

## Portions of Hope: Lessons from the Lead Presbyter

Since I began my work, first as your Transitional General Presbyter and continuing when I accepted the position as your Lead Presbyter, I have written newsletter articles reflecting on the questions who is God calling the Presbytery of West Virginia to be and where is God calling us to go as a Presbytery – for such a time as this. In fact, many of you have been reading newsletter articles about these questions as far back as the Leadership Team began asking them through the words of General Presbyter, Ed Thompson. These questions guided us through our work with Holy Cow! Consulting, its Landscape Survey, small group conversations, and finally the work of the Leadership Team, consultant Emily Swanson, and me to create and refine a Strategic Plan that works for the Presbytery of West Virginia.

At the Presbytery meeting last week, I shared that I have heard rumblings of frustration regarding the implementation of the plan, everything from eye rolls to blunt questions asking why – why so slow, why bother, why implement this plan when past plans were never fully implemented? Being faithful to God’s call - who God is

calling the Presbytery of West Virginia to be and where God is calling us to go as a Presbytery should be our guiding questions. The questions we go back to as we implement and live out the Strategic Plan. In fact, the Strategic Plan is the answer for our next season as a Presbytery.

The words “Strategic Plan” are words we in the church borrow from the secular world. That is not a bad thing, we benefit when we draw on all the resources available to us to follow God. I am challenging us to flip the conversation and view the Strategic Plan through the lens of faithfulness.

This flipping of the conversation, this viewing of the Strategic Plan through the lens of faith, gives me hope – hope for a refreshed, innovative way to focus on mission, ministry, and relationships. It gives me hope for a Presbytery that prioritizes resources, relationships, and leadership development to support its churches in God’s work. This Strategic Plan says God is calling the Presbytery of West Virginia to be a community of Jesus people who offer resources to our churches, building deeper relationships with and between our churches, and gives new energy, ideas, and tools to the

leaders of our churches and the Presbytery.

My hope is shared by our partners in ministry, the Synod of the Trinity, our siblings in this connectional Presbyterian Church (USA). The Synod of the Trinity offered each of its 15 presbyteries an opportunity to apply for a Fit for the Future Grant. The Synod describes that the grant's purpose is to encourage presbyteries to take concrete steps toward missional and/or ecclesiastical changes that will position them for continued ministry effectiveness over the next 10 years. This purpose may be understood across four dimensions: addressing the common liminal season in the life of the church; finding new ways to do ministry; rebuilding presbytery structures to address new circumstances; and sparking possibilities in places that have previously been stuck. This grant meets our Strategic Plan in a flash of providence.

At Thursday's Presbytery Meeting, Leadership Team chair, Andy Rice, announced that the Presbytery of West Virginia has received a \$30,000 Fit for the Future Grant from the Synod of the Trinity. The grant committee was unanimous in its decision; one member exclaiming that this is what the

presbytery needs.

The Presbytery of West Virginia is deeply appreciative of the Synod's recognition of our important work as we prioritize resources, relationships, and leadership development to support our churches in God's work. The Fit for the Future Grant will allow us to increase the connectivity of our congregations and their members to each other and the presbytery, advancing the strategic plan developed to guide us into the future. We will use this grant to support four initiatives, all aimed at increased connectivity and strengthening ministry: 1) fund four launch events for our new connectional ministry; 2) cultivate [visiting] teams for the Presbytery; 3) startup costs for a database for organizing Presbytery members, relationships and service; and 4) developing a new logo and website. (Source: Fit for the Future Grant application.)

We have discerned who God is calling the Presbytery of West Virginia to be and where God is calling us to go as a Presbytery. God is inviting us into new ways of being church. My question to you is how will we answer?