

SPECIAL GALA EDITION

CROSS ROADS

Where the Acts of Faith meet

An occasional newsletter of South Presbyterian Church & the Acts of Faith Community



**THE MARK
OF AN EFFECTIVE CHURCH
IS NOT HOW MANY
PEOPLE COME
BUT
HOW MANY PEOPLE WHO
LIVE DIFFERENTLY AS
A RESULT OF HAVING
BEEN THERE.**

A

REPORT ON OUR CELEBRATION September 22-24, 2023



What a great time to be a church!!! Our Gala Celebration on the weekend of September 22-24 was a highlight for so many of us as we discussed what God has done through us for 175 years and more specifically, for the last ten years. And then we directed our attention to sharing what we have learned with our sister churches in the presbytery. Immediately following that, we opened our arms and our hearts to our partner organizations and elected officials who wanted to honor those who came before us and the work we continue to do. Rounding out our weekend was a worship service to kick off this

Year of Celebration

This will be a special issue of our *Cross Roads Newsletter*, as we will focus on the events of our Gala Weekend because as with our Acts of Faith community, nobody attends everything. We may be part of different ministries and different Aof's, but we are all connected to South Presbyterian Church. This is a time of celebration and future planning for all of us, so I invite you to read carefully and feel blessed by what God is doing through our "merry little band of believers." Who we are as this little portion of the Body of Christ in this part of the world is because we – and those who came before us – have said YES! to God ... YES! to the Spirit's invitation ... YES! to becoming who we didn't even imagine we could become. And what we all affirmed on that weekend in September was that we intend to continue saying YES!



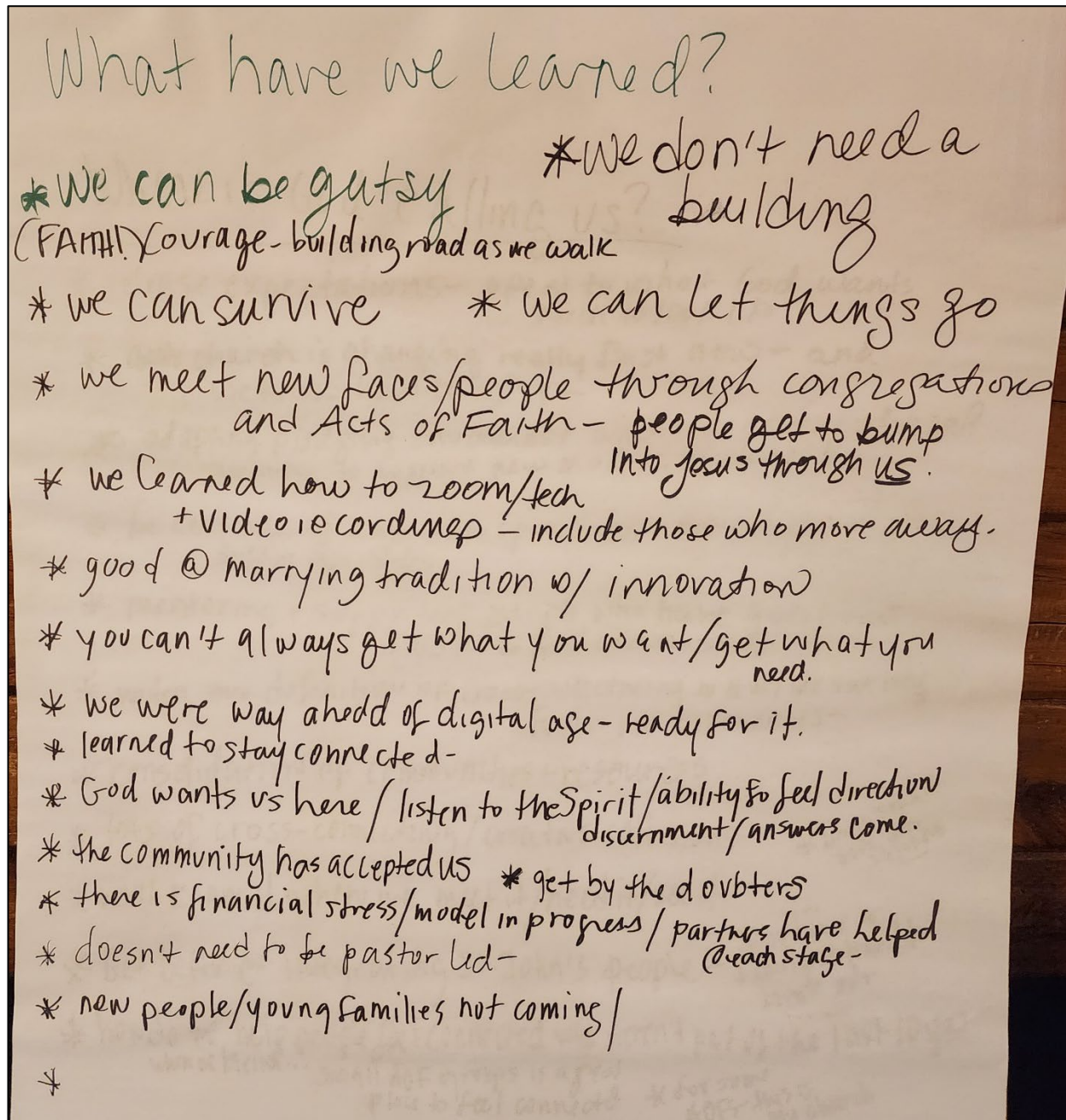
To God be the Glory for writing our story!
Pastor Deb

