people who want to or can lead others to Christ's cross."

Christian spirituality can be summed up in the words of the hymn *Rock of Ages*: "Simply to Christ's cross I cling."





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## HOW CAN WE BUILD TRUST IN A VACCINE?

The development of a vaccine for the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 has led to hope that the global health crisis will soon be over. How soon may depend on willingness to receive a vaccine, and a recent survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation reveals that roughly one quarter (27%) of Americans say they “probably” or “definitely” would not get the vaccine. “Vaccine hesitancy” is highest among Republicans, rural residents, and Black adults.

### Reasons for Distrust

According to Kaiser, among those who are skeptical of the vaccine, the main reasons are concern about possible side effects (59% offer this as a major reason), distrust of the government’s ability to ensure safety (55%), worries that the vaccine is too new (53%), and the role of politics in the development of the vaccine (51%). About half of Black adults do not trust vaccines in general (47%) or are worried about getting COVID-19 from the vaccine (50%).<sup>1</sup>

### Historical Context

The development of new vaccines has historically engendered mistrust. In the past two decades, an anti-vaccination movement emerged after a 1998 study falsely concluded that vaccines cause autism. Though the study was retracted in 2010, it gave life to a movement. The advent of social media has encouraged the spread of misinformation (untrue information that is passed along inadvertently) and disinformation (organized campaigns to intentionally spread falsehoods). For Black communities, the memory of the 1932 Tuskegee Experiment—a study of the effects of syphilis performed mostly on poor, illiterate sharecroppers and run by the US Public Health Service—continues to cause outrage and distrust in public health efforts after it became known that researchers knew that penicillin effectively treated the disease, withheld that information, and followed the men for forty years.

### The Case for Vaccination

Vaccines are an important tool in fighting preventable diseases of all kinds, not just COVID-19. Skipping vaccines can leave a person vulnerable to preventable diseases like shingles, pneumococcal disease, influenza, and HPV and hepatitis B (both leading causes of cancer). Infants and the elderly are put at risk and work days lost due to illness can hurt the economy. Vaccines are one of the safest products in medicine because governments monitor safety after a new vaccine is licensed for use. The US has the best post-licensure surveillance system, according to the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases.<sup>2</sup>

### How to Take Action

**Counter Disinformation on Social Media.** Stronger (www.stronger.org), a “national campaign on behalf of science, medicine, and vaccines,” recommends the following actions to stop the spread of misinformation



“I’M SURE SEEING ME GET VACCINATED  
WILL CONVINCING MY HUSBAND TO OVERCOME HIS FEARS...  
ONCE YOUR EXPERT MEDICAL TEAM REVIVES HIM.”

in social media. 1) Block, ban, or hide posts from your feed. By limiting what you see, you are also stopping others who are linked to you from seeing this information. 2) Report it to the platform. This helps social media sites to alter their algorithms so that false information is not spread. 3) Comment to warn others. Even doing the minimal, such as commenting “not true” next to misinformation influences how readers interpret the message, according to research.

**Provide a Model for Others.** When trying to figure what to do, most people look to peers—friends, co-workers, and family—for guidance. In a famous study, Robert Cialdini, a marketing professor, experimented with methods to get people to conserve energy. His team went door to door in a San Diego suburb, placing hangers on doorknobs with messages about energy conservation. They tried four messages: 1) conserving energy saves money, 2) conserving energy can save the earth’s resources, 3) conserving energy is the socially responsible thing to do, and 4) the majority of your neighbors conserve energy on a regular basis. Only the last message had a discernable effect. Peer pressure works.<sup>3</sup> This suggests that seeing others get vaccinated may convince those who are undecided to overcome their doubts.

