



NEW, CREATIVE WAYS TO MEET NEED

BY REV. SUSAN CLAYTON, DIR. OF COMMUNITY MINISTRIES & BRYSON EDMONDS, CHAIR OF COMMUNITY MINISTRIES TEAM

Our Community Ministries Committee began the year with a commitment to broaden our impact, improve our communication and increase volunteerism opportunities for congregational members. We reorganized into subcommittees to support education, family stability and opportunity, homelessness and housing, hunger and food insecurity, and global missions. We began the process of setting goals and objectives to help reinforce the broader commitments of greater impact, better communication and increased engagement.

Then the world changed. In March, along with the rest of the ministries of IPC, Community Ministries engaged in that key word for these times of COVID-19: we “pivoted” and began to seek new and creative ways to meet real and increasing human need while closing our offices, working mostly from home and practicing safe “social distancing” to protect the health of everyone in our community. The work we do in Community Ministries is very “incarnational” in normal times. We are accustomed to meeting people face-to-



“FOR I WAS HUNGRY, AND YOU GAVE ME SOMETHING TO EAT.” MATTHEW 25:35

face, to offer in-person hospitality in our ground floor offices and to serve in the community. We try to be the hands, feet and face of Christ, sharing the love of God in very concrete acts of compassion, justice and service. At the start of the pandemic lockdown in Birmingham, we could not imagine how to continue to be of service as

we became more isolated from one another and our community at the very same moment the need of the most vulnerable in our community increased.

Then something wonderful happened: you, the members and friends of IPC,

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FEATURING

Meet IPC Interim Pastor Dr. Steve Goyer **PG 4**

FEATURING

How God is calling the church right now **PG 8**

LEARN

How to worship, learn, serve from home **PG 6**

MISSION

Entering the digital learning summer camp world **PG 7**

UPCOMING events

See complete calendar online including details and updates:
ipc-usa.org > connect > calendar

JULY

- 3 Fri** Church offices closed ❖
- 4 Sat** Independence Day ❖
- 8 Wed** Wednesday Morning Bible Study with Dr. Steve Goyer begins, 7:30 am, Zoom ❖
- 12 Sun** Vespers Service, 5 pm ❖
Final Bible in 90 Days Class, IPC YouTube
- 12-18 Su-Sa** Montreat Youth Conference, Virtual ❖
- 21 Tue** Session, 5:30 pm, Zoom ❖
- 26 Sun** Vespers Service, 5 pm ❖
- TBA** Digital Youth Mission Trip ❖

AUGUST

- 9 Sun** Final class with Dr. Jeff Leonard, IPC YouTube ❖
- 18 Tue** Session, 5:30 pm, Zoom ❖
- TBA** Youth Grant Team begins ❖

SEPTEMBER

- 7 Mon** Labor Day ❖
- 9 Wed** Children's musical rehearsals begin ❖
- 15 Tue** Session, 5:30 pm via Zoom ❖

Due to COVID-19, this calendar may change. Please make sure to visit our online calendar at ipc-usa.org and to subscribe to our Thursday congregational emails for the latest information.

- ❖ Major Events
- ❖ Learning/Education
- ❖ Children/Youth
- ❖ Service Opportunity
- ❖ Adults/Seniors
- ❖ Music Ministry



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The Window is published for church members and friends.*

CONSIDER THIS

Be the Church



"From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded." Luke 12:48

Dear friends,

The other day, I decided to walk around the church property inside and out, into the four balconies in the Sanctuary and into every unlocked room in both buildings. Mostly, I was trying to check out the whole "camp of tents" that make up the buildings and rooms at IPC and get my bearings. Finding chairs in Sunday School rooms

still set up with lessons on white boards, charts and tables that were in process before you "evacuated" because of COVID-19 and signs of abundant life filled me with both joy and sadness.

As far as the buildings and grounds go, I have never seen a church so full of great space, architecture, beauty, and so well kept. It is a testament to the love, commitment and generosity you have for this church and the many gifts to give.

Of course, what was missing was you. It seemed vacuous without your chattering, laughing, questioning, singing, learning, praying, and caring presence. That will come in time, probably little by little until it is safe for all of us to gather again. Just because we are church, we are not offered divine immunity for what's going on in the world, so we need to be responsible to each other in this. Thanks to our House and Properties Subcommittee, we are.

