

May 2023 Co-Leader Report

To date, I have visited a total of 57 pastors and/or sessions. I have worshiped with a total of 52 congregations. To date, I've been able to connect with a total 79 churches. That leaves me with about 19 churches to go.

The bulk of my work this winter and spring has been working with congregations in transition, especially those considering a future that looks very different from their past. One of the resources I've been using is the book by Paul Nixon and Beth Ann Estock which I also referenced in my February 2023 report. The book, *Weird Church*, explores what the authors believe the church may look like in 2050. Drawing on their experience consulting mainline congregations, their image of the church is drawn from emerging expressions of the church that are neither traditional nor institutional.

The language Nixon and Estock use in their book to describe more than a dozen expressions of the church reminded me of our Missional Invitation which says,

Fresh expressions of faith are springing up all around, even as older expressions are passing away. The Church at every level, from individual congregations to national denominational bodies, is examining anew what it means to be and do church. "As the Church seeks reform and fresh direction, it looks to Jesus Christ who goes ahead of us and calls us to follow him. United with Christ in the power of the Spirit, the Church seeks 'not [to] be conformed to this world, but [to] be transformed by the renewing of [our] minds, so that [we] may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect' (Rom. 12:2)" [F-1.0401].

There are many things I like about this statement. It does not say that every church has to be the same expression of the church. Yes, all of our expressions will reflect the rich history and theology of being presbyterians here in Northeast New Jersey. That is part of our identity and will continue to be even as we seek out new ways to be and do church. Some congregations will express themselves through their work in social justice. Other congregations will express themselves as learning communities. Still, others will continue to serve as traditional institutional churches in and for their community.

As Paul reminds us, "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work." I would simply add the following: There are different expressions of the church, but it is the same God whom we serve.

Steve Huston
Organizing Co-Leader