

“REALIZING OUR CALLS” RETREAT

Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, many of our congregational leaders participated in a retreat via ZOOM on January 16. It was coordinated by the Called to Life! Core Team (Pastor Lawrence, Pastor Marc, John Bailer, Pat Gifford) to review the progress made with our congregational calls and explore commitment for 2021.

Three videos were recorded and provided as preparation for the retreat; “How Did We Get Here” by Pat Gifford, “Eradicating Systemic Poverty” by Anne Bailey and “Caring for Creation” by Carla Blackmar Rice and are still available on our OPC YouTube channel. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPUMQEOViKgck-4IWDb5eLg/playlists>

Technical wizard, John Bailer, helped ZOOM randomly assign the group of 38 into breakout groups of 5-7 discussing questions posed the Call to Life! team. It worked well!

Breakout session #1 asked the participants how they felt called as a person and as a member of OPC during this pandemic year.

Pat Gifford introduced Rev. Rebecca Barnes, Coordinator of the PCUSA Hunger Program, who shared thoughts with us encouraging us to dare to act because we dare to hope. God is leading us, she said, calling us to alleviate hunger and eliminate its causes. She cited Matthew 25: 37-40 and Isaiah 58:6. Eliminating systemic poverty and caring for creation are connected and she suggested interlocking pathways to address both personal and congregational calls. She also reminded this is God’s work and that we enter this work to help as we can, we need not feel as if we have to shoulder it all.

Breakout session #2 asked the participants to share ideas presented by Rev. Barnes that best connected with them and what the ideas mean to them as individuals and as members of the congregation.

Anne Bailey then introduced community partners Brad Hoblitzell, Director of the Family Resource Center, and Ann Fuehrer, Executive Director of TOPSS. Both described the efforts of their organizations, thanked OPC for its contributions to their programs, and said they look forward to the continuing partnerships with OPC.

Breakout #3 sought suggestions for what OPC does now. What comes next? Are there learnings from COVID that we want to study post-pandemic? How do we further relate our congregational calls of eliminating systemic poverty and caring for creation to our mission?

We were reminded that our individual and congregational calls are part of God's story and that we cannot walk away, we find a way to contribute with the talents that we have.

Participants responded positively to the format and this new way of coming together. Good conversations led to good feedback and ideas for moving forward. Scribes recorded conversations which will be shared with the congregation in the next weeks,

Pat Gifford, Called to Life!

Judy Schiller, Clerk of Session