

A Matthew 25 Church? What does that mean?

Elizabeth Hewins, Mission and Service chair

In the January 7 edition of the Mission Presbytery Newsletter, our General Presbyter, Sallie Watson, issued a challenge to churches within the Presbytery. Her challenge is part of her goals she has established for the Presbytery, the Leadership Team and General Council. One of these goals is:

“That we increase the number of congregations which have signed on to the Matthew 25 Initiative from the Presbyterian Mission Agency. At last count, 11 of our congregations have officially signed on to building congregational vitality, dismantling structural racism, eradicating systemic poverty – one, two, or all of those emphases. Mission Presbytery and Synod of the Sun have also voted to take part”

So what IS a Matthew 25 initiative? Is our church one of 11 that has “officially” signed on? How can I find out more about this initiative, so I can make a decision about whether Northwood should be part of this program?

The Matthew 25 initiative is a program from the Presbyterian Church (PC(USA)), and the Presbyterian Mission Agency. Fortunately, there is a great deal of information about the program on the PC(USA) website. The URL is <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/matthew-25/>

Information on the website includes:

“Matthew 25:31–46 calls all of us to actively engage in the world around us, so our faith comes alive and we wake up to new possibilities. Convicted by this passage, both the 222nd and 223rd General Assemblies (2016 and 2018) exhorted the PC(USA) to act boldly and compassionately to serve people who are hungry, oppressed, imprisoned or poor.

“By accepting the Matthew 25 invitation, you can help our denomination become a more relevant presence in the world. We recognize Christ’s urgent call to be a church of action, where God’s love, justice and mercy shine forth and are contagious. And we rejoice how our re-energized faith can unite all Presbyterians for a common and holy purpose: our common identity to do mission.”

The Matthew 25 initiative includes three focuses. A church can opt to participate in one, two, or three of these, as Sallie mentions. The three areas of focus as summarized on the website are:

1. **Building congregational vitality** by challenging people and congregations to deepen their faith and get actively and joyfully engaged with their community and the world.
2. **Dismantling structural racism** by advocating and acting to break down the systems, practices and thinking that underlie discrimination, bias, prejudice and oppression of people of color. *(Continued)*

3. **Eradicating systemic poverty** by working to change laws, policies, plans and structures in our society that perpetuate economic exploitation of people who are poor.

Notice each one contains a “by” statement—the requirement that a church take active steps—ACTION! If you click on each of the three items on the website you will find additional information.

Focus Descriptions:

Building congregational vitality--A community’s vitality is primarily its spiritual strength and its capacity for purposeful mission. Congregational vitality is evident in a worshiping community when its structural systems, finances, and discipleship practices are aligned in such a way that the community is actively engaged in the mission of God in their local community and the world, and they are powerfully focused on growing as disciples in the way of Jesus Christ. Faith comes alive when we boldly engage God’s mission and share the hope we have in Christ. The Presbyterian Mission Agency has developed 7 “marks” of vitality in a church that we can use to make our assessment.

Dismantling structural racism— When the Northwood Mission and Service Committee offered the class on structural racism last fall, the curriculum and materials came directly from this website. There are suggested materials and activities for the church, as well as for each of us individually. Many of us who took the class also individually took the 21-Day Racial Justice Challenge. There are many materials and videos as additional resources for learning.

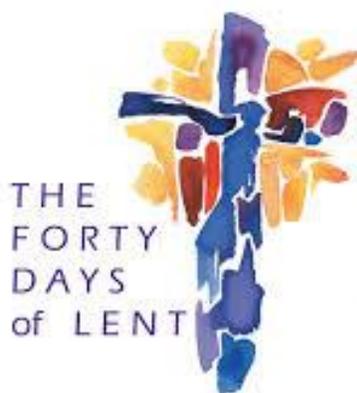
Eradicating systemic poverty--Did you know:

1 Racism, classism, ageism, and sexism are well-documented and mutually reinforcing trends. Disproportionate numbers of African-American and Hispanic families are headed by women, have little net worth, and constitute the largest number in poverty.

2 Homelessness is one of the most egregious signs of poverty. Watch video about how one Matthew 25 congregation in Southern California is making a difference in a homeless encampment.

All three of these focuses include information on the theology of the program, if you want further information on why the churches of PC (USA) are getting involved.

I challenge you to review these materials so you can decide if you think we should accept Sallie’s challenge.



Lent Activities for Kids and Families

Children and families of Northwood, we will begin the Lenten season with a brief virtual lesson on Ash Wednesday. Throughout Lent, there will be an activity calendar for families to follow along at home. We will meet the morning of Palm Sunday for a hike; kids will also make a craft for Holy Week to take home.

Ash Wednesday - February 17 - 5:30 PM

Palm Sunday - March 28 - 9:30 AM

Lent and Easter Services



Wednesday, Feb. 17, 6:30 pm ~ Ash Wednesday

- *Live Stream*

Thursday, April 1, 6:30 pm ~ Maundy Thursday

- *Live Stream*

Friday, April 2, TBD ~ Good Friday - *Online*

Sunday, April 3, 11:00 am ~ Easter Sunday - *TBD*



Session Actions in January

Finance, presented by Bob Lord: Session approved a 2021 Operating Budget. The budgeted total is \$281,360, which assumes several months of continued remote worship.

Safe Church Team, presented by Tommy Moreno. Plan for doors, sensors and mailbox keys was detailed.

Pastor Nominating Committee, presented by Elizabeth Hewins. Committee continues to work, now considering terms of call for a new pastor. A candidate will visit in February.

Personnel and Administration, presented by Cotton Clark. Approval to extend Covid-related leave and sick time through December; it will be refunded through payroll tax credit. Session approved P&A continue work on application for a second PPP loan/grant.

Day School Is a Busy Place



The students may have had the MLK holiday off, but the teachers and staff at the Day School were once again getting their learning on with another great staff development session. We were trained on a new assessment instrument: the ASQ-3 and SE2 (Ages and Stages Questionnaire). Northwood Day School is one of only 25 child-care centers in Bexar County to be given the chance to use this instrument!

The ASQ is a set of questionnaires about children's development in the academic and social-emotional domains. The ASQ can help identify a child's strengths as well as any areas where a child may need support. Since the parents are the best source of information about their child, the parent fills out the questionnaire. This is a great way for each teacher to be able to fine-tune their lessons so as to provide the highest quality early childhood education for each child. How fortunate Northwood Day School is to have this great assessment instrument at our disposal!!

Open enrollment for this summer and for the 2021-22 school year starts this month!!! Please let anyone you know who is looking for high-quality faith-based early childhood education for their child to contact us soon...spaces are filling up!

Even though we cannot invite visitors into the school yet, we are still having fun...we have had Channel Your Flannel day 😊. We wore our Spurs shirts to show our love for the Silver and Black. Next month we will celebrate Dr. Seuss and have fun activities as we Read Across America!! Thanks for your support of your Northwood Day School!!!



PW in February

Presbyterian Women circles will be meeting in February.

The Monday evening circle will meet Feb. 8 via zoom for fellowship followed by the study of Thessalonians written by Max Lucado. Contact Sherryl Walsh for information.

The Saturday circle will meet via Zoom at 9:30 AM on Feb. 13 for Lesson 6 in our study of Laments. Contact Elizabeth Hewins for Zoom information.

The Wednesday circle will meet Feb. 17 on the lawn at church. They also are studying Lesson 6 in our study of Laments.

All women are welcome at any of our circles. Contact Judy Harris for information or questions.



By being a part of activities at Northwood Presbyterian Church, you may find your image, voice, or quotes used in our social media, website or publications.