

February 2023 Co-Leader Report

I was able to resume my congregational visits in the new year. To date, I have visited a total of 51 pastors and/or sessions. I have worshiped with a total of 45 congregations. To date, I've been able to connect with a total 72 churches. That leaves me with about 25 churches to go.

As I reflect on what I've heard and seen during my visits there are a couple of things that come to mind. First, while the church is called to be the body of Christ, a lot of churches are overwhelmed because they are trying to be the entire body all by themselves. Taking some liberties with Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, I see there is a need to remind ourselves, "There are different kinds of churches, but the same Spirit. There are different ways to serve the needs of your community, but you all serve the same Lord. There are different expressions of the church, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work."

Paul Nixon and Beth Ann Estock wrote a book titled *Weird Church*. I've shared it with several congregations since I finished reading it last month. It explores more than a dozen expressions of the church - from table fellowships to theme park churches. While traditional-institutional churches are dying at a rapid pace, new expressions of the church, what our missional invitation refers to as gospel communities, are taking their place. Since many of these expressions don't require buildings or professional clergy I've been asking myself, what would it look like for the presbytery to help congregations transition from one expression of the church to a new expression of the church in their community?

The second thing I've been reflecting on is the health of our congregations and our presbytery. Early this winter, I was invited into a significant conflict that was developing in one of our member congregations. I also spent a number of hours on the phone coaching congregational leaders through smaller conflicts at other churches. I am thankful I have the help of those on the Synod's Mediation Team and the staff at Lombard Mennonite Peace Center (who trained many of us).

As I reviewed my conflict mediation training materials I was reminded of some important points for our lives together as a presbytery (and congregations). The first is that there will be differences. Second, where there are differences we need more dialogue and less debate because the goal of a debate is victory and the goal of a dialogue is to gain greater understanding. Third, when entering into a dialogue we must be careful not to confuse issues and people. It is okay to challenge ideas and express concern. It is not okay to attack someone's character. For us to continue to develop as a presbytery, we

will need to be mindful of how we relate to one another as siblings in Christ who are called to both speak the truth and to love.

Finally, from an institutional perspective, the Finance Task Force, which was formed by the transition team in the fall of 2019, has completed their time together. A new Finance Committee was oriented in January and is already hard at work to pick up where the task force left off. The Vision Team is currently working on a new job description for an Administrative Operations Committee that could potentially assume the responsibilities of the Personnel committee and the Property and Insurance Committee. This would provide two committees to oversee the institutional needs of the presbytery.

And I am happy to announce that after more than a year of merging, sorting, and verifying data, there is now a directory of our minister members and commissioned pastors. You can find it on our website under the About Us tab. The committees, commissions, and teams have also been updated. You can also find them under the About Us tab and then click on Leadership in the dropdown menu.

Steve Huston
Organizing Co-Leader