**Listen for Understanding.** Heidi Larson, Director of The Vaccine Confidence Project, believes that people are too quick to jump to conclusions about those who are reluctant to be vaccinated. Trained as an anthropologist, she has spent years studying vaccine misinformation in various parts of the world. When having a conversation with someone who is hesitant about getting a vaccine, Larson suggests listening even if you don’t agree with them. “I think that one of the reasons that I see that the anti- and questioning and skeptical voices have gotten louder is they feel like they’ve been shut down when they tried to express a concern or have their view. . . . I always try to find some point where we can agree. Find some common ground.”<sup>4</sup>

**Offer the Church Building for Vaccine Distribution.** Hospitals and medical clinics can seem remote and inaccessible to the vaccine reluctant. Church buildings may feel safer and more familiar, especially if they are already used as the site of community meetings. Even better would be a church with a program for vulnerable or underserved populations. For example, WIC clinics, federally qualified health centers, STD clinics, or substance use treatment centers. Vaccine

services could be provided to those who participate in the program.

**Host a Meeting to Gather Information.** A congregation that values its community will make a special effort to engage with neighbors, listening for what matters most in their lives. In light of a new vaccine, what hopes and concerns are raised? Host a listening session (in-person with social distancing or online) and be intentional about inviting representatives of every demographic. This has the potential to launch new relationships, renew trust in the church, and better understand what community members are thinking.

### **An Orthodox Priest Goes into the Field**

In late 2020, Father Paul Abernathy of St. Moses the Black Orthodox Church in Pittsburgh led community health deputies to mobilize Black adults to be part of clinical trials for the coronavirus vaccine. Volunteers asked, “Would you do this? If not, why not?” One volunteer explained to a skeptical woman that the trials were already in Phase Three and therefore less risky than previous phases, and offered to bring her the results of Phases 1-2 to ease her concerns. After the first week in the field, minority enrollment had gone up from 3% to 8%.<sup>5</sup>

### **More Than Facts Are Required**

Dealing effectively with skepticism over vaccination requires more than facts. Science matters, but so do relationships. Whether in conversation over social media or face to face, listening with respect and encouraging an honest exchange of views can go a long way toward building understanding of our neighbors, and it may even change a few minds along the way.

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1. Liz Hamel, Ashley Kirzinger, Cailey Muñana, and Mollyann Brodie, “KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor: December 2020,” Dec. 15, 2020, <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/report/kff-covid-19-vaccine-monitor-december-2020/>

2. Ten Reasons to Get Vaccinated, National Foundation for Infectious Diseases, <https://www.nfid.org/immunization/10-reasons-to-get-vaccinated>. Accessed December 17, 2020.

3. “Peer Pressure Best Motivator When it Comes to Energy Saving, Psychologists Tell House Panel,” <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2007/09/peerpressure>. Accessed December 17, 2020.

4. Christianna Silva, “A COVID-19 Vaccine Has Come Quick, But Expert Says That’s No Reason To Fear It,” *All Things Considered*, November 30, 2020.

5. “A Pastor’s Plight to Address Vaccine Skepticism in Black Communities,” *On the Media*, WYNC Studios, December 4, 2020.

## READINESS IS THE KEY TO CONGREGATIONAL CHANGE

These are difficult days for the church, but also days of real opportunity. The trends are alarming. According to a recent Gallup Poll, 50% of Americans were church members in 2019, which is down from 70% in 1999.<sup>1</sup> Of the generations alive today, the younger the group, the less likely it is that a person is involved with a church. For most of us, being involved in church life has meant dealing with a declining number of active members, decreasing involvement by those who do attend, a shrinking or perhaps disappearing Sunday School, disappearing youth ministries, infighting within denominations, and struggling to navigate the pitfalls of downsizing our church staff and programming.

Church leaders seeking to change the congregation have been involved in efforts to identify our core values, define our mission, clarify our vision, lay out a strategic plan, and/or create a discipleship system. We hoped that having these necessary ingredients in place would lead us back to the glory of the growth years of our church. But often, all that good intention and hard work has not produced the fruit of our dreams.

