

Annual Report of the General Presbyter  
May 2019

*For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart.” –Jeremiah 29*

This year was filled with many blessings and challenges in the Presbytery of Southern New England. Through it all, it has been a gift to serve alongside so many committed, gifted and talented leaders that are present here. Nothing that happened in the past year would have been at all possible without so many who have given selflessly of themselves in service to the Presbytery and our shared community of faith in Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

### **Pneumatrix**

The Presbytery received a grant from the Office of Church Growth and Transformation called the “Presbytery Transformation” grant in June 2018. The total of this grant is \$50,000, which comes in two payments, we expect the other half in June of 2019. This grant is enabling the work of Pneumatrix among us. They are a consulting group out of Northern California that has worked with many Presbyteries across the Presbyterian Church (USA) on adaptive change and transformation. They are working with four congregations in our Presbytery: First Hartford, St. Andrew, Martin Luther King and Wilton. During the year-long engagement, they will also be working with the Committee on Ministry as it continues to skill-build on serving the larger Presbytery around adaptive leadership. There is still space for any clergy who would like to be part of a monthly video conference with the Pneumatrix leadership, please let me know if you are interested. The grant is also providing support for overall transformation work in the Presbytery around anti-racism, and some of the funding for the work of the Mission and Vision team.

### **Property Challenges**

The past year brought two significant property challenges to the Presbytery, that we all wish we could have lived without, and yet these situations came upon us. Right after our 2018 Annual Meeting, there was a significant oil leak at the Valley Church in Brookfield, CT. Over the summer months, it became clear

how large an issue this was and the potential legal risks for the Presbytery. In September of 2018 we formed an Administrative Commission to handle all matters pertaining to the oil spill and that team has worked diligently ever since, helping the congregation and the Presbytery navigate some very challenging waters. The AC will continue to do its work, but I want to extend a thank you to the members of that team: the Rev. Jimmy McPherson (Darien), the Rev. JC Cadwallader (New Haven), the Rev. Shannon White (Wilton), Elder John Winstead (Fairfield) and Elder Sandy Zuvanich (Brookfield, Valley). Given that this was an AC focused on property, we sought to have it populated with ruling and teaching elders from the nearby communities for ease of travel and all five of these persons have been wonderful neighbors to the Valley Church.

Our second major challenge came on Thanksgiving Eve when a fire destroyed the Woodbury-Union Church in Warwick, RI. We are thankful that the building was empty at the time of the fire and so there were no injuries to anyone, including any of the emergency responders from the Warwick police and fire departments. The fire occurred less than two weeks after the brand new Pastor to the congregation, the Rev. TJ DeMarco and his wife Gina, welcomed their third child. The Roman Catholic parish of St. Benedict has been an incredible neighbor and our new home is in their church building until the Woodbury-Union Church is rebuilt.

*In both of these challenges, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance was here at every step offering guidance, support, physical presence and emergency grants of \$5,000.00 for each congregation. It is my personal opinion that Presbyterian Disaster Assistance is the best thing about our shared ministry and mission as the Presbyterian Church (USA) and as we all know, they are being called on more and more to respond to increasing human-caused and natural disasters. I encourage everyone in the Presbytery to continue your support of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. You can give to PDA [at this link](#) which also includes information for giving by check/mail.*

### **Mission/Vision Team**

In September of 2018 the Mission/Vision Team began its work. The members of this team are: the Rev. Adele Crawford (at-large), the Rev. Jason Santalucia (Groton), the Rev. Jenny Peek (specialized), Elder Lisa Baker (Springfield) and Kirk Louis (Providence). This team began its work with Dr. David Specht who led us in a retreat funded by our transformation grant from the PCUSA. We have been meeting about twice a month ever since and are considering issues

around new ways of being together as a Presbytery with a particular focus on anti-racism work. The Mission/Vision team has led two sessions at meetings of the Presbytery and it was under their leadership that we engaged Jessica Vazquez-Torres of Crossroads Anti-Racism out of Chicago to come and lead a retreat at the Stony Point Center in March 2019 for leadership from the Roundtable, COM, CPM, and Mission/Vision team. This was a transformational retreat for those who were able to attend and the next steps for the Mission/Vision team will be greater alignment with the Roundtable and working in May and June of this year to develop a systematic approach with Crossroads for work with the whole Presbytery. Stay tuned as we continue our work. The resource sheets from the March anti-racism retreat are included in the Presbytery packet.

