

Greetings to the Saints of Mission Presbytery!

Dear ones, we have been through a week that was both heartbreaking and hellish. I wish I could have been with each of your congregations this past Sunday to hear how our pastors and CREs are ministering to you. As I have said before - and will say again - there is no better time than now for us to be the church. We have so much to do in terms of reconciliation, relationship building, and not only sharing the good news but embodying it. I pray for you daily, and covet your prayers too, as we walk this path together. And speaking of being the church....

Many of you remember meeting the Rev. Kathryn Threadgill from the Presbyterian Mission Agency at our October Presbytery meeting in Corpus Christi. Kathryn works in the office of Theology, Formation and Evangelism, and is specifically working with the Vital Congregations Revitalization Initiative. Her workshop was such a hit that folks were standing out in the hallways!

Between now and General Assembly, I'm going to be spending some time here in Ponderings going over the "7 Marks of Congregational Vitality" she shared with us, one mark at a time. As Kathryn says, this is not a "just add water" kit. These are marks for which we should aim, signs of vital congregations which are living into God's promised future and hope. Let me invite you to reflect on these with me over the coming weeks, and think about where it is that God is leading your congregation and this presbytery.

Mark 1 - LIFELONG Discipleship formation

This is about a whole lot more than the latest shiny program, or even one hour on Sunday mornings. It's also not about Sunday School classes for children which end at high school graduation. She describes it as "from the cradle to the grave, seeking to be formed for right living with God and with all people." Indeed, that is a lifelong task for us all! It's neither extracurricular activity nor mere head knowledge. This kind of discipleship is formed within the community, and carries over into everyday life. Vital congregations are concerned with the wholeness of life for all their members, and with the congruence of "life on Sunday" carrying over into the rest of the week - and month, and years. Kathryn writes:

Lifelong Discipleship Formation is about how we live into that right relationship with God, with all God's people, and all of creation. It's about growing in the community of God's grace, the church, and interpreting faith in our everyday life; confronting brokenness and sinfulness when we fall short of the glory of God, and shining a bold light of Christ for all to see....It is about the call to daily take up our call and follow Christ.

How is your congregation manifesting this mark? Is the study of scripture having an impact on the mission of your congregation? Can members have challenging conversations with each other as they grapple with the faith? Do all people feel welcome to share their voice and opinion? What uncomfortable things need to be let go? How do others know that we are disciples of Christ?

PRESBYTER SIGHTINGS

February 21 - Meet with H.M. King Trustees

February 25 - Installation for Drees Coetzee, San Antonio University

March 1 - Lunch with students, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary

March 2-3 - Presbytery meeting, Austin Westlake Hills

March 8 - Lunch with Corpus Christi region members

March 10 - "Anxious to Talk About It," Carolyn Helsel, San Antonio Crossroads

March 11 - Preach for Georgetown San Gabriel

March 13-19 - Vacation!

March 22 - Brown bag lunch with San Antonio region