Friday Evening All-AoF Potluck

Members of AoF Community gathered at the Carmen Clark Lodge at 777 Westfall Road in Brighton to feed each other through potluck and conversation. Our special guest from Louisville, Rev. Ray Jones was joined by AoF participant Rev. Rachel McGuire to lead all in a discussion of: **Part I: 10 Years - What Have We Learned?** **Part II: What's Next? Where is God Calling Us?** and **Part III: When Deb retires, what do we need to look for in a Pastor?** Following are the newsprint sheets of ideas generated.

They're presented here to bring us all up to date – even those who couldn't or didn't attend, but also to provide a record of where we are as a snapshot in time. Hopefully, we will be able to refer to these throughout the year as we continue to explore what this year of celebration means to us.

Part I: 10 Years - What Have We Learned?



Part II: What's Next? Where is God Calling Us?

Where is God calling us?

- * release expectations - open to what God wants
church to look like
 - * ~~the~~ church is changing really fast now - and
we know how to adapt
 - * adapting pledging structures + whole denominational
structures - to support new models of church -
 - * be conscious of A/F demographics - more older adults
shifting ministries
 - * mentoring + supporting people who have questions
in and out of A/F communities
 - * widen our definition of God - welcoming to a wide variety
faiths - and experiences -
 - * consolidation of communities + resources
 - * lots of cross-connecting / creative collisions -
 - * we'll know it when we meet it / need it / see it
 - * Get better @ integrating St. John's people -
 - * how do we help people feel connected who weren't part of the last 10 yrs?
when we blend... small A/F groups is a great
place to feel connected
- * bring small
AOFs into
St. John's
- Sometimes a
family is hard to
break into.
- * for some
AOFs - this is
my church

Part III: When Deb retires, what do we need to look for in a Pastor?

- What do we need to look for
its going to be tough in a pastor
- we have internal v. today who are we
 - may need interim -
 - being comfortable w/ sharing bivocational pastor Rochester
 - creative ways to share - watch videos - share services - consolidate - community organizer
 - flexibility - imagination
 - energy - organizational skills
 - non-traditional
 - communication skills
 - Jack of all trades - web skills (internal folks to support to do / list)
 - strong leader - knows where to go
 - & empowering others - developing others
 - sense of humor
 - independently wealthy / financial acumen (Kevin)
 - pastoral care skills - w/ aging folks
 - Deb has the skeletons of 2 people
 - on board w/ growing & sustaining AOF model has vision for building it
 - open to someone called here to bring us in new directions



Saturday Afternoon Panel Discussion

Saturday Afternoon at Third Presbyterian Church forty people from various churches in the Presbytery of Genesee Valley gathered to ponder ***What's Next and How do We Get There?*** The almost-two hour panel, led by Susan Orr, Transitional Leader and Stated Clerk for the Presbytery set the scene by saying the following.

