

A Last Word
Report to the Presbytery of Missouri River Valley
October 24, 2019
Rev. Dr. Mary Newbern-Williams
Executive Presbyter

Dear Missouri River Valley Friends,

This will be my last report as your Executive Presbyter.

As you know, I will be leaving this position soon. The work in which we have been engaged has taken shape in many ways. We have better connections with the larger church, which is essential as Presbyterians. We have begun to address ministry with our international partners and our immigrant partners in a more equitable manner. We have redesigned Mission and Evangelism toward a broader scope for this crucial area of ministry. We have welcomed new pastors into the presbytery and have provided more stable opportunities for congregations. The Omaha Presbyterian Seminary Foundation and the Synod of Lakes and Prairies have partnered with us every year of my time here in PMRV to provide needed funds for programming and congregational vitality events. Together, we have learned, expanded our horizons, and worked hard and well.

In addition, we have worked hard to impress upon congregations the importance of per capita and why we pay it; we have addressed the crucial place of mission giving in the work of Jesus Christ. We have begun a work toward understanding the complications of race and racism, along with expanding social justice issues. We have engaged in partnership with the ELCA Nebraska Synod. We have worked toward being connected with the larger denomination and remaining informed and abreast of all that is taking place around the nation and around the world as Presbyterians. We have re-established SDOP, COR, and PDA Committees. We have accomplished much in four and one-half years.

We have accomplished much; God has led us in outstanding directions.

God has shown us so much of the way ahead. One challenge will remain. That challenge is, “How will PMRV accept that challenge?” “How will PMRV live out faithfulness in servant leadership to Jesus Christ?” How will the vision PMRV develops be implemented?

I continue to pray that PMRV becomes a Matthew 25 Presbytery. A year-long resource for this fine ministry will be available at the Presbytery Meeting on October 24, 2019. Copies are available for your study and implementation in your congregations; in the meantime, you may access the PCUSA website and study this fine resource. In addition, I encourage you to read the most recent letter from our Stated Clerk, Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson. Our nation and the world are in crisis; a season of prayer is emphasized in his letter to us. Please read these attachments with interest. I have attached both for your convenience and will have copies for you at our Presbytery Gathering.

As PMRV continues to move through the transition in which it has been engaged, what are your dreams and what is your vision for this presbytery? What do you envision for PMRV in the next five years? How will you work in a collaborative manner to assure that vision?

May God continue to bless and keep all of you as God moves us forward.

“Keep the Faith; Live the Dream”.

The Lord bless you and keep you,

Mary

Rev. Dr. Mary Newbern-Williams
Executive Presbyter

New Matthew 25 online resource is designed for preachers, educators and worship planners

October 14, 2019 by [Presbyterian News Service](#)

LOUISVILLE (PNS) — Preachers, educators and worship planners who want to attend to the three themes of being a Matthew 25 church — building congregational vitality, eradicating systemic poverty and dismantling structural racism — have a new resource beginning with Dec. 1, the start of the new liturgical year, and carrying them through Pentecost on May 31, 2020.

“A Year with Matthew for a Matthew 25 Church,” part of the Matthew 25 Welcome Kit, is available for download by clicking [here](#).

A resource for the second half of the Christian year, Trinity Sunday through Reign of Christ, will be posted when it's available. Watch pcusa.org/matthew25 for updated content.



The resource, developed by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) [Office of Theology and Worship](#), takes advantage of a happy convergence: Matthew's Gospel is the focus of the Revised Common Lectionary Year A in 2019-20 and the April 2019 launch of the Matthew 25 invitation.

The resource has three primary components:

- A brief introduction to the Gospel of Matthew and how it functions in the lectionary

- Theological, pastoral and liturgical guidance for the seasons of the Christian year, with a focus on the three Matthew 25 themes
- Sermon prompts and music suggestions that highlight Christ's call to righteousness, justice and reconciliation in Matthew's Gospel.

"A Year with Matthew for a Matthew 25 Church" also has these resources:

- Seven ways to read the Gospel of Matthew (reading plans)
- "Emmanuel: God with Us," a public reading of the Gospel
- The Sermon on the Mount (Scripture reading and hymn festival)
- The 10 Miracles (Scripture reading and hymn festival)
- Reading Matthew in Daily Prayer (daily lectionary)
- Index to the Gospel of Matthew (appendix)

Beginning with the first Sunday in December, preachers, congregations and individuals are encouraged to use as much or as little of the resource as they like.

