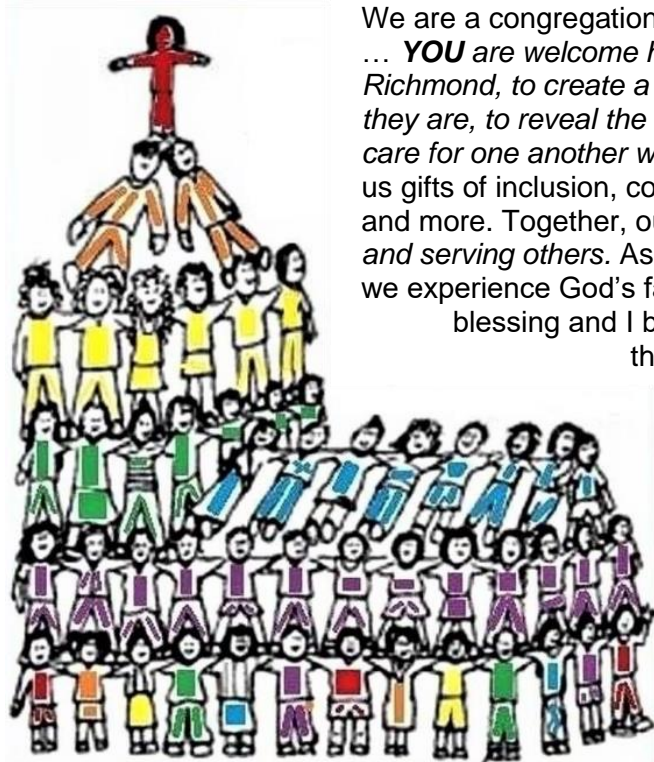


Pastor Kenny's Annual Report – 2019

“Look! Look! God has moved into the neighborhood, making God’s home with men and women! They’re God’s people, the Almighty is their God. God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death is gone for good – tears gone, crying gone, pain gone – all the first order of things gone.” Revelation 21:3b-4 -The Message

Eugene Peterson wrote *The Message*, a retelling of the Bible in contemporary language. He had a unique way to catch the realness and relevance of God working in God’s Kin-dom in the here and now. MCC Richmond is a thriving and ever-changing congregation that has been called and blessed by God to share this message of hope and love.



We are a congregation who lives our mission and vision within our neighborhood ... **YOU** are welcome here! People of all backgrounds come together at MCC Richmond, to create a safe and welcoming environment for ALL people to be who they are, to reveal the relevance of God in our lives, to be empowered to serve and care for one another while working toward justice and equity. We believe God gives us gifts of inclusion, community, engagement, spiritual discovery, transformation and more. Together, our vision as a church community is *Loving God by caring for and serving others*. As we strive to live and share these things with our neighbors, we experience God’s faithfulness and blessing. MCC Richmond is blessed to be a blessing and I believe we make a difference in each other’s lives, the lives of those within the Greater Richmond community and the world.

As we celebrate our 41st year of ministry and look ahead to continued ministry together in 2020, I am thinking about all the people that make up our church community. One of the joys of pastoral ministry is getting to see a broad view of our congregation on a regular basis.

One part of the church community is the one that gathers Sunday morning. This group includes members, friends and those who discover MCC Richmond for the first time. In this part of our church we experience God and community through spirited and interactive Sunday School,

relationship building as we listen to, pray for and support one another, enjoy lunch and fellowship each Sunday. For some, Sunday lunch is their favorite meal of the week because it’s the only meal they don’t eat alone. We engage in joyous worship as we discover new inspirational ways of expanding our rich worship tradition. We are blessed to have many volunteers who serve in the church kitchen, as worship assistants, folding and collating bulletins and doing whatever is needed ... all of this helps us experience God’s love and acceptance.

Thanks to long-time leaders and new leaders, along with a hard-working and creative staff we collectively strive to serve with passion, love, faithfulness and compassion while being constantly challenged and encouraged to grow in our understanding of God and God’s plan for our lives. The Board of Directors focus on serving the congregation as a group of friends committed to servant-leadership as they oversee the congregation’s finances, our various ministries, maintaining the integrity of our buildings, supporting and empowering the overall life and ministry of the congregation. The Board has also engaged in the process of planning for future ministry through our strategic planning process and strengthening our financial system with better internal controls and more transparency. Thank you to all ministry teams, leaders and volunteers who work together to help make MCC Richmond a blessing.

