

Moderator's Remarks

It was about a year ago when John Calvin Presbytery met in Iola, Kansas, when we were greeted with multiple signs asking, "HOW ARE YOU?" Dan Davis, our outgoing moderator, called us to reflect on the inner and outer aspects of our lives that perhaps we were not paying enough attention to, to remember who we were as children of God and siblings.

Maybe it was the obvious fact that the stole Dan later put on me was about two feet too long, and the enormous cross put around my neck was below my waist, but what I was silently thinking was, "I AM NOT SURE THAT I AM READY FOR THIS! I'm a small group, one-on-one person, this is A LOT. " AND that I would definitely have to do some alterations. So I did!

And in the year that has followed, I have discovered that while there was plenty of learning to do, there were unexpected gifts that accompanied it. And I didn't have to feel completely "ready" or "prepared," because fortunately, I could actually keep learning as we went along, and there were plenty of people (thanks especially to Malinda!) and experiences to help me do that.

A week later, I was on the road to Louisville for the Moderators' Conference, for an intense two and a half days of listening, cramming in information, engaging in practice sessions, and meeting new and a few old friends. We were inspired and encouraged, and I was thrilled by the number of young and a bit older adults in the room – they were hopeful and energetic, and even willing to invite 70 year old me to the party! We were encouraged to choose a theme for our year of moderating, and inspired by Dan, I decided that we would explore answers to "HOW ARE WE...?" to highlight all the ways the people of this Presbytery are involved in doing the work of the church.

More reading assignments and first meetings of Council and Presbytery followed. The new year also brought our new clerk, Bob Frasier, who had been an old friend from Kansas days. Ah! I could breathe easier now – the yellow brick road will be there, and help me find home!

In March, I attended Synod of MidAmerica and was able to learn more about our connections in our region and the plans for redesigning the way our Synod works. Again, what energy and hope, even in the middle of some uncertainty. And again, I connected new and old friends, as the church does what it does so well – welcome and include us all.

In May, Crocker welcomed us as a Presbytery with open arms and warm hospitality, showing us how vital they are to their community as a center for food and generous sharing. In August, we met remotely, “apart but together,” recognizing the gifts of small churches who meet faithfully together and serve where they are. We have since learned from a Toolbox event, where we were asked to consider whether we were really paying attention to people who are not “used to” church and how willing we are to change our behavior if they are brave enough to come through our doors.

In our larger world, the last few months have held deep uncertainties and hardship for many, with grief and anger for more. Times feel grave and at times it is easy to even wonder about our futures. But all around us, we see people acting in faith, speaking up, giving selflessly, and sharing hope. We *can still* grow, and we are – in our learning, our engagement, and our willingness to step out, faithfully, “step by step,” as Pastor Tom reminds us at Trinity. And this, for me, means I come to you today with gratitude. Thanks be to God for this year and you all!