

General Presbyter's Report

July 29, 2017

"Follow me and I will make you fish for people." (Matthew 4:19; Mark 1:18)
"Feed my sheep." (John 21:18)

We are to be fishers of people and to feed Christ's sheep. The disciples fished with nets. Presbyterians can be good at fishing with nets. We can invite people to be part of our churches where persons can hear the gospel and see demonstrations of God's love and grace. We can invite them to worship, but also to Circles, mission trips, ball teams, men's groups, Bible studies, fellowship events, and more. We can welcome people where they can develop supportive friendships, hear about God's wonderful love, grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ, and participate in mission.

We are also to feed Christ's sheep. Many of our churches are literally about feeding people, through backpacks for children on the weekend, having food pantries, and providing food to the elderly on weekends. Homeless families are fed. Grace Covenant's huge community garden in front of their church produces food for many, as does Northminster's. Nickel-a-Meal money helps local food banks as well as hunger in Malawi, Haiti, and Guatemala. Bryson City has a community meal one Sunday a month. Other churches show God's love in a variety of other ways. We are called to reach out, trusting the Holy Spirit to be at work.

Many churches are sharing the gospel through Vacation Bible School (VBS) or Bible Camp this time of year. VBS provides a witness to God's love and grace to children and adults. It results in stronger disciples and sometimes new members. You can have more than a hundred kids, or just a few church kids and their friends. Gastonia Area Presbyterians (GAP) listed the times and dates of the various Vacation Bible Schools in their area, so members can take advantage of those opportunities. Many churches share Vacation Bible School with others. Kenilworth did VBS with six African-American churches and delighted in all the ways they worked together. It is an avenue that enables us to reach out to others.

The Marion First Church, where the Presbytery will be meeting this month, has reached out to others in a variety of ways. Several years ago, the church provided a place for a successful free medical clinic. The clinic is no longer in operation since one person helped all but eleven clients get health insurance, and the doctors divided up those remaining people to receive care. Being concerned for people's health, they recently sponsored screening for life-threatening medical problems. In the space formerly used by the free clinic, they now have a spiritually integrated counseling service. Marion has been growing in mission and numbers the last couple of years. If you were at Marion on July 4th, you might have been one of the five hundred people, sitting at the church on the top of the hill, watching the fireworks and eating free ice cream. They have the best view in town! They also sold hamburgers and hot dogs and had a rummage sale that day to help fund the new roof. On 9/11, the children and youth will deliver homemade cookies to the emergency workers and first responders to thank them for their work. They have an active youth group and are supporting their youth director, who will be going to Columbia Seminary soon.

What activities are you doing, or could you do, to provide outlets for new people to join in? Mills River recently hired a person to work with children and young families part-time. Just by having that person signaled their support to families, who now are about 1/3 of their membership. Through grants from PWNC and Synod, the church upgraded their playground, which is used by the community, and added picnic tables and seating. They have a free library "birdhouse" where people come to exchange books. In the winter, they have a 10-day period where folks can come to work on a puzzle. It started seven years ago with the world's largest puzzle. Now it provides a place during the cold of winter to socialize, have goodies, and work on a puzzle with neighbors and new friends. They have added new signs and gotten TV and newspaper publicity. These various outreach efforts have been a source of mission, fellowship, and new members.

There are many ways to reach out. First Morganton hosts one of the high school football teams for dinner before a game. A group of Hispanic young women use their kitchen to create and sell bakery items as a way of learning about business and earning money. Each year, the church hosts "Prom Project," a place where high school girls can get free prom gowns. Their annual Bible Camp for more than 100 children is a wonderful outreach and a source of future members.

Southminster hosts a prom for special needs youth. Robinson Memorial and others have a dinner or dessert for the local school teachers. Third Street worked with the Health Department to get a farmer's market for local products in their neighborhood and they also have a non-food pantry with paper, cleaning products, and other needed items not covered by food stamps for people in need. There are numerous ways to reach others!

I have a passion for wanting people to reach out to others, many who do not have a church home or know Jesus Christ. It is as important for us to talk about what happened in church as it is to talk about what we did on the Fourth of July. Outreach is as simple as inviting someone to your church. Statistics show that 86% of people who come to church do so because they are invited by a friend or relative. We need to be including people in a Christian, supportive community.

In my seminary class, one woman was invited to church by a co-worker for nine months before she attended. I think three is good, four or five is too many, but she got invited for nine months! Then she attended and was invited back another six months before she returned again. After that, she kept going. Without constant invitation, she would not have gone. How many people have you invited recently? See who God might give you the opportunity to invite. People need God's love. **This summer, challenge yourself to invite or take with you at least one person each month to a church function.**

Often when someone is dealing with a difficult issue, they think of how another person (us) talks about the support they receive from their church community. It is easy to say that we had a sermon where we got a new idea, or liked an illustration, or felt loved, or whatever. Sometimes, we enjoy the music or have sung a song that the tune or the words stuck in your memory and you just keep humming. Maybe you heard what one of the kids said during the children's sermon, or maybe you were so proud of the youth this past Sunday for sharing about a mission trip they attended. Maybe you just enjoyed being with the people at the church. **This summer, what if you tried to mention a good church experience to four people each week? Could you do it? Try!**

Because you talk about your church, perhaps someone going through a stressful time will come to you. Or, maybe they have questions about faith, and that will start a conversation. In our churches, we need to share how God has been active in our lives, so we can grow in faith; and if someone asks us, we can share. It helps us in our faith to look back at our own life and to also hear others' stories. When I share my story, it reminds me of how God has been at work in my life. It helps my faith to grow.

Look for opportunities to share where you have seen God at work in your life, or in the life of your church. Invite a friend or family member to join you. Challenge your Sunday school class, Session, men's or women's group, to take turns telling about their faith journey or ways you have seen God at work. At the end of the summer, you will be richer.

Be fishers of people – feed lots of sheep!

Peace,

Bobbi

The Presbytery of Western North Carolina

announces the retirement of

Ms. Barbara Ross

effective June 30, 2017.

Barbara served as a Presbytery Associate for six years, the first four of those as a volunteer. She coordinated PNC trainings, taught elder training and worked with many of our churches in various capacities. Much thanks for your years of service, Barbara! Enjoy your retirement once again.



Take the opportunity to greet Barbara during lunch at the Presbytery meeting.

Please feel free to extend your gratitude and appreciation during this time.

*Please join us in wishing Barbara
all the best in her retirement!*