

## **Section 4: This world and its people need Jesus!**

Yes, there is messiness in the church. But, in the meantime, we have a very broken, hurting world. We have a world and people who need Jesus. We cannot pause our mission and our ministry just because it's messy and just because we disagree on some things. That would not be faithful living. We need to continue to persevere in the mission and ministry of Christ.

Let me share some things about the mission and ministry of Christ in the West Virginia Conference. We ended the year 2021 with a total of 983 churches. This is the first time, in a long time, that we have fallen below the 1000 church line. There are opportunities within the West Virginia Conference to create new places for new people, to create new faith communities or new churches in new ways that may or may not need bricks and mortar. Our church membership has trended downward, and we have been averaging a decrease for about the past 32 years. It is not only these past two years that we have been experiencing a decrease; it is the past 32 years that this has been happening.

We need a reality check, and we need to put our data in perspective. We have some work to do! We need to do what our 2022 Day of Service pushed us to do: get our local churches – not just our Conference mission sites – but our local congregations, connected and engaged and building relationships with people and groups within our communities. And we need to put this service that connects us into practice not only for one day, but in every week. Thank you, George Webb and George Howard, for organizing a facilitating our Day of Service! We need to get out of our church buildings and make connections, build partnerships in new ways because there are people out there starving for the life that only Christ can give!

The percentage of our average number of people in attendance in our church buildings over the last two years declined. Due to the pandemic, we couldn't use our church building for periods of time. We still we have people that aren't ready to get back into gathering and we need to respect that. However, that doesn't mean that we lose connection with those people. Don't lose connection! I would challenge you to go back to your membership list, back to your constituency list, and if you haven't seen the persons

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on these lists, if you haven't heard from them, now is the time to make a connection! Now is the time to communicate to them that they are missed and that their absence has been noticed. And, as you move back to using your buildings, are you maintaining connection, building relationships with those who have joined your congregation online for the last two years?

We need to connect. We need to continue to make our connections and build them into relationships. We need to ask and to listen. Can we be of help? Are people in your community wallowing in the tragedy and the layered grief and pain that we have experienced in so many different ways over the last two years? These persons and our communities need hope, the hope of Christ, the hope of transformed life, new life. People need new life and for that to happen we need to connect and bring them to know Christ. We really do need to become spiritual trauma centers! People need the hope and the life that only Christ can give!

#### Reflection Questions

1. God has created us to be more than we have become! What is keeping you or your congregation from becoming more than it is now for the sake of the mission of Jesus Christ?
2. There are more connections to be made with people who need Christ! The day of service was not meant to be only a day of service. The whole point was to challenge churches to make new connections with people who need the healing, life giving power of Jesus – and not just for one day! How might you and your congregation make, develop new places for new people?? New connections that reach new people for Christ? How can you nurture new opportunities to connect people to Christ and make disciples?
3. There are three courses on Portico to help you and your leaders learn more about your community and begin to pray about doing something new: Prayer Walking, MissionInsite, and Contextual Communities.