### **Staff Transitions**

In the last year we said goodbye and thank you to longtime Stated Clerk, Bill Thomas and welcomed the Rev. David Baer as our new Stated Clerk. David has fit right in and his ministry among us is a gift. We also are living into a new staffing structure for Presbyterian Immigrant Ministry. After the Rev. Gerson Annunciano's retirement, the Rev. Paulo Ribeiro, the Rev. Alonso Dacunha and Elder Katia Dacunha have taken over the ministry to incarcerated immigrants as contract staff persons. Their ministry on our behalf is with some of the most forgotten people in our country, and those who have the least legal and personal protections and care. Their workload has doubled in the last six months as detentions and arrests of immigrants and refugees in our country have increased. We will be continuing to assess and find ways to strengthen immigrant justice ministry in the next year in the Presbytery.

### **Committee on Ministry**

As you can see from the COM report, they were very, very busy! The COM really is the workhorse committee of the Presbytery and I want to say a special thank you to the Rev. Sean Miller and Elder Barbara Riihimaki who have led the COM together in the last year and will continue for the next year and all members of that committee. We have focused on learning sessions for the COM over the last year as detailed in their report. I hope everyone is noticing their strengthened work and care for clergy and congregations in the Presbytery. In the next few weeks we will be rolling out the new COM Manual of Operations so that process is clear for all congregations and clergy in the Presbytery and streamlined resources and forms on the new Presbytery website.

## **Visits from the larger Presbyterian Church (USA) to PSNE**

Since our last annual meeting, we have enjoyed the visits of the following persons to come and work with our Presbytery:

- Rev. Emily Brewer, Presbyterian Peace Fellowship (*work with the New Haven congregation on Sanctuary training*)
- Rev. Molly Casteel, Office of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) (*work with the Committee on Representation*)
- Rev. Luke Choi, Office of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) (*work with the COM and New Haven Korean and Connecticut Korean congregations*)
- Rev. Dr. Jan Edmiston, Moderator of the 222nd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) (*ordination/installation of Shelley Donaldson*)
- Rev. Dr. Jim Fenimore, Samaritan Counseling Center (*coaching with clergy and conflict consultant for the COM*)
- Elder Paul Grier, Presbyterian Foundation (*work with COM and small church program to begin in May 2019*)
- Rev. Ellie Johns-Kelly, Presbyterian Foundation (*work with First Hartford and overall Presbytery support*)
- Rev. Cindy Kohlmann, Moderator of the 223rd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) (*installation of TJ DeMarco*)
- Rev. Margaret Mitsuyasu, Synod of the Northeast (*work with MLK on their Synod grant*)
- Rev. Dr. Allison Seed, Presbyterian Board of Pensions (*work with the COM and Personnel committees of the Presbytery and individual support to clergy and congregations throughout the Presbytery, best wishes to Allison as she retired in January 2019!*)
- Dr. David Specht, Specht Consulting (*work with the Mission/Vision team*)
- Jessica Vazquez-Torres, Crossroads Anti-Racism (*work with the Mission/Vision team, Roundtable and leadership retreat*)
- Rev. Deborah Wright, Pneumatrix (*work with congregations and COM*)
- One virtual and one in-person team from Presbyterian Disaster Assistance under the direction of the Rev. Jim Kirk of PDA (*Valley and Woodbury-Union congregations*)

## **Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Presbyterian Church**

We received a special grant of \$40,000.00 from the Synod of the Northeast which has enabled the Rev. Dr. Terrlyn Curry-Avery to serve MLK as an Interim

Pastor. Her work there continues as we seek to serve this congregation and figure out new ways to engage ministry in the City of Springfield.

*One of the highlights of the last year was how many leaders from our larger church came to be with this Presbytery. We received grants totaling \$100,000.00 that came from our Synod and the national church offices to enable ministries to be supported and flourish and new initiatives to take shape. Being part of the connectional church is the gift that keeps on giving and that allows every one of us to live out the ministry we are called to.*

It continues to be my joy to serve you as your General Presbyter. I am always glad to come and visit with your congregation or ministry location to participate in worship, meet with a group or have conversation. Just give me a call! I want to say a thank you to the Presbytery Staff for their wonderful work in this past year and to many of you for your support during February and March when I was mostly off-the-road recovering from foot surgery. Some of you got to meet my temporary weekend chauffeur, my husband Juan; who enjoyed sitting in on some conversations and meetings (and eating the many desserts that were provided to him) as he got me around on many weekends during my recovery.

I look forward with great anticipation to what God will do with us in the next twelve months of ministry!

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Shannan".

Rev. Shannan Vance-Ocampo, General Presbyter