

## General Presbyter Report Bobbi White, General Presbyter April 30, 2019

The Spirit is working mightily in our Presbytery and within so many of our churches. Lots of our churches are growing in ministry and mission and some even in numbers. I want to share with you what some of our churches are doing. I continue to be amazed at the goodness of God at work in our Presbytery.

**Bryson City Presbyterian Church** is known for its concern about the food security of its members and their neighborhood, and for sharing its space with the community. It was known for its community meals in the past -- and now it has a new ministry. They have joined forces with a mission called The Giving Spoon. This is a nonprofit with a mission of providing hot, nutritious meals in a caring environment while working to reduce hunger in Swain County. The church provides the space for this community table every Thursday evening while also providing office space for the organization.

Another way Bryson City Presbyterian Church is helping to reduce hunger is by working with MANNA Food Bank in Asheville to provide a Pop-up Market on church property once a month. MANNA sends a truck to Bryson City with whatever food resources are available in that month, including fresh produce and perishable food which is sometimes difficult to find. Anyone from the community who needs food can come to the church to fill their boxes and bags until the truck is empty. These ministries go along with the Bryson City Food Pantry which is run by the churches in the town, but is housed at the Bryson City Presbyterian Church.

The Holy Spirit is at work through their members. Dr. Frank Van Middlesworth and his wife, Ann Edison, started the Swain County Caring Corner to help provide free medical care. In cooperation with the Methodist Church, a group from the Bryson City Church has secured a house to provide winter emergency shelter -- called Sweet Dreams. Continuing the work of the Spirit, Bryson City will host Holy Week luncheons to provide another opportunity for the community to come together and to grow in faith.

While reaching out to others and providing food and care for the community and its neighbors, Bryson City is updating its nursery and the children's playground in response to new members who have come into their midst. They are growing from those young couples with children and also with older adults moving into the area. For a small church, Bryson City Presbyterian has done more than they could have ever thought or imagined through the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Waynesville First Presbyterian Church** is growing and reaching out in many ways to their neighbor. Yet as the Body of Christ, they also have an important ministry to their members that they had not expected - their ministry to women who lost their husbands recently. In fact, four men died over the course of two months, and their loving, comforting congregation reached out to care for these widows. This has brought Waynesville to look more closely at God's purpose for them. As an older congregation, they desire to exhibit the Holy Spirit through helping people to "run the race" and finish well, growing in gratitude, knowing each day is God's gift.

You may have heard that **Sherrill's Ford Presbyterian Church** has several ministries in their community. Their most recent ministry, a "Blessing Box," was featured on the front page of the Hickory

Daily Record (see attached). They have been known as the church providing free hot meals every “Third Thursday” to nearly 200 people who are hungry and/or just want fellowship. These folks are first responders, friends, neighbors, anyone in the community. They started a Clothes Closet in the local elementary school to provide clothes and new underwear for the children. They have a patriotic cantata as a way to reach out to and honor veterans each year. They are now reaching out to the alternative school in their area.

Their new Blessing Box (see the pictures) on the church grounds is a place where folks can come and pick up food and household items they need, but might not have the money to buy—soup, baby formula, toilet paper, maybe some sheets and towels. These items can be picked up whenever they can get there and without having to provide personal information. Pastor Russ Reighley says that the Blessing Box and other things they are doing has given them a new identity and standing in the community. It has also given them the confidence to step out and try more new things. The Holy Spirit at work!

**Mills River Presbyterian Church** will be celebrating its 160th year of ministry in October. Over the course of one year, they have had 23 adults and 7 children become members of that congregation! They have been able to expand staff with a professional musician who also ministers to young children and their families. These new people have brought such energy and positive thinking to this church.

In the past, the Mills River Presbyterian Church has always tried to reach out to others. It has been known as the “Community Puzzle” Church. In the cold of winter, they invite the community to come together to work on a huge puzzle. The first puzzle, ten years ago, was 24,000 pieces and took three weeks of community work to complete. Each year, they have a new puzzle and many of their neighbors plan on participating. They are also known as the church which blesses the pets and has time to give thanks for those that died the past year. Recently, they created a picnic area that can be shared with the next door manufacturing business. They have also updated their children’s playground to include exciting activities and activities for children with disabilities. The playground area, which is used by the whole community, also includes a library box for the exchange of books. The Holy Spirit!

**I recently returned from a trip to Rwanda** with a PCUSA Peacemaking group. What we observed and learned is that 25 years ago, on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, the genocide began in Rwanda. Over the next three months, more than 800,000 and maybe closer to a million people, were killed. Many were slayed by their neighbors and friends who used machetes and other weapons. This team went over there to look at ways the Presbyterian denomination and other churches are working with reconciliation and forgiveness. I heard testimonies of individuals that had lost their entire families, forgiving those neighbors who had been the killers. I learned about the power of Jesus’ forgiveness from the cross, allowing suffering people to forgive and allowing murderers to accept Christ’s and their victim’s forgiveness. Powerful stuff, which I am continuing to process, and would like to share further with anyone who is interested.