As I write this, Alabama and Florida, the two states I straddle as home, are both "red" from new cases. Some because of more testing, but mainly because of unsafe congregating- probably around Memorial Day and since. So, we wait. We adapt. We persevere. We pray, and we find ways to serve others and God.

The verse above from Luke is found after Jesus tells a parable about some servants who slack off after their boss goes away verses the servant who stays doing the good work needing to be done. Jesus ends the parable with the words, "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded."

Dislocated, disconnected (except by technology), and feeling disengaged, it is easy for us to lose heart and forget that we still have a mission to accomplish as "the body of Christ in the world." This mission is one of our gifts and how we use it makes all the difference. No matter where we are or our condition in life, we can fill our days being "Christ like" to others through acts of kindness, notes, phone calls, prayer, gratitude, generosity, and connecting safely- especially to those people and members from whom you are estranged. Forgive others as you have been forgiven. Don't trust conspiracy theories. Don't fall for gossip. Recognize the many biases and false perspectives we all carry. Look as critically at ourselves as we look at others. Reconcile where reconciliation is possible or at least make an effort to. There is plenty to do and no matter our age or state of health, we can still do something for God's kingdom come.

So, no matter where you are, "be the church!" As Jesus challenges, "the one to whom much is entrusted, even more will be demanded," and as another parable reveals if we don't bury it in the ground, in the end, even more will be given.

Thank you for giving me the honor and opportunity to serve God by serving you who serve Christ in the world.

Gratefully,
Steve Goyer, *Interim Pastor*

responded to this crisis in our community with an incredible increase in financial giving to IPC designated to address food insecurity and social services. You trusted us to find ways to help those most impacted by these difficult days in our nation and world. We cannot begin to express our gratitude adequately for the generosity you have provided, but we want you to know some of the ways we are responding through Community Ministries to meet needs while striving to keep our members, volunteers, staff and the community we love and serve as safe as possible.

HOW WE ARE RESPONDING

• **IPC FOOD PANTRY** Through financial contributions from IPC and the congregation, we have expanded our food voucher program while our physical Food Pantry at IPC is closed through a strengthened relationship with our two-year old partnership with City Meats in Woodlawn. We are providing \$45 vouchers to every IPC Food Pantry client. Each client goes to City Meats and in the convenience and safety of one-stop shopping, City Meats provides boxes of fresh, frozen and non-perishable food items to our clients. Because of your generosity, we have been able to increase the number of people we can help each week. We are averaging 50 families per week going to City Meats with an IPC voucher. During the week of June 8-12, we sent 65 families to City Meats. Our clients weep with gratitude for the amount and quality of food received and the concern for their safety and health seen in offering them a one-stop shopping experience. An added bonus is that we are helping support our good partner, City Meats, a locally-owned business.

• **FREE MEALS** With financial contributions from IPC and church members, we have been able to offer 30 free meals each week through both Rojo and Bagues Restaurant for neighbors struggling with food insecurity due to job loss, furloughs, lay-offs and reduced hours. You all have increased the number of available meals by participating in the pay it forward option. We are serving anywhere from 20-50 people each week with free meals.

• **BLESSING BOX** With direct



(L TO R): BLESSING BOX, STAIR/LIFT OFF CARE KITS, FACE MASKS

contributions from church members, we have started a new ministry called the Blessing Box. The Blessing Box is located under the covered walkway on 31st Street and allows us to provide neighbors in need with non-perishable food items 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You are providing the food to stock the Blessing Box by shopping for us and dropping off food directly or ordering online for delivery. Our neighbors are utilizing the Blessing Box daily.

• **SACK LUNCHES** Congregation members are providing sack lunches and restaurant lunches for our homeless and at-risk neighbors through links on the SignUp Genius website each week. Your efforts are providing 50 lunches each Tuesday at Highland United Methodist Church and 20 lunches several days each week at First Light.

• **IPC SOCIAL SERVICES** Through your generosity to IPC Social Services, we are helping more and more struggling families with utility, rent, transportation and medical assistance in these troubled times.

• **CARE KITS** Church members helped fill 90 Care Kits for our STAIR and LIFT OFF students whose school year ended abruptly and who needed food support, school supplies and games to help fill their time. You also helped deliver the Care Kits to students' homes.

