

Enews for 4/12/2023

Is your congregation facing a volunteer shortage? You are not alone. As we begin the fourth year since COVID-19 upended our lives, churches and other organizations whose work largely relies on volunteers are struggling as volunteerism has not returned to 2019 levels. In my visits with pastors and congregations around the presbytery since I arrived, I have heard some common struggles shared by our largest and smallest congregations alike:

We haven't been able to start up Sunday School again because we can't get teachers.

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No one wants to serve on session, we're hoping that having two-year instead of three-year terms will help.

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Some members are serving on three committees to try and keep everything going. God bless them, but I worry that they're going to burn out and then where will we be?

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COVID forced us to try some new things that are really working, but now people want to start up some old ministries again. I'm not sure we have enough people and energy for everything.

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I was preaching Sabbath and boundaries for years. COVID forced some people to slow down which is good, but now I'm short handed!

If those sound familiar, you are not alone. The presbytery has this challenge too. When the Committee on Nominations & Representation meets next week it will try to fill 16 vacancies on presbytery committees! The other thing that the Nominating Committee will do is begin to ask the question, "What if we can't fill them?" The truth is this: things will be different after COVID for both our congregations and presbytery. The task of leadership then is not to ask "what was?" but "what's next?" [To help with that I commend this exercise from the Congregational Consulting Group.](#) Social scientists will be studying the impact of COVID on the church for years to come but if you want to see some of their early work I encourage you to read [this article from Faith & Leadership at Duke Divinity School and the EPIC study from which it draws.](#)

Finally, as you plan, I encourage you not to lose perspective. Remember that the Church of Jesus Christ has experienced ebbs and flows throughout time as we have survived persecution and plagues and experienced reformation and revival. Through it all, the Church has endured (though it wasn't always sure it would). So, if you are feeling anxious (and who isn't?) take heart in the constancy of God, the perseverance of the saints, and my favorite verse of *The Church's One Foundation*:

*Tho' with a scornful wonder
the world sees her oppressed,
by schisms rent asunder,
by heresies distressed,
yet saints their watch are keeping;
their cry goes up, "How long?"
and soon the night of weeping
shall be the morn of song.*

May the Peace of Christ be with you,
Barry