Adapted from the back of the book: Beyond Resistance addresses the realities faced by what too many (including myself) have called a dying institution. It is a call to move the institutional Church out of a modality of denial and into a perspective of hope; out of a paradigm of scarcity and into a world of possibility with a growing multiplicity of options and allies; out of a time of end-game scenarios where only the fit (or big) will survive to where those who are faithful to the gospel (and not their building or their past) ensure that Church continues long after they have left this earth.

Why now?

In 2001 when I began in ministry in PGV, we had 76 churches, just under 20,000 members. Today we have 55 and 6,612 members. We are likely to dismiss/dissolve three more in the coming year.

"If we DO NOTHING DIFFERENT, by 2040* all of our current churches sized 100 and less will be gone."

Dr. Bill Drummond,
Professor of Urban Analytics, GA Tech, PCUSA MWS
* Post-COVID estimates have revised this to 2030

If we can accept that some churches are going to die; if we can trust the capacity of our faith to sustain us through the grief and the pain that will come every time one does; and if we can shift our strategic approach to these deaths from reactive to proactive (meaning we have to be honest in our assessments with church leaders about their future); then we can have a very different kind of conversation about death.

It is a great time to be the Church. There is hard and painful work ahead. I have no doubt that in time the Church will look back on this moment and be grateful both for those who had the courage to change, and those who had the courage to hold strong to their convictions. I believe the Holy Spirit is behind this work, and that we should trust it. I believe that because the world has shifted so dramatically, the Spirit is birthing a new way of being Church so that the gospel message can be heard, received, and transmitted in ways the postmodern world can accept.

After that introduction she asked a series of questions to be answered by our panelists:

The Rev. Dr. Ray G. Jones, III – Director of Theology, Formation and Evangelism for the PC(USA)

Ruling Elder Barb Sixbey – former Evangelism Coordinator at SPC and one of the founding members of the Acts of Faith Community

Pastor Whitney Scoville – Pastor of the Ogden Presbyterian Church and also the shepherd of the 1001 New Worshipping Community, *Pray & Play*.

After her introductory remarks, Susan posed some of the following questions, but also listened intently and led the discussion to areas that emerged from the panelists' responses.

- How would you describe a “successful congregation”?
- What is hopeful in your current context?
- “What I do not any longer accept is a commitment to my way of being Church as the only legitimate and acceptable way because it works for me. No matter which expression of the Church you find most fulfilling, the other expressions are not your enemies.” What is your reaction to this quote from *Beyond Resistance*?
- The Church is the Church when lives are changed. It is the Church when it inspires people to use their time, talent, and resources to serve the common good. It is the Church when it helps people love themselves, God, and their neighbor. Developing new habits around measuring these successes could very well be what the Church is called to think about.” What is your reaction to this quote from *Beyond Resistance*?

Members of the audience asked questions and were particularly engaged around the areas of “defining success” and “developing a new matrix for membership and giving.” The wealth of knowledge and experience among those attending was deep.

A full, un-edited video of the panel discussion can be found on our YouTube Channel with a link from our website, or by clicking [HERE](#).

Saturday Afternoon Recognition & Reception

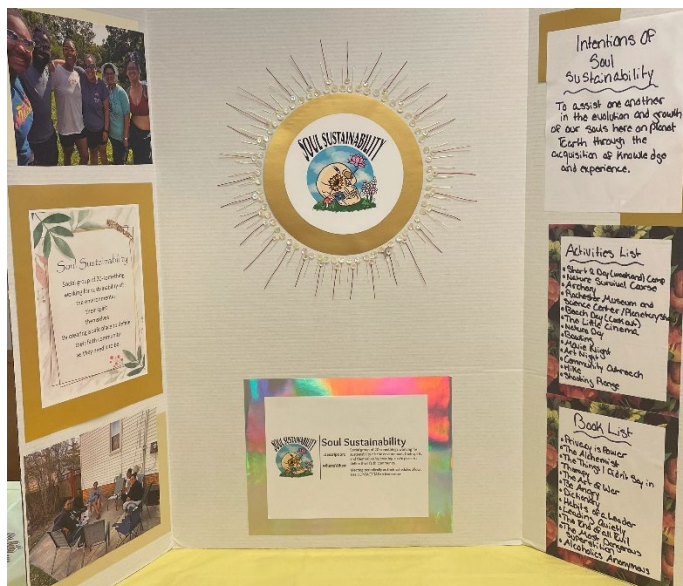
At the heart of our weekend celebration was the essence of who we are as a church now – The Acts of Faith Community. Beginning at 3PM, approximately 50 individuals from our sisters churches, our own AoF's and the community came to recognize and lift up South's 275 years of community organizing, sharing the transforming love of Christ, and daring to step out into the unknown by saying YES! to the Spirit's call.

