

Report of the Lead Presbyter

November 9, 2024

During the past ten months, my focus has been on listening. As I have preached and worshiped at churches throughout the presbytery, attended session and congregational meetings, met for coffee with pastoral leaders and members, celebrated at church anniversaries and pastoral ordinations and installations, trained elders to serve communion in congregations that have no pastor, and convened gatherings to have hard and hopeful conversations about what collaborative ministry can look like, I have heard you.

The Leadership Team joined me for listening sessions throughout Great Rivers, in which we invited you to tell us about your experiences in and with the presbytery; the ministries that make your hearts sing; the connections you have nurtured in your communities and the world; your hopes, dreams, and concerns for your churches. We read every response submitted on every presbytery assembly survey. We have heard you.

Your keen observations and suggestions have already begun to inform our planning for 2025—our restructuring of the presbytery, the training of teams and committees to be more responsive to your needs, the scheduling and formatting of presbytery assemblies, the development and sharing of resources and information, and staffing. Based on what you have communicated, we have begun to identify practices and efforts we want to adopt that will enhance our life together in ministry in Great Rivers and those we want to abandon because they no longer serve us and you.

Clearly, there are things we can do better. Adjustments in processes and procedures, while sometimes necessary and often satisfying, however, are not in and of themselves transformative for a church or a presbytery.

I want us to shift our energy to reimagining what the Presbytery of Great Rivers can be:

- a vibrant witness for Jesus Christ in central and west central Illinois;
- a body in which pastoral leaders and congregations are nurtured, supported, and can thrive;
- a connectional community that finds meaning in our common identity, core values, and relationships;
- an association of believers committed to discerning together God's will for us;
- a creative force to meet our present and future challenges;
- a church that models the justice, compassion, and generosity of God;
- a people who love our neighbors and work together for the common good.

Please know that just because the official Year of Listening is coming to an end, I—we—won't stop. We—I—want to hear you. And we will respond.

Rev. Ann Schwartz
Lead Presbyter