Building a Virtual Community among the Shy: Doing Some Good in the World
First Presbyterian Church of Livonia Center

What were you hoping to accomplish?

Our goals and where we stand:

- Support and train an initial core of two relationship builders—accomplished
- Initiate a virtual prayer group—accomplished
- Grow our electronic community of blessing from about 15 people a week to 50—we have about 37 people who watch regularly
- Support at least one mission outside the Livonia community that searches for social justice for women, children, or oppressed minority members
  - Pastor Jamie included our electronic community in his personal ministry that supports a school for children of the oppressed Vietnamese minority in Cambodia, another school serving young girls at risk of being sold for human trafficking, a ministry to the poorest of the poor in Phenom Penh, and a training school in Kampong Chhnang that prepares people to be church workers and pastors
  - Over $3500 was raised; members of our congregation joined with others in praying for these organizations and gifts
  - The electronic ministry increased the number of people participating—their active support made an important difference
- Pending completion—this project was harder to execute than expected
  - Include people in at least one small group that includes both geographic and virtual members
  - Find at least one more relationship builder in our existing congregation
  - Recruit at least one relationship builder who is not a part of the existing congregation
  - Raise enough money, mostly from the virtual church, to cover next year's advertising expense—we have plans to include a donation button on our Facebook page; using our broadcasts to raise some or all of their expenses is part of the project pending future Session consideration

Who was touched by your project or program?

- Members of the congregation who are ill, shut in or out of town or uncomfortable being out and about (8)
- Shy people within 30 miles of the church looking for support during a crisis.
- We prayed for 16 people in crises; several of them visit our Facebook page twice a month
- Pastors in Cambodia and Pakistan (6) are members of our electronic congregation; including both the Thursday Morning Meditation ministry and the Sunday Services, we have about 37 people weekly spending a minimum of three minutes watching with about half watching all or most of the service or meditation

- In addition, thorough the generosity of the group as a whole:

- We supported about 160 students in Kampong Chhnang who attend one of two schools: we helped build a new school for Vietnamese river dweller who fish for a living and we helped reopen a school just outside the city—the families with children in that school live in absolute poverty
- We helped 5 families in Phnom Penh living in absolute poverty rebuild their homes after a fire—the families totaled 31 people
- Altogether, that is around 220 people. Not bad for 30 people in an Upstate N.Y. Hamlet.

How did this grant energize or transform your congregation or community?

- This ministry opened new avenues to touch others through our ministry and is exciting to many in the congregation
- In the past we advertised only fundraisers and as a result have a reputation for being devoted to the church building and each other; this is a reputation that discourages people from joining with us—we are now becoming known as a spiritual family that incorporates and supports new people
- The message is that if you yearn to do some good in the world or need people to walk with you in life, come

What did you learn from this project and what obstacles did you experience?

- There are many people beyond our community that benefit from watching our service
- Many who may not come to church for whatever reasons, find comfort in our service and enjoy it
- What started out as a Covid isolation thing, but more people are continuing to check in and it really does maintain connections through life changes
- There are significant obstacles
  - Facebook was not consistent—changes that were loaded on Saturday night came as a total surprise on Sunday morning
  - Learning how to use production software (vMix) and to troubleshoot on the fly

What are your next steps?

The following are for our Session's discussion and decision:

- We recommend using a second or third platform in addition to Facebook in order to increase our participation—this may involve engaging a 3rd party service
- Reach out to EMT's, nursing homes, group homes and other special service people unable to attend Sunday mornings—would involve identifying the groups and making contacts
- Reach out to chaplains
- Expand our Penny Saver and special service ads. to include electronic church as an option
- Get our own people to share on Facebook and other ways

- Continue to advertise service at $25 a week through Easter and see if our active participation increases
- Raise some money to support the ministry through our donation button on Facebook

<u>Please share a story of where you saw God in this project.</u>

- A former member watched service! Is this a first step towards coming back?
- One of our elders was flat on her back and could not come to the sanctuary. So, we installed her electronically. This was very moving for her and touched us all knowing she was a part of the service. Sometimes God is only limited by our imagination.
- A couple who had recently moved south love being able to continue to participate with us. The wife got her hairdresser interested. And the timing of this ministry was just perfect for them. They both let us know how pleased and appreciative they are.
- A couple of people have become involved conversationally through messaging and challenged our faith. They caused us to think more deeply about our faith. Others have asked questions which have led to teaching and considering just what we do believe.

Indeed, God has been a part of all of this.

Respectfully submitted:

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