• **SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAM** Members of the church are helping to coordinate the distribution of food to our 80+ SLP students and their families since

we have had to transition from in-person to digital and hard-packet summer learning for our children.

• **CFAF GARDEN PLOTS** Some of your families have adopted garden plots at the Children's Fresh Air Farm, and you are raising food you will share with those in need at harvest.

• **FACE MASKS** Many church members are making cloth face masks at home and bringing them to Community Ministries. We are providing masks to our Food Pantry clients at City Meats, in the Blessing Box and to people served through Meals on Wheels, First Light and other places of need.

All of this and more is happening through IPC Community Ministries during these days. We may be physically distanced from one another, but your love and service have not diminished at all. You are still the Body of Christ, alive and active and sharing God's love in a world that desperately needs it. Thank you for all you are and for all you do as disciples of Jesus Christ!

Because of the times, members of our community are in greater need than ever before. We are responding and have created more opportunities than ever before for members of the congregation to participate, contribute and play a personal roles in Community Ministries. Please reach out to the Community Ministries Staff or Committee if you are not as engaged as you would like to be and want to participate more in any of these programs. Bless you all and keep healthy and safe during these challenging times.

WELCOME DR. STEVE GOYER TO IPC

Dr. Steve Goyer was called to IPC this April to serve as Independent Presbyterian Church's interim pastor. When he retired from Riverside Presbyterian Church in Jacksonville, Fla. June 2019, he thought he'd left ministry. That was until former IPC Senior Pastor Dr. William J. Carl called him about the interim position in his hometown.

We sat down with Dr. Goyer to learn about the Birmingham native.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR FAMILY.

Anita is my second wife. I was widowed in 2001 then met Anita on a blind date in 2002. I was smitten immediately, We were married in 2003, and I'm so honored to be able to share my life with her. She inherited my two girls. She is now just like their mom. Meghan, the oldest, is in Atlanta finishing her PhD course in psychology from Georgia State. Amanda is in Knoxville with the two grandchildren, Brooklyn who is 8 and Finn who is 5.

WHAT HAVE YOU MISSED ABOUT MINISTRY?

The congregation. The people. The relationships. They become your family, and I didn't realize I would miss the people as much as I do. I miss the whole experience of being together that is meaningful and purposeful as each of us tries to be Christians.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO DO IN YOUR TIME AT IPC?

I don't see myself as a real change agent as much as someone to smooth the waters and maybe help the church perceive who IPC needs to be in the future.

WHO HAS BEEN THE GREATEST INFLUENCE ON YOUR FAITH?

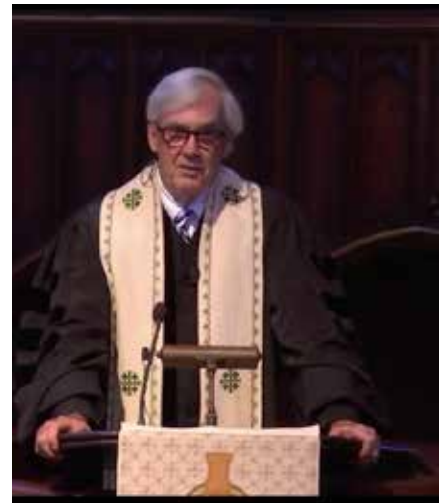
My grandfather who was a Methodist lay preacher in Florence, Ala. was one of the best Christian men that I have ever known. He was devote but not self-righteous. He was kind, compassionate and showed a real



DR. GOYER AND HIS FAMILY. TOP ROW (L TO R): DAUGHTER AMANDA, WIFE ANITA, DAUGHTER MEGHAN. BOTTOM ROW (L TO R): GRANDCHILDREN FINN & BROOKLYN



DR. GOYER AND HIS WIFE, ANITA



DR. GOYER PREACHING AT IPC

depth of gratitude.

My parents. My mother taught Sunday School. My father helped start a church in Montgomery, Ala. Their faith, their devotion to Christ, their love of church rubbed off on me.

Finally, theologically, it was H. Lewis Patrick of Charlotte. We were held spellbound by his amazing presence and preaching. That began my quest with "what am I going to do with my life?" At the time, I was in the insurance business and we were asked to take care of a youth group at

Trinity Presbyterian Church, Nancy, my first wife, and I. Then they asked me to teach a Sunday School class, and I began thinking, "I think I like this church stuff more than the insurance business." It took me three years to come to terms that I should go to seminary.



