Update on the Cultivating the Gift of Preaching Initiative (CGPI)
from Director Dr. Matt Aragon Bruce

It's been two months since I began my position as the director of CGPI. During that time, I have had the opportunity to attend 10 different presbyteries in order to share the news about CGPI with leaders across the Synod. Thank you for having me at your meeting just a few weeks ago on February 24.

If you had told me 2 months ago that attending 10 presbytery meetings in 8 weeks was a cause of joy, and that I would call doing so an "opportunity," I would have smiled, nodded, and found an excuse to talk with someone else! So let me briefly explain why that is not the case.

When I applied for and started this position, I understood my role to be somewhere between a plumber fixing a leak and a sailor bailing out a sinking ship. And I imagine you sometimes feel that way too. Nearly everyone in leadership that I know across the PCUSA, as well as other mainline denominations, lives with near constant background anxiety about the state of the church, particularly the steady decline in numbers. Indeed, my position is, at least in part, a symptom of this decline as it is driven by the need to identify and train "lay" preachers due to a shortage of teaching elders to fill pulpits.

I began this job with the notion that our problem was one of scarcity. We need preachers. Of the 650 churches in our synod, some 200 do not have a permanent installed pastor. So, let's go train some people and plug some gaps as best we can.

However, over the last two months, I have had something akin to a conversion experience. Our problem is not a lack of resources or even people. As I have travelled (both in person and digitally) from presbytery to presbytery, what I have encountered is a wealth of people who are called and gifted to preach. What they need, please forgive me for this, is a little *cultivating*, some formation. Please listen, for we in the PCUSA need to hear this: we have reason to be hopeful, we have ruling elders, and deacons, and church members from across the synod who are called and gifted to preach and serve our congregations. Some of them have been preaching for years already, some are just braving the waters, and some are just discerning the call to preach. I have already received the names of more than 50 people from our synod in whom presbytery leaders have recognized a call to preach, including some from the Presbytery of Mackinac.

That does not mean, by the way, that I don't want you to send more!

Our website has just recently been updated and you can find more information about GGPI here (the URL is also given in full below). The application page is live on the Synod web page, and we have already begun to receive applications. We ask that interested individuals complete the application by April 5th, and that recommendation letters be submitted by April 12th.

The Initiative will begin formally June 6-10 with a conference hosted at Alma College, where participants will hear lectures and participate in workshops on interpreting the bible, an overview of Reformed theology, writing and delivering sermons, and much more.

You can support our Initiative to Cultivate the Gift of Preaching in at least two ways. First, by praying that God will continue to raise up emergent preachers across our synod. Second, by sending us names of individuals called to preach who would benefit from further cultivation of their preaching gifts.

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