

Report to Presbytery re: Community Organizing and Congregational Development Training in Baltimore

Last year Summerville received a bequest from a member who had been very active in Mission. Our session agreed to use some of the funds for a special mission project. As we struggled to discern what we as a church should be doing in our community, I became more and more frustrated with my inability to lead the church in a new direction and to engage with the community in which we have been a part of for many years.

I have been an elder for 3- 6 year stints and have received a lot of “Leadership Training” This has basically included: reviewing duties of the position, Attending Presbytery teaching days, learning Roberts rules of order, reviewing the Book of Order, reading books on dealing with change. None of these learning opportunities helped me with the challenge of trying to be relevant to the needs of our community.

When the opportunity arose to take the Community Organizing training through NEXT Church, I was intrigued. I had the time available, and thanks to the Presbytery grant I was able to afford to go. The program was a week long conference geared towards church leaders. I was the only elder there, most of the attendees were pastors. The week consisted of lectures from professional community organizers and church leaders doing organizing in their communities. We were able to visit a Jobs program and hear from people who had successfully made positive changes in their communities using the tools taught in the class. We also had daily worship experiences.

Here’s what I learned:

We need to deal with the world as it is and be the agents to make it the world as it should be. The Church has lost its voice and needs to get back involved with creating a more just and kind world

We learned about Power and self- interest and how building relationships and learning peoples’ self interest helps in creating win – win solutions

I learned that in order for the Church to survive, we need to move from a ”maintenance” mindset of just trying to keep our present church going to a “transformational “ mindset that is built on relationships.

And most important – we were given tools and training on how to build power and relationships that can move our churches into their communities and actually create positive change for people who have been powerless.

I would like to thank the Genesee Valley Presbytery for enabling me to attend this conference – I believe the skills I learned will help my church, The Riverside neighborhood group and our community. I apologize that I was not able to be here to deliver this message personally, but one of the other things that was taught at the conference was to create time in your calendar for your own personal relationships that energize you to go out and try to make the world a better place.