

Presbytery of Genesee Valley
Prayer Profile: Elba & Barre Center Presbyterian Churches



The Basics

Barre Center Presbyterian Church (585-589-9639), Sundays at 9 AM

Elba Presbyterian Church (585-757-2728), Sundays at 11 AM

Key Leaders: Barbara Tipton, Pastor (pictured at left); Joanie Smith, Clerk of the Barre Center Session, and Dee Wilkin, Clerk of the Elba Session

A Prayer Profile is usually written for one church at a time, but Barre and Elba give us good reason to blend their Prayer Profiles, because they are blending their ministries. Read on to see who is smiling about this pairing! The two congregations have been working together to further the mission of Jesus Christ since 2015. Rev. Tipton emphasizes that it is not a “yoked” arrangement where one pastor serves two separate congregations, but a “blended” arrangement in which a variety of things are shared. Each congregation brings its own strengths to enrich the blend. The churches are seven miles apart on the same road, Route 98.

Here are some examples of blending: Elba hosts Sunday services in February, and Barre Center hosts them in March, at 10:00 AM. This saves some fuel expense, but it also serves to draw both congregations together. During the rest of the year it is not uncommon for people of one church to attend a service at the other church. Ash Wednesday and Maundy Thursday services take place at the Elba Church; a single Easter service rotates between the churches. During Advent “Lessons and Carols” is at Elba, and Barre Center presents a Children’s Pageant. The churches share many of the same vendors and contractors. The churches share a single youth ministry and Sunday school at Barre Center. Organists occasionally substitute for the other church’s organist. The churches share fundraisers and special events, like the road rally and a harvest supper. Church leaders have keys to both churches!

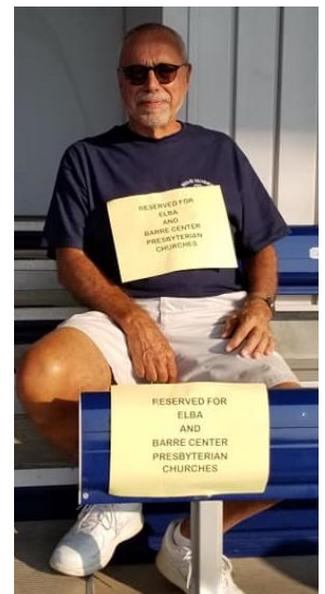


Blending requires careful negotiation between the two sessions, as a proposal needs to be reviewed by both sessions, requiring a little extra time. But, according to Rev. Tipton, the negotiation is not competitive and each church is sensitive to the needs of the other, and generous in making decisions.

Having once served as a yoked pastor in Rochester many years ago I was naturally curious about the ways in which these two churches work through practical matters. Rev. Tipton began serving full-time at the Elba church in May, 2007. She began serving the Barre Center church in November, 2015, and is now half-time at each church. She is currently compensated 50% by each congregation. She uses the Elba Church for her office and lives in the Elba manse. Callers to the Barre Center church hear a message directing them to the Elba phone number. When there is a common service, offering envelopes are designated to the appropriate congregation, while the “loose” offering is equally divided.

Please pray for the two congregations to be faithful and creative in discerning the facets and future of this arrangement. As Rev. Tipton describes it, “we need to discern the right moves at the right time for the right reasons,” a useful prayer for any congregation, but especially important when two churches are learning to do things together (with the Spirit smiling, of course!).

[Rev. Jim Renfrew, Relationships Working Group]



Photos (from the top): Rev. Barbara Tipton with her husband Rev. John Tipton (he serves a UCC church in Gasport), Youth Band at Barre Center, Elba folks enjoying a meal in the barn at the Fall Hayride, Saving seats for both churches at a Batavia Muckdogs game.