Our thanks to Third Presbyterian Church for sharing their space with us, and a special thank you to Kevin Fuller, our Director of Operations who coordinated our Deacons, John Hust and others in arranging for food donations, furniture set-up, registration, and more. ***Kevin, we couldn't do it without you!***



Each Act of Faith had a presentation space and someone present to answer questions about their way of “being the church.” Those pictures follow.

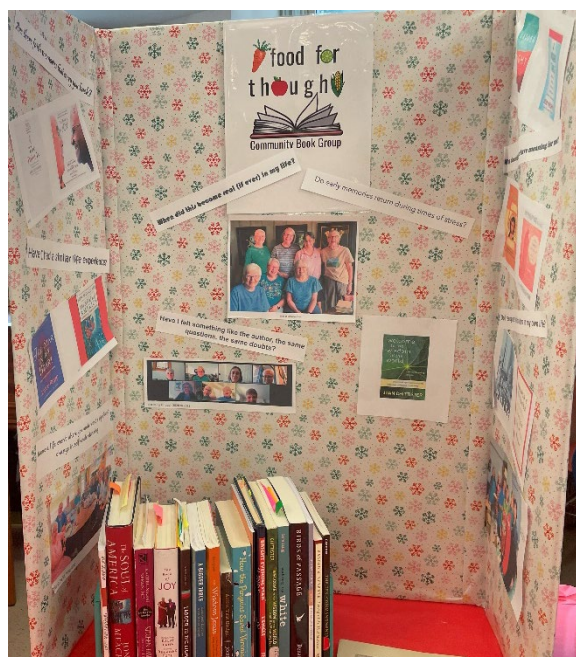
If you are viewing this online, please zoom in to see the detail of these presentation boards.



Soul Sustainability



Water from the Well, Evening Prayer,
eWorship, DVD Ministry, Senior Spirituality



Food for Thought



Ring for Joy!



Sing for Joy!



Matthew 25, Matthew 25 Study Group
Living Bread Ministry



New Life Food Cupboard



Cuppa the Bible



LoveJoy Fellowship



Fellowship of Faith



Firebird Spirit



As our guests were mingling in the room, enjoying the amazing refreshments from Hedonist Chocolates, Savoia Pastry Shoppe, Rubino's and Cheese & Charcuterie, we gathered 'round to hear the well-wishes of community partners and elected officials. County Executive Adam Bello was present to read the proclamation from Monroe County, and shared that he had no idea such a progressive church as South existed here.

Letters were received from the County Exec, Rochester City Mayor Malik Evans, U.S. Representative Joe Morelle, New York State Assemblymember Harry Bronson, and the former Presbytery Leader, Rev. Amy Williams Fowler.

Also sending their greetings and blessings were our partners in the community, the Rochester Psychiatric Center, Community of the Savior who purchased our building from us, and the St. John's Community. The Proclamations and Letters are online and can be viewed by clicking [HERE](#).

Sunday Afternoon Worship

Our Gala Weekend wrapped up around the theme, “How did We Ever Get Here?” When Pastor Deb couldn’t attend due to illness, Elder Mary Lee Miller read her sermon, thus rounding out a worship service that included Ray Jones, Andy Pratt and Holly Powell as leaders. Ring for Joy! and Sing for Joy! provided musical inspiration in dedicating the next decade to the Acts of Faith Community and South’s next 175 years. Special thanks to our music ministry that has continued the long tradition of musical excellence from our very beginning.



Photo Credits: Kevin Fuller, Andy Pratt & Deb Swift



It was a great kick-off to a very special year!