

General Presbyter Report to Presbytery

Rev. Shannan Vance-Ocampo

I hope and pray that all of you are doing well, and that the summer season was one of renewal and reinvigoration for you. We had a little bit of an opportunity to see some of our family over the summer, and other friends we have not seen since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. These were good reunions, good for the heart and good for our spirits. As many of you know, I am an avid gardener, and am still enjoying a very good season. Being outside, hands in the dirt, digging, moving things, helping things grow and watching nature flourish and unfurl its beauty with or without me is a delight in every season and a reminder of God's grace.

Covid-19 and Gatherings

As we all know, very unfortunately, the Covid-19 health pandemic continues. While we live in and do ministry in a part of the United States where vaccination rates are among the highest, we are still not out of the woods. Indoor gatherings, such as the majority of the activities that happen in faith-based communities continue to be among high-risk activities. I commend to you the [webinar](#) offered by our Synod two weeks ago with science-based information. The "high points" from that webinar:

- The former rule was you needed to be exposed for about 15 min. in order to catch enough of the virus to be infected. With Delta the number is lower. **10 seconds.** It's that much more virulent.
- CDC now recommends masks OUTDOORS in crowds and indoors anywhere that is a high or greater transmission rate (***this is the entirety of the bounds of PSNE***)
- Get your flu shot earlier this year.
- N95 masks remain the gold standard.
- Reconsider indoor restaurants.
- Singing with masks is okay, but consider limiting the number of verses in the hymns or finding creative alternatives. Large (greater than five people) choirs are problematic due to social distancing. Singers masks can be helpful, especially for the breathwork needed to sing!
- Congregations should take a deep breath (and a deep sigh) and consider returning to last January's restrictions.

This summer I have witnessed a number of clergy colleagues around the country develop breakthrough Covid-19 because of the Delta variant. Some have been hospitalized with severe reactions. Many have also brought it home to their families. Ministry workers are at high risk, because they are front-line workers. While the

decisions around gatherings, masks, etc. are the responsibility of local Sessions, I implore them to put health and safety first, continue with masking, and keep all activities outdoors as long as possible, and then when indoors, only in spaces where windows can be open and ventilated. **We are not out of the woods.** We have already have had two breakthrough Covid-19 cases that have affected PSNE clergy, our nightmare scenario as a community is that one of our members, clergy or church workers in out bounds (or their families) get breakthrough Covid-19 because of an unsafe no-mask indoor gathering who are then very sick and/or die. There are already the most extreme and tragic of these cases within the larger PC(USA) family. I do not believe God wants us to make things unsafe or take the bait of unscrupulous politicians only interested in personal gain. If you need help or consultation, please reach out to me or the COM, we would be very glad to assist you and help you towards decision-making.

Anti-Racism Leadership

We are continuing with this work within the Presbytery. I am grateful to the Anti-Racism and Equity Committee that has been working tirelessly this last year and has been so well-led by Rev. Jenny Peek and Elder Kirk Louis along with Jessica Vazquez Torres, our consultant. The Roundtable is working this fall on next steps for the Presbytery in this work. We will be working on relationship building through one-on-one's and also having the Anti-Racism and Equity Committee lead worship at this meeting. One of the podcasts we listened to over the summer that I commend to the whole Presbytery is from Code Switch:

<https://www.npr.org/2021/06/08/1004467239/the-racial-reckoning-that-wasnt>

I hope you might take some time with your local congregation's leadership, Session, Deacons, Matthew 25 teams, Bible studies, etc. to listen to this provocative podcast and invite an honest evaluation and conversation in your context. What is Jesus calling us to be and do in this moment? What sort of lament, confession and then renewing actions does the information in this podcast call us to?

8 Habits

I also want to highlight a wonderful new resource from the Presbyterian Mission Agency, the office of Theology, Formation and Evangelism called [8 Habits](#). This resource is also available in [Korean](#) and [Spanish](#). Our Committee on Ministry decided this month to begin in October working through this resource over the next eight meetings as we are a learning community. This resource is specifically focused on learning on what

Evangelism is in our current ministry context, what news ways we engage in it, and how it is done with the following frames in mind:

Radical Welcome

Worship

Sacraments

Prayer

Justice

Teaching

Fellowship

Generosity

In all things, giving thanks for each of you, and the ministry we share together, even in this unprecedented time we continue to live in!