

General Presbyter Report

Bobbi White, General Presbyter

January 26, 2019

Thus says the Lord . . . "I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." {Isaiah 43:14,19}

At the beginning of each new year, most of us think about New Year's resolutions or things that we plan to do or not do in the new year. We worship a God who makes us and all things new. In this new year, what if each session, church, pastor and member asked what God is calling them to do differently in 2019? What if each Session and church group spent January and February defining some new goals for ministry and spiritual growth for themselves and the church?

It's no secret that we live in a time when many people have never been to church and do not know any Bible stories. Lots of folks are even reluctant to enter a sanctuary. We live in a time more like the early church than the church of the 1950's. How will we share with people who have no interest in being Christian and do not know why they should learn about Jesus? It helps for us to be better at sharing our faith and telling why our lives are different because of God's great love. What new thing(s) may God be calling us to do? How might we invite people to join us in activities so they can see Christ in us?

In the old days, people came to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, joined a church, and then became active in ministry and grew in faith. Today, that seems to work backward. People are more likely to become involved with something they like, bond with the people, and then begin to learn from the people in order to believe. Therefore, it is important to be asking people to join our mission trips, small groups, food pantry work, volleyball teams, fellowship times, covered dish meals, special music events, etc., so they can know what a Christian community is, and then began to believe in Jesus, as the Lord and Savior that we serve. What are some new things that your church is doing (or perhaps even old ways that still work) that help you reach out to the broader community?

Newland Presbyterian Church has recently started a new early morning, informal, contemporary worship service. They decided there was a need, and even though it was winter and many of their members had returned to Florida, they began in October. The Newland Church's mission is "to lead all people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ." They say, "In the early service, you will find a warm welcome, a comfortable environment, praise music led by Joy Pritz and the Dave Calvert Collective, and preaching that finds its center in Jesus Christ and connects to your daily life. We'd love to see you at 9 a.m. Sunday mornings!"

At Shelby Presbyterian, a member noticed that Shelby did not have a support group for divorcees. They applied for the Presbytery's "Water to Wine New Initiative Grant" to start a new group that would include child care and an experienced facilitator for folks in this situation. The church also realized that a huge number of people in their community were single households with children. They are asking the questions as to what that means for their church's present and future ministry. What new things may God be showing them? They are building on Shelby Presbyterian Church's reputation, as they are already known for the two lunches they serve weekly for the homeless, people who are food insecure, and those who just want fellowship. It is not just local they demonstrate God's love, but to their partner church in Guatemala, and the scholarships they provide for children there as well.

God has called Sherrill's Ford Presbyterian to step out in new ways. Sherrill's Ford has become known in their community as a church with a passion for caring about children. They work with an elementary school in their area and found out that one of the school's needs was new underwear and clothes for children in need. They keep the school stocked, and also added a closet for coats. The church holds an annual Veteran's Day cantata, which recognizes the veterans in the area. They have also

decided to have a monthly community supper for anyone who wants to come. Their "Third Thursday" free meal started with just a handful of people and now has more than 200, which includes people who want fellowship, those struggling to put food on their table, first responders, the homeless, members of the church that cook, and more. From that came another new idea - a Blessings Box. It is a box outside the church that contains products that people need, such as toilet paper, dish detergent, and toothpaste, non-perishable food, diapers, etc. People can drop off products or come to pick up the items they need. Sherrill's Ford has small cards that school personnel, police, and others can use to refer people to the dinner and Blessings Box. This church has become known for its ministry, which has drawn people to their church, into a Christian community, and into a deeper relationship with Jesus. What a wonderful way to reach out to people that may not attend any church!

Waldensian Presbyterian in Valdese has also recently started a Blessing Box ministry. While Waldensian has had a food pantry for a number of years, the church felt the need to expand their offerings in the form of a Blessing Box on the church campus. Now folks in need can stop by when convenient and without fear of embarrassment to retrieve items necessary for day to day living.

First Franklin reached out to the community in a big way at Thanksgiving. They served almost 500 meals that Thursday! It is a community event and incorporates people helping that are not members of their church. This is in addition to their Christmas concert, which raises money for "CareNet." With the concert's money, plus a grant from PWNC's "Nickel-a-Meal", First Franklin was able to give \$8,000 this year to CareNet. The concert, in addition to raising money, has community members participating and gets people into the sanctuary making it easier for people who have not been to church to come and try church out. They are already known in the community as a church which shares their building with others, blessing the pets, and being in partnership with a church in Guatemala. It is about inviting others to come join them in ministry.

Robinson Memorial in Gastonia did something new last year that is now an annual event. They invited people to a worship service on the Sunday before Christmas that included an adaptive Moravian Love Feast. It begins the Saturday before when people gather to make and decorate cookies for the Love Feast and to be given to others at Christmas time. Sitting around tables in the fellowship hall, Christmas hymns were sung, the word was preached, and good fellowship was had with cookies, coffee and hot chocolate. They announced that the members gave chickens to 24 overseas families to supplement their nutrition. In addition, they collected two gigantic baskets of socks and provided Christmas for one family from the school next door. For this school, they also provide a luncheon for the teachers and helped a new teacher buy supplies for her room.

Ryburn, Third Street, and Good Hope Presbyterian Churches started a new thing when they decided to worship together each fifth Sunday morning. Of course, this was followed by good food and fellowship!

Add "reach, grow, send" to your activities. When Stan Ott was working with our Presbytery, he challenged our churches to look at things they were already doing to see if they could add "Reaching out, growing in faith, or going out to show God's love." Basically, how to add "Reach, grow, send." In a brainstorming session, one church decided they could "send" by taking their men's Saturday breakfast outside their doors to homeless men. They decided they could grow in faith by looking at the Bible about God's concern for people that were homeless or hungry. They could reach out by inviting some of their friends to join them in serving breakfast to the homeless. Do you reach out to mothers in your preschool program when they have new babies or a trauma in their lives. What things are you already doing that you might invite others to join in?

Share with us some of the innovative ways your church is getting people involved in your ministry and community. It's the easiest way for people to meet Christians and see Jesus through them. Praying God's richest blessings on your ministry and new outreach ideas in 2019.

Peace,

Bobbi