Peace and blessings,



Bobbi White

## ATTACHMENT

### Need a blessing? Take one

#### Church's anonymous pantry aids community and motivates congregation

By Emily Willis ewillis@hickoryrecord.com, Mar 31, 2019 Updated Apr 1, 2019



Pastor Russ Reighley and Bill Gregory check the stock in the Blessing Box at Sherrill's Ford First Presbyterian. Gregory built and donated the box to the church.  
ROBERT C. REED/HICKORY DAILY RECORD

Even though most blessing box visitors remain anonymous, one person shows their appreciation by leaving thank-you notes on napkins. The writer has dubbed herself, "Napkin Mom." "She's left us two notes now," Pastor Russ Reighley said. "That's just amazing, and that's what this is all about."

### Neighborly suggestion brings change

Russ and his wife, Marcia Reighley, have been serving the church as co-pastors for seven years. "One of the things that has started to happen with this church is that we've started to look outside of the church at mission opportunities," Russ said.

Their mission efforts began with a clothing closet at Catawba Elementary School. Then the congregation found ways to help with Catawba County's backpack program.

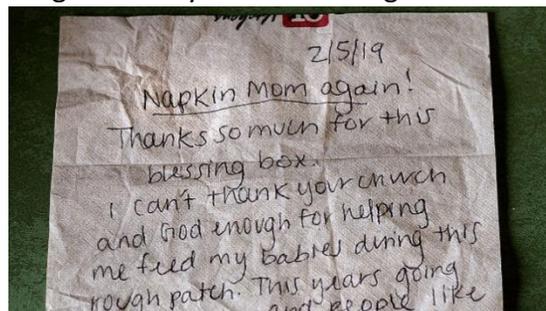
Now, a free community meal is offered every third Thursday of each month, where Russ said 140-200 meals are served. "That's when we started to understand that there was more food insecurity in our reaches of the county than we had any idea that there was," Russ added.

As the church searched for ways to provide food to their community, the Reighleys' neighbor, Donna Sims, told Russ about the blessing box at her church.

Sherrill's Ford Presbyterian Church members found a way to do mission work right from home.

Church member Bill Gregory built a blessing box in the parking lot of the church in October 2018. A blessing box is similar to a little free library. Instead of sharing books, food items are up for grabs.

"When we first started this, I had reservations," Gregory said. "How would it work? Would it work? Would someone vandalize it? I was totally wrong. There are people in the community that have needs, and this is a pride-saving way. Some come late at night or early in the morning."



A note was written on a napkin in the Blessing Box at Sherrill's Ford First Presbyterian by a mother thanking the church for helping feed her babies during her time of need.

ROBERT C. REED/HICKORY DAILY RECORD

“She told me about a blessing box in the parking lot of their church in Claremont at Bethlehem United Methodist Church,” Russ said. “I drove over there that day to look at it, and I said, ‘Wow, that’s great.’”



Bill Gregory and Pastor Russ Reighley stand by the Blessing Box at Sherrill's Ford First Presbyterian, which helps local residents during rough times. ROBERT C. REED/HICKORY DAILY RECORD

Russ brought the idea to a session meeting at his church. The congregation was quickly on board. Gregory stepped up to the plate to build the blessing box.

Everything fell into place.

Gregory’s craftsman skills came in handy when building the box. “When Bill built this, he insulated it. He put a shingled roof on it,” Russ said. “I don’t care how cold it’s gotten; we haven’t had one frozen item in there.” The box is also vented so heat can escape during summer months.

## Community helped, church blessed

The blessing box is stocked with nonperishable foods, microwaveable meals, loaves of bread, blankets, toilet paper, baby food and baby formula and other items. “We had no idea in the beginning how successful this was going to be, because we’re way out here in the county,” Russ said.



Russ continued, saying he expected 10-15 items per week would be removed. “We go through 15-20 items a day,” he said. “We go through about 10 loaves of bread per week, but we always make sure everything is fresh.” Donations continue to pile up and not everything will fit in the blessing box, which Gregory believes is a blessing in itself.

“Our church is excited,” Gregory said. “There is as much joy in getting something out of the box as there is to put something in. It’s turned out to be a real two-way street. It’s taking care of itself.”

To learn more about Sherrill’s Ford Presbyterian Church, visit [www.sfpchurch.org](http://www.sfpchurch.org)

The Blessing Box at Sherrill's Ford First Presbyterian contains all types of food items, baby items, and clothing such as socks and scarves. ROBERT C. REED/HICKORY DAILY RECORD



## *The Presbytery of Western North Carolina*

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April 3, 2019

Dear Friends in Ministry,

I have often said, "I have the best job there is because I get to travel and see how God is at work in the lives of different churches, pastors and members, and I work with incredible people and a wonderful staff." Being too generous to keep this all to myself, effective October 26, 2019, I will be retiring and giving this "best job" to a younger person (younger than 76!) who will bring amazing gifts and energy to this position.

My retirement has been planned for a year to coordinate with implementation of a new staffing model, which will be presented at the April 30<sup>th</sup> Presbytery meeting. At that meeting, you will hear the new model presented and elect a search committee to find your next General Presbyter.

Please know that my passion and energy for supporting pastors, churches and this Presbytery will not change in my remaining time as your General Presbyter. I look forward to continuing to work with each of you, strategizing, visioning and planning until my very last day on the job. I am even hoping we will start some new things together because God is calling us to step out into the future.

This Presbytery has important work to do in serving Christ. I am seeing new energy and the Spirit moving among you. I have hope for your witness to Christ's love and grace in this world. With the help of the Holy Spirit, I know that you will continue to do great things for the furthering of Christ's Kingdom.

Peace and grace,

*Bobbi*

Bobbi