

Report to Convention 2021
Missioner for Servant Leadership
The Rev. Jennifer Gregg

Cathedral of the Beloved:

At the end of 2020, the leadership of Cathedral of the Beloved (COTB) took a leap of faith during an end of the year retreat and proposed a new vision for downtown Pittsfield as we emerge from this pandemic: a Beloved Community Campus. With congregation communities in flux and all with a collective interest in the well-being and empowerment of the most vulnerable in Pittsfield, this vision of collaborative relationships among congregations, non-profits and businesses has been a catalyst for a new vision of our ministry and life within downtown Pittsfield.

In discerning this, the COTB Leadership Council expanded and leadership strengthened. Multiple grants were submitted to support this evolving vision and we were granted a New Episcopal Church Start Grant for \$5,000. As part of this discernment, six leaders from within COTB and downtown churches attended the ACTIVATOR Training by the national church, gaining a skill set and strategies to activate this vision. I have met with Leadership Council members and judicatory heads in the Diocese, New England Synod, Southern New England Synod and Methodist Conference for consultation and support. In May and June of 2020, I preached at the local congregations— St. Stephen's, Zion Lutheran, First Methodist, South Congregational/First Congregational— to further and deepen the conversation.

Congregations were invited to build new and thoughtful relationships with their faith and with each other via a book study of *Praying with our Feet*, by Lindsey Krinks. Multiple study groups were held via zoom, and thirty-one people from multiple congregations participated. Our planning for this fall includes bringing moderators/wardens together to build relationship, discern strengths and goals for each church community, and begin to develop a vision for shared community service.

This year, we hired a Community Care Coordinator, Becky Crane, who brings skills as a LCSW and experience as a pastoral assistant at a local UCC church. Her focus is to strengthen skills by providing a Community Care Training for volunteers who serve and are served by COTB. When COVID restrictions lift, we hope to offer a space for regular conversation and skill building for volunteers at meal sight/food pantries.

We cultivated church online through regular Thursday evening Compline, and Morning Prayer on Tuesday mornings. We introduced Walking Wednesday's during the summer, pilgrimaging to places of importance in the community and introducing our online audience to some of these spaces: South Congregational Food Pantry, First Methodist and Homeless Shelter, and the North. St. Coin Op. (our Laundry Love program).

In June, we joyfully returned to the lawn of St. Joe's after being away for almost two years. Since returning, we have reunited with friends from across the community. Our Community Care Coordinator and our Associate Pastor, The Rev. Sloan Letman, are available once weekly at a sidewalk table of a community coffee shop to offer welcome, conversation and pastoral counseling to members of the COTB community.

In collaboration with COTB, our neighbors in north Berkshire County, North Adams and Williamstown, have begun to discern what a Cathedral of the Beloved–North might look like and they also received a New Episcopal Church Start Discernment Grant. COTB staff and members are working with their forming team to discern what form this might take, holding in common our Statement of Practice.

In the midst of this pandemic— perhaps even a bit stimulated by it— 2020/2021 has been a miraculously formative year for a new vision. We look forward to providing leadership in partnership to further develop and expand this vision to actualize a Beloved Community of Pittsfield while continuing to hold to our core of being present with the most vulnerable in our community.

Leadership Development in the Diocese:

Loving the Questions: Loving the Questions successfully completed its shift to Zoom in March of 2021, celebrating with The Rt. Rev. Bishop Fisher and sponsoring clergy, the 28 participants who spent time deeply listening for the Spirit’s movement. From the 28 that participated, roughly 9 went on to Communities of Discernment to further discern Holy Orders.

To aid in our registration process and make information regarding Loving the Questions more accessible, Craig Hammond and I developed a website for this work: www.lovingthequestions.org Development of the website, enabled us to focus on three main messages for this space: “You are unique.” “You are called.” “Your story matters.”

This fall we continue to be grateful for our partnership with the Diocese of Massachusetts and our ability to extend this space to Province I. A new class of Loving the Questions began with 21 participants in September: 12 from the Diocese of Western Massachusetts, 7 from the Diocese of MA, 1 from the Diocese of Spokane, 1 from the Diocese of New Hampshire. We are thrilled to work with three co-leaders who facilitate small groups: Don Temples, The Rev. Peter Feltman-Mahan and Chelsea Smith (Dio. of MA). Our work continues to focus on living out our baptismal covenant.

To create a space of deep listening and cultivating discernment in community, we are implementing a process modeled after the work and teachings of Lois Lindbloom and Shalem, Institute for Spiritual Formation. Shalem is a new resource for us that offers in-depth support for contemplative living and leadership. They have provided us with training and ongoing support for the work of discernment in small groups.

We are grateful for the following people and initiatives that continue to shape our work:

- Holy Orders Discernment with Canon Rich Simpson and Archdeacon Jane Griesbach who co-lead an adjacent space for those considering Holy Orders for 4 sessions.
- Society of St. John the Evangelist (SSJE) — especially Br. Jim Woodrum for his enthusiasm and presence with us last year and in the year to come.
- Shalem Institute and their process of group spiritual direction that enriches and deepens this space.

- *Together we Thrive* and The Rev. Heather Ramsey-Mabrouk (UCC) and The Rev. Claire Bamberg (UCC) who help us to coordinate and oversee a process that matches TWT coaches with participants.
- Bethany House of Prayer (Arlington, MA) and presenters Julia Slayton, and Mary Meader. They are helping us as we seek to implement the wisdom of spiritual direction as a support for nurturing our spiritual lives.

We give thanks to conversation partners around the country who have come alongside, shared resources and joint enthusiasm for creating spaces where God's people can listen deeply for the Spirit's movement in their lives.

Professional Coaching

Coaches in our diocese and through *Together We Thrive* continue to be available to vestries, clergy and wardens. There are now 5 clergy who have been fully trained in both the ACC and PCC levels through training offered through TWT. Two lay people are also now fully trained as ACC coaches. There will be a new cohort of clergy from the diocese who will be invited to participate in the coach training through TWT. Current coaches include:

The Rev. Jennifer Gregg
 The Rev. Heather Blais
 The Rev. Jose Reyes
 The Rev. Dave Woessner
 The Rev. Mary Frances Curns
 John Cheek
 Dick DeLorme

This past year our diocesan coaches, participated in the coach offered through *Loving the Questions*. Coaching was also introduced to new clergy in *Fresh Start* and worked with a few congregations throughout the diocese. Questions around coaching for you and your parish can be directed to: revjgregg@gmail.com

Together We Thrive – Prior to the pandemic, the diocese along with the New England Synod (ELCA) and the Southern New England Conference (UCC) were awarded a million-dollar grant from The Lilly Foundation to encourage clergy wellness. Outside of coaching which I described in greater detail above, *Together We Thrive* initiative also offers:

Tending the Fire is a retreat for clergy to learn about family system dynamics and parish life. To date we have had four clergy from the diocese participate in this ecumenical offering

Communities of Practice, ecumenical gatherings where clergy can come together to be fed and share in mutual support, as well as Affinity Groups, focusing on specific areas, have begun to be offered again. These have included the following:

- **Tending the Holy Fires** (Group Spiritual Direction)
- **Rainbow Path** (LGBTQ+ Group)
- **Women in Ministry**
- **Playing with Prayer** with Broth Luke from SSJE

Outside of these endeavors, I am also leading Fresh Start with Canon Rich Simpson and continue to serve on the Vitality Team.

Faithfully Submitted,
The Rev. Jennifer Gregg,
Missioner for Servant Leadership