

The In-Between Times

God is doing a new thing. - Isaiah 43:19

Presbytery Assembly, February 13, 2016
First Presbyterian Church of La Grange

On February 13, 2016, the Presbytery of Chicago gathered together as a learning, worshipping, and debating community. Praying together, renewing our baptisms, singing, and installing Jennifer Burns Lewis as the 2016 Assembly moderator, the Presbytery committed itself to staying centered during the in-between times. It also agreed to use the World Café model to chart its path through the in-between times.

Vision

The three transitional teams, the VERGE, Congregational Vitality, and Mission Collaboration, have been hard at work over the last year. In December, they converged to share their respective learnings, update one another on their work, and explore how to reach leaders, congregants, and communities on a grassroots level. After exploring several options, the ConVerge believed World Café would best serve the Presbytery of Chicago in this season. To date, the presbyteries of Charlotte, Mid-Kentucky, Transylvania, and Southern New England have been led by Howard Mason in The World Café process.

What - The World Café is a whole-group interaction method focused on conversation. People sit four to a table and hold a series of short conversations. At the end of each round, one person remains at the table as the host, while the other three travel to new tables, bringing the conversation threads with them -- and then the conversation continues, deepening as the rounds progress.

Why - World Café is far more than “just talk.” Cafés provide a quick and effective method to make headway on what can otherwise be a tedious planning process. The experience of World Café for sister presbyteries has been incredibly productive. The co-creation process

fosters large scale buy-in creating long-term sustainability for emergent plans.

When - Over the next month, six members of the converge team will interview people to serve as World Café Design Hosts. Once the team is formed they will work with Howard Mason to design, as well as schedule the cafes to take place in late spring and early summer.

Where - World Cafés will take place across the presbytery, both in congregations and in community settings. It is hoped that some of our community partners will also participate as together we seek to make a missional difference in the communities that we serve.

Relationships

Change is stressful. It challenges three basic human needs: for safety, for meaning, and for a sense of connection to others. Led by Rev. Laurie Ferguson, the assembly looked at how Elijah, on the lam from Jezebel (1 Kings 19:1-15), hid from God and the world in a physical cave and a cave of his own anxiety. He was in a “red zone,” where creativity and hope are in short supply, and all one can do is repeat the same grievances over and over.

But then God spoke to Elijah in a gentle whisper, a still small voice, drawing him from his cave into the “green zone” of meaning, connection and hope. By practicing gratitude and allowing ourselves to be awestruck by our Creator, we too can return to our green zones when we are feeling lost, threatened, or disconnected.

Ministry

LEAD is coming! On Saturday, March 5, the Presbytery will gather at McCormick Seminary from 8:00 to 12:15 for a special LEAD event: “LEADing CHANGE.” Change happens. Are you and your congregation prepared? If you come, you will be.

Structure

Of course, there were votes. The Presbytery approved Rev. Kara Smith-Laubenstein as an associate pastor at Libertyville First (she had been temporary); celebrated the successful transition of Canto de Esperanza into Clement; blessed Grace Commons’ new path; passed seven overtures; dismissed three administrative commissions with gratitude; and gave the executive presbytery staff a small raise. And the meeting ended an hour early.