REV. BRIAN LAYS AND HIS WIFE, SUNELLE, WILL LEAVE IPC IN MID-JULY

ANSWERING GOD'S CALL

Rev. Brian Lays Called to Fla. Church

Rev. Brian Lays has accepted a new pastoral call as senior pastor of Riverside Presbyterian Church in Jacksonville, Fla.. After serving as an associate pastor at IPC for four years, he and his wife, Sunelle, will leave in mid-July.

"From the moment Sunelle and I arrived in Birmingham, you all (or as I've learned to say, 'y'all') have embraced us and made us feel welcome and loved. I've learned more in my first call than most pastors do in theirs, because IPC is a vibrant place involved in a remarkable network of ministries, a lovely range worship services, and is led by an extraordinary staff. I've been privileged to be among you, and want to thank you for nurturing me as I've found my voice, discovered my biggest passions, and grown into my calling to pastoral ministry. Your thoughtful insights, servant hearts, tears, and prayers have been precious to me, and I will always remember you with admiration and fondness," said Rev. Lays.

Rev. Lays is currently finishing his Doctorate in Ministry. Both he and Sunelle are preparing for the birth of their first child in November. He believes it is time to take the next step in God's plan for his life.

"This is all difficult to explain, but I hope you'll understand: It's not that I feel called away from IPC, it's that I feel called to Riverside. And I will depart from among you full of hope that IPC's best days are yet to come, and full of gratitude for all that you have meant to Sunelle and I these past four years. As Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, 'I thank my God every time I remember you,' so I will be thankful whenever I recall these years in Birmingham," he said.

Take a moment and send Rev. Lays an email at blays@ipc-usa.org to let him know the impact his service at IPC has made on your life.

SUMMER CLASSES

Online Christian Education classes are now underway. All of the Sunday classes are posted by 7 am each Sunday on our YouTube channel. You can also find links in Sunday emails. In addition to those classes, Dr. Steve Goyer is starting a Wednesday morning Bible Study via Zoom.

Bible in 90 Days

We're most of the way through the Bible. But don't let that stop you from joining this class. Videos previewing the week's readings are posted on YouTube on Sundays. There's an active online discussion on our Bible in 90 Days Facebook group. We also have a custom reading guide that will allow anyone to follow (or catch up) with from home. Contact blays@ipc-usa.org for more information.

Dr. Jeff Leonard's Class

Samford University Professor Dr. Jeff Leonard is back again this summer. He's leading an online Sunday class on "The World of First-Century Biblical Interpretation." Like Bible in 90 Days, you can find new lessons every Sunday through August 9 on our YouTube channel.

Wednesday Morning Bible Study

Join IPC Interim Pastor Dr. Steve Goyer on Wednesdays at 7:30 am beginning July 8. This class will meet via Zoom to look at and discuss the scripture for the upcoming Sunday. To join this class, please contact Alynn LeBerte at aleberte@ipc-usa.org. She will add you to an email list to receive the Zoom meeting information.

To find Bible in 90 Days and Dr. Leonard's class, go to [youtube.com > ipcbirmingham](https://www.youtube.com/ipcbirmingham)

For more about classes, go to [ipc-usa.org > learn](https://www.ipc-usa.org)

STEWARDSHIP

Counting Our Blessings

As a congregation, we are truly blessed. We are blessed to explore and live out our faith together. We are blessed to carry out Christ's ministry and to walk in his footsteps together through local and global missions. We are blessed for the friendships and the memories created within our church family. Our blessings are numerous. Especially these days, we are counting our blessings, realizing you, our members, are at the heart of who we are and how we serve.

The Stewardship Team wants to express our gratitude for you, your service and your gifts that you bestow on our church home. For the remainder of 2020, we will be "Counting Our Blessings" by sharing stories about how we are ministering to our members and the community. But the team also wants you to get involved by sharing your own stories about how someone has been a blessing in your own life. A special gift should arrive in the mail any day explaining how you too can reach out and uplift someone through gratitude. Look for more information in upcoming eUpdates. We look forward to "Counting Our Blessings" with you.

