

Penfield Presbyterian Church
1881 Jackson Rd.
Penfield NY 14526



Congregational Grant Report

Name of Project:

We requested the funds with the title: "Mindfulness as Peacemaking." However, during our planning process the group determined that we would instead invite people to participate in a series entitled: ***"Let It Begin With Me: An Exploration of the Peace Within"***

"Finally, brothers and sisters, fill your minds with beauty and truth. Meditate on whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is good, whatever is virtuous and praiseworthy. Keep to the script: whatever you learned and received and heard and saw in me—do it—and the God of peace will walk with you." Philippians 4:8-9 The Voice

Contact person(s) for project

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Program Dates:

1/21/18; 1/29/18; 2/12/18; 2/26/18; 3/12/18; 5/14/18

Participants:

In total 29 different people participated in at least one (1) of the sessions. About 22 people participated in at least four (4) of the sessions. This was the most well-attended adult education program response in recent memory.

The participants also included eight (8) people who were not members or attendees of PPC. We were gratified to have had such success with outreach outside the walls of the church.

Funds Received: \$1350

Funds Utilized: \$1350

We did not exceed our total budget. However, we did spend more money on food than was originally planned as we had a larger turnout than expected. We were thrilled to offer hospitality to 20-26 people at each of the sessions. We offset the higher amount of food funds by spending less on course materials and with some donated items.

Project Implementation:

- I. Five (5) Instructional and experiential workshops were provided and one (1) informal follow session was offered.
- II. A meal preceded each of the five (5) workshops. Dessert was provided at the follow-up session on 5/14. The meals provided a very valuable time for fellowship and community-building. The mealtime was especially important for the people who were not affiliated with PPC as they had an opportunity to

informally get to know others and to feel equally connected to the group. We received wonderful feedback about the meal experience as an element of peacemaking.

- III. A journal, pen, bookmark, and many different printed resources were given to each participant. The journal was a critical component of the course.
- IV. The instructor presented information in a lecture style format with power point slides and provided many “hands-on” experiences at each session. A key feature of mindfulness is *practice* – so each week we were offered the opportunity to actively participate in a variety of practices along with our learning. Everyone was also paired with a buddy to connect with between sessions. Some of the buddies have maintained contact even though the workshops ended before Easter.
- V. Course content
 - a. Based primarily on the *Search Inside Yourself* program designed by Google. Key components of the content included: self-awareness, self-management, empathy, mindful listening, compassion, and integrating mindfulness into daily life. Peace-filled living begins with individuals as they expand their capacity for empathy and compassion and increase their emotional skills. Contemplative practices (mindfulness tools) can be transformative and foundational for relationship-building – if they are practiced.
 - b. Review of some of the neuroscience was included as “mindfulness” is grounded in science as a healthy addition to our life, much like physical exercise.
 - c. Supplementary information and readings related to mindful Christianity and contemplative prayer practices was also provided.
 - d. Specific journal prompts aligned with the Lenten devotional was well received.
- VI. Outreach: Invitations for participation were shared with the Early Learning Center staff and families and through the PGV newsletter and e-mails. We were pleased to have had eight (8) participants from the community.
- VII. **Impact on the congregation:** 1) Church members and community participants had the opportunity to deepen their relationships with each other through mindful listening practices; 2) The participants have acquired some new peacemaking capacity and skills to “make peace” within themselves, listen for God, and to use in their interactions with their families, friends, and co-workers. The ‘peace within’ ripples outward. 3) Some of the church members who attended had never participated in a church sponsored learning event before – we expect that their positive experience will open new possibilities for them in the future; 4) since this was such a successful event there is more willingness and motivation to pursue additional faith development opportunities for the congregation.
- VIII. **Feedback from some participants:**
 - a. “This program of mindfulness encouraged me to become more regular in my floundering meditation practice. Many of the ideas, journal prompts, and types of meditation appealed to my sense of deepening my relationship with God as well as with others in my daily life. I continue to meditate daily and am journaling more frequently; and I find that these practices have become quite dear to me.”
 - b. “This experience not only carved out valuable time to implement refreshing mindful practices, but provided structures for starting new lifetime habits in this arena. The brain “rewiring” has begun!”

- c. "The grant from the Presbytery of Genesee Valley provided gave us a chance to learn from a gifted leader, John Stewart. Monday's review was particularly helpful as we were in Florida during the month of March. Face to face active listening is powerful. Paying attention to our breath as we breathe in and slowly release the breath for two minutes is refreshing. Mindfulness is being aware - careful of other people offering and encouraging respect. While it is okay to hold a very different view, a mindful, not necessarily easy response, is to say "tell me more." Thank you for making this possible"
- d. "I found the time to be worthwhile. I appreciated the dinner. I think the topic and content were quite spiritual yet not religious. I find myself open to some of the Christian practices as a result of this workshop. This was a very good experience"
- e. "The fellowship of gathering together was so important to the quality of the entire experience. Being fed, physical and spiritually. I pray you will continue these types of offerings (and continue to invite other congregations too!)"
- f. "First, many thanks for making this series available through Presbytery! It has reinforced my self-awareness and brought new knowledge regarding one's ability to interrupt synapses with long established pathways in the brain. This gives me hope of new patterns of thinking and acting."
- g. "The series also provided an excellent review on the value of meditation, journaling, and empathy. Now, what I really need to do is faithfully practice these concepts. Joining with the group is great inspiration that one can follow through and concepts may become reality in one's life."
- h. 14 participants also responded to a brief Survey Monkey survey:

	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE
I found the content of the workshops to be applicable to my life	85.71% 12	14.29% 2	0.00% 0
Participating in the workshops enhanced my spiritual journey	71.43% 10	28.57% 4	0.00% 0
I learned how mindfulness leads to peacemaking	84.62% 11	15.38% 2	0.00% 0
I liked the format of the workshops (i.e. dinner, presentation of info, engaging in some mindfulness practices)	100.00% 14	0.00% 0	0.00% 0
I shared some of what I learned in the workshops with others	100.00% 14	0.00% 0	0.00% 0

- IX. **Action steps:** To facilitate follow-up activities (such as book club) with those who are interested and then (hopefully) provide another series of workshops that will delve deeper into practices related to compassion and gratitude.
- X. **Comments:** We are so grateful to PGV for making this experience possible through the generous Peacemaking Grant. We believe it was a very good "kingdom" investment.