

## Congregations Facing the Challenges of COVID-19 Together and Having Fun While Doing It

by Ann Gibbs, Associate for Ministry Vitality

It's been a shock to our systems and church practices--discerning ways to function as the church in the midst of the COVID pandemic. It has also meant a rise in creativity, adaptability, and resiliency- all markers for what distinguishes vital congregations from those just going through the motions. But another important criterion (often overlooked) is fun. Do you find joy and excitement in your ministry? Unlike COVID-19, contagious enthusiasm for life in Christ is something the church has been longing to spread. Now two Milwaukee Presbytery pastors and their congregations are combating stress through the joy of working together.

It began at a session meeting. Kettle Moraine United Presbyterian Church (KMUPC) recalled that in the past their congregation and Delafield Presbyterian Church (DPC) had worked together in youth ministry. Was there an opportunity now to work together to face the challenges of COVID-19 church life and ease their struggles? Rev. Matt Lee of KMUPC reached out to Rev. Nikki Blanks of DPC and a partnership of congregations was made.

They started with worship. Larry Laux (DPC member) has a background in video and sound. He'd been helping Nikki create recordings of the service to post online. This was something Matt long wanted to do but didn't know how to get started. Together, he and Nikki developed a rotating worship plan utilizing the worship spaces of each congregation, one pastor preaching each week while the other provides the liturgy. In addition, Robin Wohlfeil, the music director at DPC, provides the worship music with members of KMUPC adding special musical offerings.

"Being online has been a game changer," said Matt. Both reflected that while actual membership numbers hadn't dropped in the past few years, attendance for worship had. Both congregations have retirees who like to travel, shut-ins, and others facing health challenges that mean they are not able to attend regularly. "But when it's online, they can join us wherever they are," said Nikki. And now they are seeing participation increase significantly.

It hasn't only been about sharing worship, either. Nikki has accessed Matt's Zoom account for mission meetings; and the congregations, who already had some mission partners in common, are discovering ways they might serve together. Together they are offering weekday morning prayer through Zoom and looking at how they might do a confirmation class. In the midst of the interview for this article, Matt offered to share KMUPC's office manager to help Nikki (who is without office support staff) get written copies of their services to those without the technology to access them online. From worship to mission to discipleship formation, they are discovering the strength of the great Presbyterian tradition of the connectional church.



Rev. Matt Lee of Kettle Moraine United Presbyterian Church and Rev. Nikki Blanks of Delafield Presbyterian Church

"It's not less work this way," says Nikki, acknowledging the time it takes to adapt to online ministry, "but it is a lot more fun."

That was clear as the two shared the ever-growing ideas they and their members are developing and the hopes that this spirit of working together continues long after COVID-19 is a thing of the past.

Jesus told his disciples that where two or three of them are gathered, he is in the midst of them. What about when *the two* are not individuals but congregations? Can you picture Jesus so stoked he's dancing, because I can!

*If you'd like to join KMUPC and DPC in worship, you can access their service at <https://www.kmupc.com/> or <https://delafieldpresbyterianchurch.org/virtual-services/>. Nikki and Matt are also open to other pastors interested in joining the fun.*