~ IPC Stewardship Committee



OUR KNIGHTS OF NORTH CASTLE PARTICIPATING IN THE VBS QUEST THROUGH OUR AT-HOME PROGRAM THIS YEAR

CONNECTING WITH IPC REMOTELY

Worship, Learn, Serve At Home

We're continuing to offer 11 am Sunday worship, classes and other fellowship opportunities online. Here's how you can easily engage in the life and ministry of IPC through our livestream and other online offerings:

1. **Subscribe to our YouTube page.** Go to youtube.com/ipcbirmingham. Log into your account or create a new one. Click the "subscribe" button then the bell icon. You will want "all" selected to ensure you receive email alerts whenever new videos, including classes and devotionals, are posted. **If you don't wish to subscribe, you can go straight to our livestream at youtube.com/user/ipcbirmingham/live. Please stay on that page. The video will automatically start once the 11 am Sunday service or one of our 5 pm vesper services begins.**
2. **Engage with us on social media** by "liking" or following us on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn. Find us @ipcbirmingham.
3. **Subscribe to IPC emails.** Every Wednesday at 11 am, separate emails go out to our youth and our families. On Thursdays at 5 pm, look for the congregational eUpdate. We also send out an email at 7 am Sundays with all the information you need for Sunday morning worship and class, including blue links to click and to directly take you to the livestream and classes. **Not receiving the emails? Check your junk/spam folders then contact hgathings@ipc-usa.org.**

As a reminder, 11 am Sunday worship and vesper services are livestreamed on YouTube and Facebook. Our devotional is now weekly and posted to YouTube and Facebook Mondays at 10 am.

You can always find the latest updates and response to COVID-19 at ipc-usa.org > coronavirus.

THE DIGITAL LEARNING CAMP WORLD

BY CATHERINE GOUDREAU, DIRECTOR OF THE CHILDREN'S FRESH AIR FARM

The last few months have been a whirlwind. Many plans have been cancelled or changed, and summer at the Children's Fresh Air Farm is no different. In May, the Fresh Air Farm Committee and Community Ministries Team made the difficult decision to suspend in-person programming and begin to dream about a digital option. I was heartbroken. I couldn't picture a summer without those 100 precious faces laughing, learning, singing, and playing at The Farm. I couldn't picture a summer where I wasn't drenched in sweat and pool water working alongside the most fantastic, committed, creative staff around. But I also knew that summer learning would be more important.

Research shows that students who aren't engaged in academic enrichment in the summer can lose two to three months of academic skills. This year, those numbers will be significantly higher as many students have not been participating in rigorous academics since mid-March. Despite technology challenges and setbacks to redream Summer Learning, we agreed that the show must go on. So, we launched a blended digital and kit-based learning program for our students.

We will provide digital learning for 80 students in 3rd-7th grade. All participants will receive a Chromebook to be used for Google Classroom activities, Google Meets with teachers, educational games,



STUDENT RECEIVING HIS CHROMEBOOK FOR THE SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAM

and enrichment. Students who actively participate in the program will be able to keep these Chromebooks for educational use in the future. In addition, teachers will still be providing live instruction and small group instruction. Students will have access to enrichment opportunities such as music, art, STEAM, and physical education. We will also be providing kits that include opportunities for hands-on learning. We are fortunate enough to have been approved for the Farmers to Families program which

means our families will be receiving fresh produce every other week throughout the summer. Our Bham Strong corps members will be working with IPC volunteers to coordinate the distribution of those items along with non-perishable items for the families. Truth be told, this isn't how any of us hoped to be spending summer 2020 but we are committed to making this the best summer yet. I thank you all for your support as we enter the digital learning summer camp world! Here we go...!

HOW TO ASSIST THE SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAM FROM HOME



Help us provide snacks to our 75 students. We will be making two more deliveries between now and July 10. Purchase snacks through our Amazon Wish-list. Find the list online at ipc-usa.org > connect > links.

**Questions? Contact Ivy Cobbs, ivycobbs@gmail.com or (205) 209-6749
Margaret Cobbs, margaretcobbs@gmail.com or (205) 907-3598**

STATED CLERK ON RACIAL JUSTICE

BY MIKE FERGUSON, PRESBYTERIAN NEWS SERVICE

“In a very real sense during the colossal challenges of coronavirus and civil protest, God is calling the church out,” the Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II said during a Vital Congregations webinar.

