

Report of your Lead Presbyter for Transformation, 11/11/21



As many of you are already aware, it is with a grateful heart that I have announced that my work will conclude on December 17th, 2021, as I have accepted a call to serve as the Presbytery Leader of the Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy. This is my last assembly as your Lead Presbyter for Transformation of Great Rivers Presbytery.



Over the course of the last six months, it had become clearer to me that the specific kind of transformation work I was doing, by necessity, had emerged to be more of what we commonly call an unintentional interim, which means that a vast majority of my work was refining processes, articulating values, and consolidating a new sense of community identity and direction. That kind of work requires a finite timeline, which for congregations typically is about two years (which makes a lot of sense to me in this case, because the question of whether to call a traditional interim was certainly a part of the discussion four years ago!). In that time, we have done a deep dive into what we really want as a presbytery, including workshops and learning opportunities, townhall discussions, and the formation of a Staffing and Finance Taskforce to assess what changes we need to make to be more faithful and sustainable. And half of it during a pandemic! Nearing the three-year mark, I had noticed a shift in the functioning of the presbytery: committees were stronger and more independent, more responsive, and less in need of guidance and direction from staff than when I had first started in the position. I had noticed that once the 2020 Vision Statement was completed, and after training the Staffing and Finance Taskforce for approximately a year, it looked to me that the presbytery had everything it needed to begin entering into its next phase of its life. Recognizing the importance of different leadership skills for different seasons, that was when I began to consider bringing my work to a successful closure. At first, the early summer deadline for applying for the Presbytery Leader position at Giddings-Lovejoy was too soon for me to leave my work unfinished here, as we were still in transition between office support staff, so I declined the opportunity to apply for that position. However, after the deadline was extended, I found that I could both finish my work here *and* engage talks with another presbytery without compromising my work. Within a few weeks of exploring what possibilities existed for my kind of leadership, I found that I was in discussion with three presbyteries, a finalist with two, with another asking me to apply once their search opened later. As I discerned my decision whether to celebrate the ending of my ministry here, I discovered that I have achieved all that a transformational leader could be proud to achieve. I am thankful to the Taskforce on Staffing and Finance, the Personnel Committee, and the Leadership Team for so gracefully receiving any surprise my news brought and blessing my decision. I have been treated very well here, and I trust we have accomplished enough together that God extended the search at Giddings-Lovejoy just at the right time for us to transition into new chapters as smoothly as possible. Because you have embraced the work of transformation proactively, and not upon the end of spent resources, we were able to work intentionally, creatively, and fearlessly. What a gift of courage and faith you have shared! And it worked.

Here is what I can proudly say we have been able to complete together:

- Incorporating the use of Zoom into our bylaws for fully-online and hybrid meetings, giving dozens and dozens of presbyters practice with the technology, a full year and a half ahead of the pandemic
- Creating a new budget approach that moved from one year at a time to multiple-year, longer term planning, extending the lifespan of the ministry of Great Rivers Presbytery by approximately five years

- Articulating the 2020 Vision Statement as the guiding aspirations of the presbytery, in your own voice, the voice of the presbytery itself
- Exploring approximately 20 different configurations of how to model our presbytery, the formation of the vision to guide our selection(s), and the creation of the body that can execute the changes
- Shifting towards a virtual office, more in-line with a 21st century work culture, that is both more effective and less expensive than our previous arrangement for a large regional body such as ours
- Hired an excellent new virtual ministry support staffperson through Ministry Architects
- Redistributing work duties that are less reliant on a presbytery leader and central office
- Creating a detailed staff assessment process that includes presbytery feedback, accountability to the job descriptions, and ongoing support check-ins for all staff
- Launching a new process for securing transitional pastors that is less reliant on local networks by expanding pastor searches nationally
- Managing a weekly grassroots-focused newsletter that centers and celebrates the ministries of the local congregations
- Reenergizing our Nominating Committee that now meets much more regularly to focus on discipleship, spiritual gifts, and representation, rising to the challenge of pandemic-time recruitment
- Proposing bylaws for a new committee on representation that can assist us with accessibility, representation, and equity within the life of the presbytery (C.A.R.E.)
- Overseeing a shift for Personnel subcommittee of Admin to become its own committee, which would clarify ambiguous policies around quorum, participation, election, and terms.

As I look at that list of what we've been able to do in three and a half years, I don't think that's half bad.

It was clear that within the decade of when I started, things would eventually need to be cut from the budget of Great Rivers Presbytery, should the support and resourcing of our congregations continue. There were two priorities I found myself most invested in: 1) *anchoring any conversations around budget cuts in mission, ministry, and good stewardship*, and 2) *transferring the work of transformation from one person to something taken up by the entire system*. I trust that my decision at this time gives you the tools to keep mission first, plenty of time to continue the work of shared transformation, and the encouragement to not let the work of transformation be limited to one place or one person. Because of the way I have witnessed the culture of this presbytery change, I believe you are ready for that new phase of life.

When I started at your Lead Presbyter for Transformation, I had said institutional changes would come, but most change would be cultural, more felt than seen. While none of us anticipated a pandemic to change our world, I still cannot write on one page all of the changes we have achieved together to make us more connectional, more responsive, more organized, more efficient, and more relevant. I am proud to tell you that other presbyteries are following our lead, inspired by the kinds of conversations we are having, and asking about our approaches. I could not have done any of this without you. This work has been hard, but it is evident to me how the Holy Spirit has been at work in you and in the lives of those we touch. Even as some structures need to be left behind, I absolutely trust that the future of Great Rivers Presbytery is in good hands—God's hands.

Again and again and always and forever, I affirm that GOD IS ALIVE in Great Rivers Presbytery.

It has been an honor to serve as your partner,



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