

Written Report from Presbytery Co-Leader for Vision and Transformation

Last Sunday, I was worshipping with the faithful at Silver Spring Presbyterian Church and Don Wahlig preached about the theme of gratitude. In his message, he suggested that we all experience little love letters from God appearing in our lives and the proper response to those moments of joy, peace, and understanding was to return to God with gratitude. That message has stuck with me as I have pondered my first 9 months as your presbytery co-leader for vision and transformation. I have spent much of that time traveling to different congregations (25 or 26 by the time you read this!) and in each location, I have been given gifts upon gifts and grace upon grace—little messages from God of love and welcoming seemingly written just for me. And while I am still putting together the pieces of who the Presbytery of Carlisle is and who we can be, I wanted to offer you just a few reflections from my congregational visits that have sustained me through this first chapter in my position and I believe might well give you hope for your own journey, no matter which church you attend. There have been a number of things that unify us and I want to offer up those to you today.

The first is that each house of worship that I have visited has greeted me with joy and welcoming. Whether in the form of handshakes and hugs or warm cups of coffee at fellowship hour, each congregation has gone out of their way to make me feel like part of their church family. Sometimes I have come in and offered words of reflection from the presbytery staff. Other times, I have just sat in worship and gotten to silently reflect on the words, music, prayers, and sermons, but never have I felt like a stranger. I am grateful for that.

The second is that each congregation that I have visited has been dreaming of something bigger than themselves that they are being called to be or do. One of the misgivings about the church is that we are slowly dying. That small congregations like so many that dot the landscape of Central Pennsylvania are just struggling to keep the doors open and that takes up all their time, energy, and effort. And while there may be some truth to that statement (it certainly does take a lot of effort to keep any church open) that is not something that has been readily apparent from my occasions to join in worship or meetings with our churches. From the smallest congregations that have 20 or 30 in worship on Sundays to the largest gatherings in the presbytery, no one that I have been with has lost the ability to dream dreams and have visions of a better tomorrow for their church families or the world. And they still put their best foot forward to make those dreams and visions a reality.

The third is the authenticity of worship in each church. I have seen led by children, laity, clergy, and a mixture of all three and in each case, the services have been authentic and true to who each congregation is and aspires to be. Sermons have been given with a deep respect for the scripture upon which they were based. Music has been offered up to the glory of God. Prayers have come from the heart and head and challenged the hearers to struggle for greater justice, peace, and love in this world. In each service I have attended, even though we all possess a different understanding of God and God's movement in the world, we have all been unified in the spirit of the risen Christ who continues to abide in us all.

As I continue to travel around the presbytery, I am getting a glimpse of what the presbytery is and what it can be. I look forward to continuing to dream dreams and have visions with each of y'all as you ask God what God would have us do next. It is an exciting time in the life of the church with opportunities to step out in faith and try new ministries, gatherings, welcoming, study, service, and fellowship that invites the stranger to become friend and friend to become family. I am so grateful for all the chances that God has given me in the last nine months to walk with the congregations of Carlisle and I look forward to the chances that are still yet to come. Peace, friends.

Respectfully submitted.

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