Following more than a week of protest that started with the death of George Floyd at the hand of Minneapolis police on May 25, “no longer can we hide behind not being controversial,” said Nelson, the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). “We are all caught in this quagmire now.”

“We are waiting for answers from old sources we have depended on for so long,” he said. “How deep is our faith? How deep is our commitment to get into places we aren’t familiar with and proclaim the gospel?”

The church, he said, is “called to dismantle structures that put people in poverty and pain,” to not only “share the gospel, but share ourselves.”

“We should not be out here being told to go back to barber shops and beauty shops when you’ve got a virus going on,” he said. “What about the people at the bottom who are struggling? We’re putting people’s health in jeopardy in order to make a dollar,” a statement Nelson said he realizes he’s making “from a position of privilege.”

In the face of all its current challenges, the church may struggle the most with its fear of failure, Nelson said.

“We have been grounded in doing things right,” using such guiding lights as the Book of Order, “and at times we become very legalistic. We’re in a very difficult period of history right now, and I’m not sure we’ll ever go back. This is a time of significant transition. We’re being called even though we don’t know the way, to engage even though we don’t have all the answers.”

Pastors and other church leaders have “engaged the world of technology. We found a vessel by the grace of God called Zoom,” by which General Assembly will be held online beginning June 19. “It’s a



THE STATED CLERK OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, THE REV. DR. J. HERBERT NELSON, II

risk-taking venture for us,” he said. But technology also allows Nelson and others to watch “four or five televangelist Presbyterian preachers” every Sunday, “some using cameras that appear to be 100 years old to the newest technology to people splicing things together to make (worship) work.”

“I think that’s where the church is today. It’s under reconstruction,” Nelson said. “We don’t have all the answers, but we have the commitment to press on with what we have. The only thing stopping us is the fear of what might happen if it doesn’t work.”

Nelson, who’s fond of saying, “We are not dying — we are reforming,” did acknowledge “we are in that period where the church we used to know is dying, and so we are required to experiment with what the church will look like. I know it’s difficult,” but pastors and other church leaders should refrain from “gimmickry or throwing flash-in-the-pan theology at people, hoping they’ll think it looks good.”

Nelson complimented the 80 or so pastors and other church leaders participating in Wednesday’s webinar for embracing PC(USA) programs including Vital Congregations and 1001 New

Worshiping Communities.

“These are in opposition to holding on and waiting for people to come to our church,” he said. “We find ourselves in a metamorphosis of change we didn’t choose, but we have to engage it. The contextual reality we have to face has something to do with what the Almighty is calling us to do,” and “nothing but faith” will get us there.

Asked how churches might effectively invite young people inside, Nelson suggested leaving church doors open even during times of protest.

“They need water and a time to rest,” he said, “and they need someone willing to pray with them ... When people are protesting, it is an opportunity for churches to engage people by offering them something, and they’ll never forget it.”

Nelson said he grew to love the church “not because my daddy was a preacher, but because of the hospitality of churches who heard me when no one else would.” He suggested offering this invitation: “Stay. I’ll get you a cup of cold water, and I will listen to you.”

“Who knows?” he said. “It might be a transformative moment?”

As they prepare for midterms or final exams, students would relish coffee and cookies from a nearby congregation, he said. “Could our older members engage those young people with coffee and snacks on behalf of the church?” he said. He imagined what the older members’ tagline might be: “I hope you do well on the exams tomorrow. If you get a chance, our church is just down the street.”

Toward the end of the webinar, which lasted more than an hour, Nelson again praised the work of Vital Congregations for “catching the wind and the wave of this current hour, for getting out front and being part of the leadership” while “doing the grunt work of our denomination.”

“Vital Congregations is about using the best of what we know right now to wisely lead this denomination to a new era,” he said.



PCUSA MEMBERSHIP

New Worship Communities Climbs

While the numbers are slightly lower, the Office of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) continues to show a leveling off in the decline of church membership. The newly released statistical report for 2019 shows a total membership of 1.3 million, compared to 1.4 million three years ago, but the annual decline in churches and active members is lower than in years past.

In 2019, the number of PC(USA) churches was 120 less than the year before and the number of active members is down 50,000 from 2018.