"You are encouraged to select the approaches that seem most appropriate and helpful, and to adapt as needed to suit your context," it states. "For instance, congregations might choose to host a reading of the Sermon on the Mount, but not the whole Gospel of Matthew. Preachers might decide to use some of the sermon series provided, but not others. Individuals might elect to use the 26-week reading plan for half the year and other options for the remainder."

Each Sunday comes with a Matthew (or alternate) passage, sermon prompts and featured hymns from the PC(USA)'s 2013 hymnal, "[Glory to God](#)."

The resource has tips for churches putting on special services. The "Emmanuel: God with Us" public reading of Matthew's Gospel, for example, advises readers not to read from individual scripts, but from the church's Bible. While it may be more convenient for readers, an individual script "can convey the impression that the Word of God is temporary and disposable. Reading from the church's book shows that this Word is a treasure we share."

And while it may be tempting for people in the congregation to follow along in their pew Bibles, "it is preferable that participants not be distracted by the written word during the reading, but that they attend to the Word proclaimed through the voice of the one who is speaking the good news. This is how we came to know the Word of God in Jesus Christ: as the Word made flesh."

A service on the 10 miracles Jesus performed as recorded in Matthew 8:1 through 9:34 includes questions for reflection following the service: What do these miracle stories reveal about Jesus? How does he relate to others, including the disciples, religious authorities, the crowds and people who have been outsiders and outcasts? What do these stories teach us about following Jesus today?

Questions seek to invite reflection and spark discussion about the Matthew 25 invitation. For example, how does what Jesus has to say about outsiders in Matthew 8:5-13 inform the church's work dismantling structural racism?

Does the story of Jesus talking to the scribes and the disciples before calming the storm in Matthew 8:18-27 — a dramatic story about fear and lack of faith — have anything to tell us about building congregational vitality?

It's likely that many of the people who experienced or witnessed the 10 miracles were living in poverty. Why? What difference does Jesus make in their lives, and how? What might this suggest about the church's work to eradicate systemic poverty?

Learn more [here](#).

by Mike Ferguson, [Presbyterian News Service](#)

OFFICE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Stated Clerk issues Call to Prayer

Prayers for struggles at home and abroad

October 14, 2019

Dear Friends in Christ,

Your Moderators and I are greatly troubled by the political struggle that is underway in our nation's capital, as well as other developments in the U.S. and around the world, and we feel led to call upon all



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Presbyterians to join us in a season of prayer.

As the struggle in the U.S. Congress over the question of articles of impeachment for President Trump moves forward, it is easy for our Christian faith to take "second place" behind our political views and preferences, and when that happens, it is very hard for the Holy Spirit to break through and lead us in the path of God's will. That struggle is made more difficult given the degree to which many of us have linked our own political preferences to our faith, suggesting that what we wish for is the will of God. May God save us from that trap as we pray for God's guidance that transcends our political bias.

While the political struggle goes on, consuming time, money, and political energy, we do well to remember the thousands of men, women, and children in our nation who will not have a full meal, now or in the days ahead, and who will spend the night on the

street, in an alley, or in an abandoned building. We must pray for God to create in our leaders the political will to end this outrage.

And we must not forget the tens of thousands of men, women, and children fleeing terror in their own countries, only to be abused, insulted, and ultimately pushed away, where they become prey to traffickers and other criminals.

While we engage in our own political conflicts, we must remember those around the world who are facing even more serious danger and even death. We know that immediately following the U.S. withdrawal of our troops from the Syrian border, where our Kurdish allies in the fight against ISIS have served, the removal of U.S. troops has led to the immediate attack by the Turkish armed forces on these allies, resulting in widespread death among the Kurds, the ignoring of refugees held there, and the release of many ISIS fighters who have been held there. We are called to pray for an end to the violence on all sides.

As we pray, we must also remember the people of the Caribbean. Many have died, others are still unaccounted for, and all have been left with their lives destroyed by the hurricane. Let us pray for all those who are victims and for all who are seeking to support them and help them rebuild. At the same time, let us pray for our sisters and brothers in Puerto Rico, where many are still separated from their homes and livelihoods as a result of the hurricane two years ago.

As we pray for these victims, let us also remember the many fellow citizens here in the U.S. who have been, and continue to be, imperiled by rogue weather that has destroyed property, lives, and livelihoods.

God is our help. Let us pray for God's active presence among our people and, especially, in the leaders of our nation as our crisis of governance unfolds.