

MATTHEW 25 GATHERING in BLACKHAWK

July 14, 2020 RECAP

SOME HIGHLIGHTS

First articulated as an Overture to General Assembly in 2016, the submitting (and concurring) Presbyteries were responding to a series of shifts in awareness and despair following some events in the news including the Ferguson, MO shooting of Michael Brown and the Charleston Emanuel AME massacre. It was recognized that many churches are already engaged in Matthew 25 “work” as outlined in Jesus’ Parable of the Judgement of the Nations, but the Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA) felt it was time to unify our efforts under a common banner.

Chris Roseland (chris.roseland@pcusa.org), our PMA guest presenter, likened the new Matthew 25 initiative to a popular ‘stadium WAVE’ – where the response and participation starts small and grows and grows until the entire stadium acts as one organism of waving bodies and hands.

The unifying elements of Matthew 25 are described as three areas of focus: 1) eradication of systemic poverty, 2) dismantling structural racism, and 3) building congregational vitality. Congregations and mid-councils are asked to identify one or more areas to commit their efforts to reflect their self-identification as a Matthew 25 church. As PMA Director Rev. Diane Moffett has said: The Matthew 25 work will require Presbyterians to use their extremities: “We must put feet to faith, hands to hope and legs to love.”

Matthew 25 pages on the PCUSA website (<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/matthew-25/>) include a plethora of resources both general and specific in each of the three areas including bible studies, books and media recommendations, worship helps and much more. Following the murder last May of George Floyd in Minneapolis, a Racial Justice Resource page was added (<https://www.pcusa.org/racial-justice-resources/>). Updated regularly, it offers additional resources for the racism focus.

A key component of your commitment to Matthew 25’s vision is building momentum through the sharing of stories and the inspiration they provide. As of mid-June, 500 congregations across the PCUSA have now signed up – 9 in Blackhawk. The Presbyterian News Agency is actively seeking and publishing these stories (and the Blackhawk is seeking to do this as well). These stories, and the method to share them, are with the other M25 resources.

SHARING IDEAS / EXPRESSING CONCERN / ASKING QUESTIONS

- Use the “[7 Marks of a Vital Congregation](#)” as worship focus/discussion starter at each session meeting
- Begin with a focus on Congregational vitality – check your congregations ‘vitals’ – do you have a pulse for mission? It may be easier to tackle racism and poverty after starting there.
- Look to join with outside community organizations for ways to engage in justice activism
- Connect with local congregations of color – ask to join their bible study to listen and learn

- While few think of themselves as racist, most have biases and prejudices that need to be examined and addressed. Racism = Prejudice + Power.
- In beginning to address structural racism many must be convinced to pay attention. Diane Moffett (and Chris Roseland) use this metaphor: “If one fish rolls up on the shore you say, ‘What’s wrong with the fish?’ If a school of fish shows up on the shore, you ask, ‘What is wrong with the water?’”
- How to convince all-white, congregations in mostly white communities that they should care about racism and/or examine their own ideals?
- Start with a book study.
- Not a book-type congregation? Choose a movie, TV series to watch together and discuss. The M25 bible studies (with focused discussions) are also a good starting point.
- How to convince all-white, rural/small town, upper to middle class, congregations that they should care about poverty?
- Plot a tour through your town, city, or county highlighting areas of poverty. Ask people to take the tour. Gather to discuss afterwards – what did you notice? Poverty doesn’t only exist in cities. Gather statistics.
- Invite representatives from local school districts, county health departments, social service agencies to present insights into the poverty that exists among us, but we may fail to see.
- Jon Phillips, Elgin Interim Pastor and previously of Chicago Presbytery has offered to share his experience with anti-racism work as a part of the two task forces that birthed their Commission on Anti-Racism and Equity
- A pastor admitted that they weren’t always prompt with proposing initiatives (like Matthew 25) to their congregations – for a variety of very legitimate reasons. If your church has not yet signed up, don’t assume there isn’t interest in either pastor or members. Make the first move!
- Don’t shy away from tough conversations. A pastor new to their congregation (in an interim capacity) felt bold to address some of the hot issues surrounding racism and white privilege and was congratulated for these efforts – perhaps people are ready to hear this from their leaders.
- Start small with anti-poverty efforts. Sterling First began several years ago by asking a local school nurse: “What do you need?” The answer, granola bars for hungry kids, led to filling that need and eventually to their successful “Buddy Bag” program.

Every congregation wants to continue to exist, to thrive in their own context. Eric Heinekamp likes to think of these three Matthew 25 focus areas as legs to a three-legged stool. Each is equally needed to support the other and by (perhaps eventually) addressing each of the three areas, not only will the congregation thrive in their community, but their neighbors and community will benefit from, and take notice of, their efforts.

At this point in the conversation, our facilitator, Laurie Walker, polled participants asking them to vote for which one (only one) of the three areas of focus in M25 they felt most compelled to address. The results: Anti-Poverty/2, Congregational Vitality/13, Anti-Racism/25. At a minimum, there is significant interest in Blackhawk to zero-in on anti-racism efforts. Therefore, another Blackhawk Presbytery M25 Zoom gathering is planned for August 11 at 10:00 am. Watch for the invitation.

In addition, after the first all-PCUSA online Matthew 25 gathering was held in June with great participation and feedback, another is planned. The next online Matthew 25 event is scheduled for July 29 at 1 p.m. (CDT). Mark your calendars today and [find more information here](#).

THE JULY 14 VIDEO RECORDING:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/ZNollza02FIG5XB0lrHYYQBOZy0eaa803UcqfVeyxyvDJZKoXMzhvihQXyYNSov?startTime=1594738927000>

If it asks for a password, use: 3o%D^+U0

RESOURCES RECOMMENDED BY PARTICIPANTS (from Chat and Conversation)

Waking Up White – churchwide book study, racism selection by 2016 Co-Moderators

Always With Us – churchwide book study, poverty selection by 2016 Co-Moderators

Neighborhood Church - churchwide book study, church vitality selection by 2018 Co-Moderators

Anxious to Talk About It - recommended by Christina Berry, a good starting point for people who don't think racism is a problem, or cannot relate

Good White Racist? By Kerry Connelly – recommended by several

White Fragility by Robin Diangelo - recommended by Matt Robinson

A good read for History is "A People's History of the United States" by Howard Zinn - recommended by Matt Robinson

From Dale T Evans, 25, Joliet Westminster: Some resources that may be helpful on a multi-faceted approach for the local congregation in which to delve further:

- 1) Stewardship Kaleidoscope 2020
- 2) Presbyterian Foundation - Church Financial Leadership
- 3) Tony Morgan [Seven Strategic Shifts Church Leaders Must Make Now](#) from the Unstuck Group & Horizons Stewardship with Joe Park

A Few Red Drops - The Chicago Race Riot of 1919 by Claire Hatfield; Becoming by Michelle Obama; The Warmth Other Suns- The Epic Story of America's Great Migration by Isabel Wilkerson; Frederick Douglas - Prophet of Freedom by David W. Blight. Are all excellent reads - From Dale T Evans

Henry Louis Gates Jr....[4-part TV series documentary: "Reconstruction"](#)

Also the documentary... ["And Still I Rise"](#)

Movies: "Just Mercy" or "13th" (about the thirteenth amendment)

The New Jim Crow is also an eye-opening book – recommended by Susan Krause