MINUTE FOR MISSION

Macomb, Illinois

BUILDING GOD’S HOUSE:   
BEARING PEACE ACROSS RACIAL DIVIDES

Guided by their commitment to be a Matthew 25 church, the members of First Presbyterian Church in Macomb, Illinois, are actively working to bring peace to their community.

Last year, First Presbyterian accepted the Matthew 25 invitation from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Though they committed to addressing all three foci — systemic poverty, structural racism and congregational vitality — this predominantly white community dove headfirst into the issue of structural racism in response to a local event that became national news due to racial overtones.

The congregation’s Service and Justice Committee felt called to organize a series of interactive racial justice workshops where individuals could learn from and alongside one another. The curriculum was designed to equip white people with the information and tools they need to explore their commitment to racial justice. First Presbyterian designated their retained portion of last year’s Peace & Global Witness Offering to promote this learning opportunity throughout their community.

The topics and structure of the workshops varied, beginning with asking, “Are we listening?” to recognizing how structural racism exists in each person’s daily life. The final workshop was devoted to thinking through the next steps for their community, one of which included organizing community events to bring together people of different races. The first event was a chili cook-off, hosted by First Macomb in partnership with Mt. Calvary Church of God in Christ, an African American congregation. The cook-off was a great success, with lots of food, fun and fellowship.

The workshops have since been replicated, bringing people from across Great Rivers Presbytery to attend, and even attracting the attention of local media. The hope is for these programs to take place again soon, continuing to invite conversation, introspection and action. In the meantime, participants stay engaged through email correspondence and advocacy efforts in pursuit of increased awareness, promoting cross-community support and modeling peacemaking in their community.

The COVID-19 pandemic has not slowed down this congregation in their commitment toward racial justice. First Presbyterian has already chosen to designate their retained 25% of the 2020 Peace & Global Witness Offering to a campaign to purchase body cameras for the local police department. In a press release, Sarah Schoper, a member of the Service and Justice Committee at First Presbyterian, shared, “This campaign will help move Macomb forward as a united community seeking to be welcoming to all people, and is part of a systemic, sustainable culture change that involves us finding ways to work together.”

Through their continued engagement of Matthew 25 and the Peace & Global Witness Offering, First Presbyterian commits to sharing the peace of Christ with all God’s children. In our community, we are being peacemakers by using our retained portion of this Offering to [DESCRIBE HOW YOUR CHURCH USES YOUR SHARE OF THE OFFERING].

Together, through our gifts, we are building God’s household through the youngest of peacemakers in our midst, to generations of peacemakers in places where compassion, peace and justice are not just heartfelt words, but lifesaving needs. Through our gifts, we are active peacemakers. We are builders. And when we all do a little, it adds up to a lot.

Let us pray ~

Reconciling God,

continue to build us as your Church.

May we engage in ministries

that share your joy and promise with all people

and deepen our call

to be reconciled to one another.

**Amen.**