	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total Churches	9,451	9,304	9,161	9,041
Active Members	1,482,767	1,415,053	1,352,678	1,302,043

The Reverend Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the PC(USA), released a statement calling the latest report good news. He says the church is witnessing congregational transformation through innovative leadership, discipleship training, spiritual renewal, and contextual ministry implementation.

“We are no longer evangelizing on the motto ‘If you build it, they will come.’ Instead, we are learning that spiritual development and leadership training focused on discipleship is paramount to developing healthy congregations. Innovative training through Vital Congregations and 1001 New Worshiping Communities are assisting in discipleship training and church renewal efforts,” he said. “Another factor is that the PC(USA) did not have any church dismissals in 2019. This is a sign that we have stabilized previous membership loss in both congregation and member dismissals.”

While the number of youth professions of faith continues a steady decline, the number of overall professions of faith and reaffirmation is still higher than in 2016.

	Young Professionals of Faith	Professionals of Faith & Reaffirmations
2016	11,243	20,263
2017	10,716	19,599
2018	9,578	22,005
2019	9,023	21,408

The statistical report also shows a gradual increase in new worshiping communities.

	New Worshiping Communities
2016	114
2017	144
2018	158
2019	176

Nelson says the church’s future growth is dependent on evangelizing immigrant communities.

“Church planting in immigrant communities is leading the way towards our current and future church growth. However, this area of potential growth is being stunted by marginalization. Many of these groups represent communities that received training from PC(USA) missionaries. Some of their faith perspectives are interwoven with cultural dynamics that are inconsistent with U.S.-born beliefs such as ordination of women, communal accountability, and dynamics of worship,” he said. “We must bear the hard question as to whether we will accept these communities into full membership rather than created categories that marginalize their participation in the PC(USA).”

Approximately 84 percent of the churches submitted data representing 92 percent of PC(USA) membership. The median presbytery has a membership of 5,981 persons. The average presbytery consists of 112 ministers, 53 churches, and four candidates.

BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE 224TH GA

The 224th General Assembly opened with prayer Thursday, June 19 and met on June 26-27 online for the first time in the denomination's history. It was streamed live online and on Facebook with translations offered in Korean and Spanish. The theme changed in the days leading up to the event to "From Lament to Hope." Here's a behind the scenes look at some of the action taken over the first few days.

FIRST PLENARY OF THE 224TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY (2020) PUTS TECHNOLOGY TO THE TEST

BY RICK JONES, OFFICE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

More than 400 commissioners, over 180 advisory delegates, and hundreds of staff, churches, and spectators tuned in to take part in the first-ever, fully online 224th General Assembly (2020) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) on Friday night. Initially slated for two hours of business followed by the Co-Moderators' election, the session lasted nearly four-and-a-half hours, prompting the rescheduling of the election.

With a technical crew and staff scattered across several conference rooms at the Presbyterian Center, the online assembly worked well, with only a few minor pauses and a few muted microphones.

The assembly opened with a series of music performances from Presbyterian churches around the country, followed by recognition of Indigenous lands.

The Reverend Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II, opened the plenary by recognizing the various challenges facing the U.S. and the world, including the COVID-19 pandemic and racial justice issues.

"This is a time of unrest in our streets. The Breonna Taylor and George Floyd families must be remembered and recognized for how they found themselves at the center of this movement. We also



WORKSTATION FOR NATHAN YOUNG, WHO IS PRODUCING THE ONLINE 224TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY.



have to remember Ahmaud Arbery and the loss of his life," Nelson said. "We must get off of our blessed assurance and do what God is calling us to do."

Nelson urged participants not to mourn the inability to gather in person, but to embrace the moment.

"Don't be sorrowful about sitting in front of a computer. God has chosen the PC(USA) not because we are deserving of it, but because God chose us by grace," he said.

224TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY ELECTS STREET-STEWART, BENTLEY CO-MODERATORS

BY MIKE FERGUSON, PRESBYTERIAN NEWS SERVICE

Elona Street-Stewart, executive of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies, and the Rev. Gregory Bentley, pastor of Fellowship Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama, were overwhelmingly elected to be co-moderators of the 224th General Assembly Saturday.

The two garnered 304 votes, easily winning on the first ballot. The Rev. Marie Mainard O'Connell and Arthur Fullerton received 90 votes. The Rev. Sandra Hedrick and Moon Lee got 65 votes.

