

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and went and found him.

John 9:35a (The Message)

Going to Where the People Are

In last week's Presbytery meeting, we approved some important basics for our church life, such as new information on benefits for pastors and their families; presbytery minimum compensation for 2026, and a protection policy for minors and vulnerable adults which can be adapted to congregational use. We also approved a number of ministry shifts within the Presbytery:

- Tiffany Ashworth starts in October as Interim Pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Pasadena
- Katherine Lee Baker's call to Westminster was amended to be a one-year interim position, with the possibility to renew or move to an installed position in the future
- Stephanie Kang began her new ministry as Protestant Chaplain at Los Angeles General Medical Center
- Deidra Goulding and Bong Bringas began last week as chaplains for Retired Presbyterian Church Workers. Deidra is full-time lead chaplain for Monte Vista Grove Homes and other retirees in the bounds of San Gabriel Presbytery; Bong continues full-time at San Marino Community Church but is adding a limited role as chaplain at Westminster Gardens.

In addition to these changes, we welcomed Jeff Keuss, Dean of the School of Mission and Theology at Fuller Seminary, as a minister member, and we celebrated the news that Kristi Van Nostran was approved for ordination by San Diego Presbytery to her ministry as a hospital chaplain. Her ordination service will be Saturday, January 17, at Faith Presbyterian Church in San Diego.

All these new ministries are very exciting, but in some cases they create a loss for others. Tiffany leaves Occidental Presbyterian in Eagle Rock, and Deidra leaves Shepherd of the Valley in Hacienda Heights; both were beloved, effective pastors who will be missed by their former churches. Stephanie had already resigned as chaplain supervisor at PIH Whittier and Downey hospitals, and we must say good-bye to Charity Ngaruiya, who was the chaplain at LA General. Also, Deetje Tiwa will be leaving her role as temporary pastor of GPIB-USA in Claremont. The fellowship is small, so they will not call a new pastor at least for now. Let us pray for these congregations and individuals who will be seeking a new sense of call in their respective ministries.

As I look at these actions, most of the ministries approved this week are outside the congregation, with Presbytery clergy serving people in hospitals, in retirement communities, and a seminary!

I've been surprised to learn that some presbyteries choose not to ordain or receive minister members unless they are called to serve as pastor of one of their member churches. I was surprised because I've always thought that ministry beyond the congregation is important, especially now in our post-Christian environment. There have been enough generations who have not grown up in church that I think many if not most young people look at churches as if they are museums—and as congregations (and church staffs) get smaller, the “museums” are often locked up for much of the week.

We also learned during COVID, when we turned into instant televangelists, that there are many people who are happy to join worship remotely—they are not, as we had been told, turned off by our

old-fashioned worship and newfangled theology. But for various reasons, they do not feel comfortable coming into our physical worship spaces.

Given the situation we are in now, it makes great sense to me that we do like Jesus did, and go find folks where they are, rather than limit our ministries to sitting in our lovely sanctuaries and waiting for the people to come to us. No, that doesn't mean we abandon our congregations! In fact I realize I have to point out to some folks that for all our other forms of witness—feeding the hungry, working for affordable housing, returning land to Native stewardship, caring for immigrants—the basic and I would say the most important unit of mission continues to be the local congregation, and when a church needs help, that is the priority for the Presbytery.

While congregations are extremely important, church members are also encouraged to go beyond their walls and connect with the community where the community is. Also, while the Presbytery needs to respond to the needs of a congregation, that does not necessarily mean the congregation gets whatever they want. We have the opportunity—maybe the responsibility—to utilize multiple forms of ministry to connect with a community that is no longer comfortably Christian. Thank God that we are free to do this!

Let us pray for the new ministries just starting to blossom, and those who will be seeking new leadership. And let us pray for all those who will experience Christ's healing power and love through the ministries of chaplains, academics—as well as church outreach activities, faithful friendships, and loving parents and grandparents who demonstrate the love of Christ for their children. We all have opportunities to live out our faith and spread the good news of Jesus' love, in all the ways we live. Let's follow those opportunities. Thanks be to God!

Blessings,

Wendy