

Report to Convention 2018  
Missioner for Servant Leadership  
The Rev. Jennifer Gregg

**Cathedral of the Beloved:**

“Here is what we seek: a compassion that can stand in awe at what the  
poor have to carry  
rather than stand in judgment at how they carry it.” Gregory  
Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart*

The dominant narrative for those outside the Berkshires has often been that it is a wealthy community that has many resources available. During the summers, people come from near and far to experience Tanglewood, Shakespeare and Company, and Jacob’s Pillow, among others. Here, they can remain blissfully unaware of the stories of struggle and hardship that lie just around the corner, where the effort to find decent affordable housing is an ongoing struggle, where too many families and individuals are battling and succumbing to the opioid epidemic that plagues this region. This year, as I look back, we have lost four regular members of our community, 3 to alcohol or opioid overdose. Each grief has compounded the other. And yet, at the same time, within those stories of struggle, there is a spirit of hope, perseverance and community that is to be marveled. As one regular volunteer said to me recently, his mantra continues to be, “love is stronger than drugs. Love is stronger than drugs.” We continue to work to embody that mantra.

As we engage in this ongoing work, outside of our weekly Sunday gathering, we have also collaborated with St. Stephen’s and Zion Lutheran to offer Laundry Love once a month, each community offering it once a quarter. We also have weekly Bible Study and have a consistent presence on Wednesday evenings at St. Joe’s kitchen at South Congregational. Here, participants have been able to continue projects with artist in residence Jim Day, and a chapel area has been built to create a safe place for pastoral conversation and prayer.

This year, we also mobilized when needed to address the systemic needs of the community. Last year, it was through our weekly interactions with members that we ultimately learned Gov. Baker had frozen a multitude of earmarks, one being the funds to support and open the emergency cot shelter in Pittsfield for the winter months. Using our network of congregations and connections with BIO, a letter writing campaign began. As a result of these efforts, the earmark was unfrozen and the funds were released to provide the shelter needed for community members.

We are continually grateful for the many communities that have us and come out each week to provide a meal. We are also grateful for the congregations who have supported us financially. I’d like to give special thanks to the following:

South Congregational, Pittsfield  
St. Stephen’s, Pittsfield  
First Methodist, Pittsfield  
Trinity Episcopal, Lenox  
St. John’s, Williamstown  
St. Joseph’s, Pittsfield  
First Congregational, Lee  
First Congregational, Dalton  
Seton Family  
First Congregational, Great Barrington  
Laurie and Heather at North St. Coin Op.  
Berkshire Interfaith Organizing

**Leadership Development in the Diocese:**

**Loving the Questions:** In 2017-2018, Loving the Questions had six people complete this process. Topics explored included: Spiritual Autobiographies, Spiritual Disciplines, Exploring Vocational Questions, Stories of Call and Ministry around the Diocese. This fall we have welcomed 9 new people to the program and with approval from the Commission on Ministry, have opened this program up ecumenically with our first United Church of Christ participant. Craig Hammond, a former participant of Loving the Questions, has also been brought on board to help lead and facilitate this process as part of his call to help people explore their call to ministry. Loving the Questions continues to be safe and intentional space for individuals who are either discerning a call to ordained ministry or seeking to deepen their baptismal identity to listen for the Spirit’s movement as they wrestle with the questions of their heart.

**Prophetic Leadership Curriculum:** This summer, I was invited to represent the diocese to develop a curriculum on Prophetic Leadership in collaboration with Episcopal City Mission. We have gathered regularly throughout the summer and into this fall to put together this 8 month process. The structure of this curriculum is being built around Michael Ganz's concept of "The Story of Self, Us, and Now" as well as drawing on contemplative practices. Our hope at the end is to "inspire and support parishes who are yearning to be in deep relationship with their surrounding community and the goal is position them at the end to be in right relationship with local grassroots organizations." In January 2019, five parishes between the Diocese of Western Massachusetts and Massachusetts will be invited to participate in this process.

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Outside of these endeavors, I participated and worked with The Rev. Peter Swarr and Susan Schneider in their program Explorations in Christian Leadership hosted at All Saints, North Adams. Congregations were also introduced to the power of story-telling through God's story, Our Story. This introductory worship is a mini-introduction to the Story of Self by Michael Ganz and as we move into 2019 can serve, in part, as an introduction to the Prophetic Leadership curriculum currently being developed. Workshops were also led on From Surviving to Thriving: Cultivating the Life Within and a retreat for women was held with Grace of the Southern Berkshires.

Faithfully Submitted,

The Rev. Jennifer Gregg,  
Missioner for Servant Leadership