Immediately after their election, the two were installed as co-moderators by the co-moderators of the 223rd General Assembly, the Rev. Cindy Kohlmann and Ruling Elder Vilmarie Cintrón-Olivieri, as well as the Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

"I am hippopotamus happy and dinosaur delighted," Bentley said.

"This is just wonderful," Street-Stewart

said. “We look forward to meeting the fabulous expectations our current co-moderators have established for us.”

“The world needs a church that has no fear over its diversity,” said Street-Stewart, a descendant of the Delaware Nanticoke tribe and the first Native American to serve as a moderator as well as a synod executive in the PC(USA).

“We believe the denomination is headed in the right direction,” especially with the Matthew 25 invitation, Bentley said. “We want to heed Christ’s call to not be afraid ... We want to run this race with perseverance, looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.”

Street-Stewart noted the synod she leads was the first to say yes to the Matthew 25 invitation in the spring of 2019. “Diane,” she said during a post-election news conference, referring to Presbyterian Mission Agency President and Executive Director the Rev. Dr. Diane Moffett, “has a very powerful message.”

“We believe in those goals” of building congregational vitality, dismantling structural racism and eradicating systemic poverty, Bentley said. “We just need to get more workers in the vineyard.”

His said the congregation he serves has five core practices. The one that sticks out for him is radical hospitality. “It’s not just being nice and polite,” he explained. “We need to create space to say, ‘You are welcome here’ — not just with words, but a space to genuinely share our lives.”

Asked about protests over police killings and the intractable problem of white supremacy, Street-Stewart said the PC(USA) “already has incredible statements and social witness policies.” The denomination needs to be at the center of economic and social change, she said. “It’s going to take a greater understanding of what we have said we are about,” she said. “White supremacy is a hard issue because there’s a lot of fear involved.”

Studying and talking together can be helpful tools for the nearly 90 percent of Presbyterians who are white, she said, as are going to conferences and serving in organizations led by people of color.

“Let’s come with the attitude that says, ‘You are the ones to be the teachers. Tell us what you are doing,’” she said.

Both said they plan to travel to Louisville in the next few days to prepare for the scheduled two days of online plenary sessions set for Friday and Saturday, June 26 and 27.

“They gave us the option that you can do this from home,” Bentley said. “But if something hinky goes on, you’re right there. We felt that was best.”

“We need to be at the place where the best of the best are working with us to guide us,” Street-Stewart said.

She said that when travel restrictions are no longer in effect, the new co-moderators will visit places “where we are unimagined. We aren’t going to fit the profile. We aren’t going to fit the measurements that people want in all places.” In fact, “we might fit the description of something that people fear or couldn’t imagine.” She said sometimes when she meets people, “I am not what they imagine a synod executive would be.”

Most Americans “don’t understand the long relationship” that Indigenous people have had with Black people, she said. “Every moment is a teaching opportunity.”

Asked about the possibility of stretching the virtual assembly by a few days, Bentley said, “Let’s put the pedal to the metal. If that’s the desire of the assembly, I’m on board with that.”

However, “I’d much rather be two miles deep and two inches wide,” rather than the other way around, he said. “Let’s drill down on a few things and really get a handle on it.”

Asked how Presbyterians can be in prayer for their new leaders, Bentley identified three prayer requests: for stamina, perseverance and patience.

“We are going to pack a lot into the next two years,” he said. “We are excited about it, but we know it will be taxing.”



ELONA STREET-STEWART AND THE REV. GREGORY BENTLEY WERE ELECTED CO-MODERATORS OF THE 224TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)

To find more information about the General Assembly, including videos from speakers and articles about action taken on the docket, go online to ga-pcusa.org. You can also follow the General Assembly on Facebook at [@spiritofga](https://www.facebook.com/spiritofga).



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Join us for these special evening worship services just before sunset. It's a time for contemplation, thanksgiving and intercessions to God on behalf of an individual community and world. Welcome the voice of God into your heart through prayers. The service will include beautiful music from IPC's musicians.

Sunday, July 12 • 5:00 p.m. • Livestream
Led by The Table 5 P.M. Worship Team
Music from The Table 5 P.M. musicians

Sunday, July 26 • 5:00 p.m. • Livestream
Led by The Table 5 P.M. Worship Team
Music from The Table 5 P.M. musicians

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