

## Report of the Lead Presbyter for Transformation, 2/15/19

I am now halfway through my seventh month as Lead Presbyter for Transformation, and I can say that it has been an inspiring joy serving our community of churches. I remain focused on building relationships, fostering partnerships, and strengthening communication channels across the presbytery. So far, I have had meaningful visits with almost a third of the 90+ Presbyterian Churches in our Presbytery. I have enjoyed sharing messages of hope in God's presence through times of transformation from the pulpit, have enjoyed connecting with fellow presbyters about what you most value about the faith life of your worship communities. I have felt honored to serve as a resource person/deliberation partner for both sessions and pastors.

These recent months have showed me the strong need for pastoral leadership for and with the presbytery. With the tragic death of Rev. David Daniel by car accident before Thanksgiving, with a number of other hospitalizations including that of Rev. David Esche, and other family illnesses, deaths, and traumas across our presbytery, I have found value in offering pastoral support in the form of serving as a kind of "pastor to the pastors." I continue to be astonished by your deep love for Jesus Christ and each other that leads you to bear one another's burdens (for example, I am impressed with how churches came together to support our neighbors in Southeastern Illinois Presbytery in the wake of the Taylorville tornado). I continue to pray for each of you and your churches, and welcome your prayer concerns/updates. I also encourage all our presbyters to pursue the best exercise, rest, and care rhythms that foster your spiritual, mental, and physical health; I laud your efforts to protect your boundaries, including Sabbath rest, vacation, and continuing education.

Of course, this winter has been rocked by the hardest inclement weather I have yet experienced while living in the Midwest! I am happy to notice careful discernment for whether to hold or cancel church gatherings in dangerous conditions, especially with consideration in mind for our more elderly members and commuting preachers. This has also created a unique challenge for how the presbytery can still conduct its business despite the weather when so many churches rely on swift responsiveness from our committees. I am so pleased to see more and more presbytery gatherings successfully utilize the technology we have available to help us interact virtually, but I am grateful for the earnest reflection and conversation regarding the limitations of these channels. It does not look like virtual meetings will *replace* physical meetings anytime soon, but they look to serve us well as a way to complement our physical meetings so people who otherwise cannot participate may still be included. Our gatherings...





...are always made richer by the fullest possible participation by the body of Christ, and you are a valuable member of that body. We will be working further to develop a guiding policy on how to use virtual meeting technology in ways that are responsible, decent, and in order.

While there is much “crisis-of-the-moment” and routine day-to-day operation that involves this executive leadership role, I am not straying far from my longer term goals as your Lead Presbyter for Transformation. I am still working on the target areas that were articulated in our 2017 town hall gatherings: *developing trust, fostering relationships, building connection, and clarifying purpose*. To that end, I am working with others on strengthening communication channels across our presbytery, giving more visibility to the work of the committees, better translating the efforts of the presbytery into the impact we are making on the ground, and encouraging greater accessibility and inclusiveness for all. Because of this, we will continue to use the various communication platforms available to us to celebrate innovation, creativity, and adaptive ministry both on the local level and on the wider presbytery level.

One of the more immediate and tangible transitions we will be experiencing soon will be the change in location for our presbytery office sometime in April. This is the result of a long time of needs assessment and deliberation between the Administration Team and the staff. Summarily, our current office location is not conducive to hosting many of our larger committee gatherings. For a long time now, we have been using the Life Together Center at First Federated Church in Peoria for many of our regular committee meetings, so our presbytery has already been naturally working out of that facility (with support staff leaving the office to work in the Life Together Center during those meetings). The move is a much better use of space and time, cuts back on our expenses, and brings us closer to the church setting, so our work can be more closely reflect our larger mission.

I am thankful for your convictions in ministry and for the affirmation you have shown me as I conduct my duties in this new role with you. I humbly ask your patience as I continue to find a rhythm in the rhythmless work that is 21<sup>st</sup> century ministry. I am learning and adapting quickly myself, and part of that continuous education will be happening during the week of the February Assembly, where I will be in Louisville, KY participating in Presbytery Leader Formation, a three year orientation/equipping program for new presbytery leaders. I hope this will empower me to serve you more faithfully in my role, to the glory of the mission of Jesus Christ on behalf of the world God so loves.

May God bless our ongoing ministry together!

*Ryan*

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