### Why Do Revitalization Efforts Fail?

Many things can contribute to the ineffectiveness of our revitalization efforts. Some of these include:

- Unresolved conflict in the church can make forward progress impossible.
- Rushing the improvement efforts and involving too few people can minimize the sense of ownership and scuttle the development process.
- Creating a vague vision that does not delineate specific goals can make planning ineffective.
- Identifying a mission that does not resonate with the real values of the congregation yields a lukewarm response.

- Focusing spiritual growth programming only on the young leads to fading commitment in the adult leadership.

### Readiness Must Be First

But there is a logically prior requirement if we are to make progress. We must be ready to change. “Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.” (Matt 9:17)<sup>2</sup> It is most often our inability to let go of the past that has blocked our efforts. Churches must continually change if they are to keep pace with an ever-evolving cultural setting.



“SO FAR, FIVE OF OUR PREVIOUS PASTORS  
AGREE WITH YOU ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE  
OF LETTING GO OF THE PAST.”

But people, generally speaking, do not like change, and institutions are more resistant to change than individuals. Institutions are designed to preserve themselves. But when the desired outcomes change, the system needs to change too; form follows function. We must organize in whatever way best fits what we are trying to accomplish.

This is obvious, but it is not easy. In church systems, as in our individual lives, a kind of inertia sets in over time. We fall into patterns of behavior that become automatic and comfortable. Edwin H. Friedman refers to this condition as “homeostasis” and defines it as “the tendency of any set of relationships to strive perpetually, in self-corrective ways, to preserve the organizing principles of its existence.”<sup>3</sup> The homeostasis is familiar and seems safe, but change feels risky. When change is needed, our comfort is disrupted. It forces us to let go of habits that are ingrained in us. It means the hard work of learning how to be in this changing world in a different way.

We often make the mistake of imposing change on churches that are not yet ready for it. The result is twofold: the change is never successfully implemented, and many people become disgruntled in the process. Being ready for change is necessary to realizing the vision to which God calls us. Raymond Schulte, Executive Director of The Center for Parish Development, describes change readiness this way: “Readiness is that moment when congregation leaders become willing to expose themselves to learning something new. It is willingness to take a risk, to confess that a gap exists between the way things are and what they believe is God’s vision for the church; it is receptivity to the movement of the Spirit.”

We are ready to accept the sacrifices we must make to change when we see that the current situation is not viable. We need to really feel the urgency of our plight. We need to be shaken awake to the fact that our current reality requires something of us.

### **Pandemic as Wakeup Call**

These days of trial in the pandemic may be just the wakeup call we need. The requirements of these days have forced us to be the church in new and different ways as it seeks to address challenges such as grief, a need for financial support, a heightened need for community, and a hunger for healing and reconciliation.

And with congregations already loosed from the grip of past ways of being, we are in a good position to address those needs. The pandemic has caused us to communicate remotely and this has been a blessing. We are more flexible in our worship. We are more efficient in the use of our meeting time. The most reticent media users have been moved to participate and have experienced the convenience of a variety of communication venues. It is easier for us now to share our faith and our care and concern with people we might not have otherwise reached.

This is the time; this is the moment now, to do the hard work of discernment, planning, and implementing that will reach our hurting nation with the love and care of the gospel of Christ. We are more ready for change than we were a year ago. The felt needs of our citizenry are clearly in our view. Now is the ideal time to reach out as our churches and our world find the way to a new homeostasis.

So get to work. Make clear the values of the faith, define a mission of reaching out with love and acceptance for all, clarify a vision of a grace-filled community, create a plan in line with your mission and vision and launch out in faith. Perhaps you were created for a time such as this!

**THE REVEREND LAUREN W. SWANSON** is a United Methodist pastor and former Director of Congregational Development for the North Central New York Conference.

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1. Jeffrey M. Jones, “U.S. Church Membership Down Sharply in Past Two Decades,” <https://news.gallup.com/poll/248837/church-membership-down-sharply-past-two-decades.aspx>, April 18, 2019.

2. The Scripture quotations contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

3. Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1985), 23.