

## Matthew 25 – Congregational Vitality: An Update

An Interview with Rev. Dr. Diane Moffett, President, and Executive Director of the Presbyterian Mission Agency

Written by Joy Williams June 2023

When you think of Presbyterian community mission, Rev. Dr. Diane Moffett is who you should know! Rev. Dr. Moffett is the President and Executive Director of the Presbyterian Mission Agency, one of the six agencies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A). Faith Presbyterian Church in Oakland, California is her home church. We were able to speak with Rev. Dr. Moffett about the visionary goals of the NBPC 47<sup>TH</sup> Biennial, Matthew 25, and the future and challenges of Black P.C. (USA) congregations. The Matthew 25 invitation focuses on Matthew 25: 31-46, the parable of the sheep and goats in which Jesus makes clear, that what we do matters to God and how we treat others is important to God. More information regarding the Matthew 25 Invitation is found at <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/matthew-25/>. The initiatives of the Matthew 25 Invitation lift Congregational Vitality, Dismantling Structural Racism and Eradicating Systemic Poverty.

In a recent conversation with Rev. Dr. Moffett, the NBPC 47<sup>th</sup> Biennial Planning Team asked with the NBPC 47<sup>th</sup> Biennial Focus on Black Presbyterians and the Black Family, what is the current success rate of the implementation of the Matthew 25 Initiative, Congregational Vitality, in Black Presbyterian churches? From Rev. Dr. Moffett, “there are currently 75 self-identified Black congregations who are engaged in the Matthew 25 invitation. This represents 7% of the 1,110 congregations who have joined the initiative.” One of the challenges Black churches are working to overcome in achieving their goals regarding Congregational Vitality, is to recover from the jolt of the Pandemic on all church activities. However, currently there is a group of African American Presbyterian Churches, The Bronx Borrow Churches, whose Congregational Vitality initiative is being re-ignited with commitment from the Presbytery of New York City and its interim Executive Presbyter Rev. Mary Newborn Williams. The Presbytery of Atlanta has five African American churches who have been consistently active since their commitment to the invitation. In a move to aid and support all Churches, post-pandemic, engaged in the Vital Congregations Initiative, a Virtual Presbytery was opened in 2021. This allowed individual congregations to enroll on their own if their Presbytery was not ready to begin. Southminster Presbyterian Church in Phoenix, AZ enrolled in 2022 using this method.

Rev. Dr. Moffett shares that the Matthew 25 Invitation is embedded in the structure of the church. As of today, 1,115 congregations have embraced the vision. About 50% of the PC(USA) Presbyteries have joined. This is critically important because the work is carried out through the Presbyteries and the Mid Council organizational structure of the PC(USA). She said, “The mission is to unite the world, so the Kingdom can become a reality”. “The challenge is only 20% of about 400 Black churches have installed pastors.” It is difficult when a church does not have

installed leadership, however, there are capable Ruling Elders who have been certified in the skills of implementing the Matthew 25 Initiative and are leading their congregations.

Rev. Dr. Moffett shared examples of the marvelous accomplishments of Matthew 25 churches in cooperation with their presbyteries showing the wonderful works. One example is First Presbyterian Church, in Hollywood, CA, who have re-purposed their land, renting it out for movie sets. In turn, they use the resulting revenue to embrace members of their community who are experiencing homelessness. They start with Bible Study, followed by food and fellowship.

With that unique example in mind, we asked Rev. Dr. Moffett, if a standard methodology has become prominent for achieving Congregational Vitality with community involvement? She again points to the importance of your congregation's community connection, through your local Presbytery, and, or Synod. Standardized learning tools include the Presbyterian Mission Agency website, and the Matthew 25 App for iPhones only and found on the Apple Store. This App is the best place to start. It contains Curriculum resources, listing of the Matthew 25 institutions, Assessment Questions, and a "Being Matthew 25 Facebook Stream". A piece about this worldwide initiative is being featured on "Viewpoint", hosted by Dennis Quad and shown on the Public Broadcasting Network.

Rev. Dr. Diane Moffett reminds us that the Presbyteries and Mid Councils are available to assist churches in taking the step into the Matthew 25 Initiative.