

Pastor's Report June 2021

My activity from May 20 to June 17, 2021 includes:

22 pastoral counseling appointments, 3 meetings with staff, ministry leaders and parishioners, 2 Zoom meetings with community leaders, 1 in-person meeting with a visitor, 2 Zoom meetings with visitors/newbies from the virtual service, providing spiritual counseling, support, encouragement, follow through, ministry interest with volunteers, members, and friends of MCC Richmond.

It is a blessing to return to open in-person worship and church activities. Having people in the sanctuary greeting each other, giving appropriate hugs, and seeing smiles on faces warms my heart. It has been impressive how people have responded well to respecting personal space, some wearing masks ... others not, no one appearing to be uncomfortable but grateful to be in our holy and safe space of worship.

It is also wonderful how the in-person folks appreciate and value our virtual offerings and congregation. Together, we are learning to develop a hybrid ministry and all that encompasses. We are literally learning another aspect of doing and being church differently ... and it's wonderful! Sunday School and the Centering Community are the first ministries to transition to a hybrid reality. I look forward to more small groups and ministries determining if they will utilize this mode of ministry.

Community groups have contacted me and are interested in returning to holding meetings at the church. Prime Timers will begin meeting in the Celebration Hall the afternoon of July 11. Two AA meetings want to return to using the church. As I've received these requests, I have been clear that all Community Groups are expected to follow the same protocols as the congregation in respecting personal space, and wearing a mask if not fully vaccinated. There has been no objection to these guidelines.

The Virginia Department of Health Mobile Vaccination Clinic will return Thursday, June 24 to vaccinate anyone wishing to be vaccinated. Because of the positive exercise and reception last month, they are also bringing a staff person to offer suggestions for self-care and medical screening for homeless people and seniors.

The Branch House Museum of Architecture and Design has generously offered for MCC Richmond to hold Bubba Bruce's Celebration of Life Service and the 43rd anniversary Homecoming Service inside the building. The reception and picnic lunch will be held outside on the shaded patio. What a blessing that our neighbors at the Branch House are grateful to have us and are also looking out for us during the summer heat!

The third octave of handbells have arrived, and they are beautiful. I'm looking forward to holding rehearsal in the Fall and can't wait to use the added bells!

The Vicky Hester Food Pantry (VHFP) continues to thrive in every way possible. One Thursday this month we decided to not have the usual chili dogs and instead add a third choice (we always have meatloaf and bologna) sandwich option. It was astounding to realize that people know which Thursdays we serve chili dogs and which Thursdays we serve Sloppy J's. We felt sad that our guests were disappointed we didn't have chili dogs but also learned just how much

they count on and appreciate the routine of chili dogs and Sloppy J's. The Panera Bread Ministry donations have been abundant this month. This was perfect timing because the RAM Food Pantry at VCU opened and asked if we could begin donating bread again. A mid-year report sharing how the \$5000 Diversity Richmond grant is being used has been sent and received. Bill Harrison continues to be thrilled with the ways the grant has been used, how it helps the VHFP continue to expand, and the volume of people being served each month. During May MCC Richmond's feeding ministries served 880+ people.

Calvin Wills, Jr. continues to be a blessing to me personally and does an excellent job with assigned and ongoing regular tasks. He responds to requests within record time which I appreciate. Macon Mann is doing a fantastic job holding the music ministry volunteers together and providing excellent accompaniment for soloist, the Spirits of Joy and worship. Amanda Granozio is directing the Spirits of Joy and assigning who leads what songs for Sunday worship. We certainly miss Ginny but are grateful she is doing her best to take good care of herself so she can return to us as soon as possible.

Within a few days I will celebrate moving to Richmond (June 25), beginning my ministry at MCC Richmond (July 1), and meeting the love of my life, Kirk Blandford (October 15). It blows my mind that I have been the pastor of MCC Richmond for 5 years ... where does the time fly? I am proud of my work as pastor and leading this amazing congregation. During this time there have been challenges galore, I have faced and experienced a variety of feelings, accusations, abuse, and heartache, dealt with conflict from and within the congregation, been through many ups and downs, and together we have survived a pandemic.

In 24 years of pastoral ministry, I have never experienced or encountered the intensity and depth of these experiences and behaviors. At times they can be overwhelming, brutal, and extremely painful. As I seek support from other UFMCC clergy and elders, I have learned these behaviors are common among UFMCC congregations. Being an advocate for healing and change, our work together as pastor and congregation has allowed these behaviors to come to the surface in a way that many of them, with continual work and effort, are resolved and people experience new freedoms and realities. It is the transparency and vulnerability we experience together in facing these behaviors that sets us free and brings us to appreciation of the beauty of God's loving embrace ... and allows to grow closer to one another and to thrive as a spiritual community. **This is one of the many reasons I love being your pastor.**

The truth is, MCC Richmond today is by far not the same congregation I met five years ago. Our witness of God's transforming love for one another is stronger than ever. Our service and outreach within the Richmond community and around the world is ongoing and growing. Our list of community partners continues to grow and on a regular basis we are asked by them to partner with them in making a positive difference within our community. I believe all of us have grown tremendously ... and many of us have grown together.

As we move forward into a new era of reality of ministry and being a transformative spiritual community, it is important for us to name, claim, address, work through our differences and disappointments, and take personal responsibility for our parts in them. It is equally important to realize and review the many ways God has blessed us which enables us to grow and transform ourselves as we transform the world. I love MCC Richmond and will continue to lead this congregation with integrity, strength, vision, and will do my best to address and work through conflict and behaviors within the congregation. I look forward to the next five years with

recognition of God as our Source of all things and our Provider of love and grace. Together, let us recognize the abundant blessings of our God and live in gratitude for God's hand in of all the ministries, experiences, and expressions of our spiritual community.

With gratitude,

-Pastor Kenny Callaghan