Another part of the church I get to see is the part that gathers in our buildings during the week. It is wonderful to have an expanding list of ministries and community user groups meeting in the Community Center and Church buildings. Currently our facility is used six days a week ... often with multiple groups meeting simultaneously. Many of these groups meet weekly, some monthly, others quarterly. All of these groups

comment there's a *warm, special feeling ... an energy of love* they experience as they gather and meet. Everything from 12-Step meetings, the Prime Timers International Dining, Spirits of Joy, Voices of Praise, Handbell Choir, Living Wednesday Dinner Church, the Vicky Hester Food Pantry and The Lounge, Bi+ Discussion Group, Ending Stigma of Mental Health Support Group, Community Centering Meditation, Rock Ministry, the Democratic Socialists Association, VCU Sororities and Fraternities and multiple one time user groups. As I engage with these groups it is common to hear stories of how they view MCC Richmond as their *church home* even though they've never been to Sunday worship. Someone from a 12-Step meeting recently stopped me, made sure I was looking her in the eye, and said, *Thank you! We love being here, it's the best place we've ever been. This is my church because being able to come to this group has saved my life. I don't come on Sundays, but I come to this meeting at the church every week. Thank you!*

Often those who come to the food pantry and The Lounge express their appreciation and gratitude for having a safe and welcoming place to simply *be*, ... a place where they are welcome ... just the way they are ... without judgement, a place where they can choose the groceries they enjoy, have a hot self-serve lunch, leave with groceries and a full stomach. These and others are an important part of our church community that not everyone gets to see. I am privileged to be the one to receive these compliments on behalf of the congregation who have committed to making MCC Richmond a relevant, welcoming, hospitable, caring and a loving place for **ALL** people.

Another part of our church are the people that are touched by the ministry that takes place beyond our walls. Every Monday and Friday evening volunteers pick up and bag donations from Panera Bread Company. Tuesday and Saturday's bread and pastries are delivered to The William Byrd Senior Living Apartments, the VCU RAM Food Pantry, Unity Fellowship, Ronald McDonald House, The Doorways, Dominion Place and our local First Responders. Bread donations are also available on Sundays for our congregation.

People within the Greater Richmond community are hearing about and receiving assistance from the food pantry and The Lounge. This year we have more than doubled the number of individuals and families we serve who struggle with food insecurity. Most of these people are marginalized, over-looked, abused, forgotten and hopeless. Our congregation and members of the community-at-large are faithful in donating food and money to make this ministry possible. The Good Neighbor Fund helps people with utility bills and medication. Through our community partners we have also been able to help 6 individuals find low-income housing, receive medical treatment and apply for Social Security and other benefits allowing them to have a home rather than sleeping on the streets of Richmond. One individual told me he *never had a home before and now he has a lease and keys to his apartment in a High-Rise and it even has air conditioning. I've never had it so good.* Another individual stood outside Diversity Thrift crying because she *didn't know how to shop ... she never had a bed or furniture of her own.* We are committed to continue helping these individuals as best we can to help them stay off the streets. It is a joy to see people's lives transform as they commit themselves to the hard work of living differently.

Tuesday evenings the Boot Scootin' Believers meet at Babe's of Carytown for Line Dance Lessons which is followed by open Line Dancing. As we dance, others in the bar watch us and often join us as we have fun together. As we visit and welcome others to dance it is fun watch facial expressions when they learn we are a church meeting in a bar to dance, have fun and collect donations for the food pantry. It is not uncommon for people to share their ups and downs and ask for prayer. UFMCC has a history of activism in gay bars and we are blessed to continue this tradition.

Table Talk Tuesdays is an opportunity for people to gather at a restaurant to share lunch and conversation together. It is proving to be a wonderful way for people to connect and get to know each other in a non-church environment. As we were leaving Stir Crazy a server *asked what kind of meeting we were having because there was so much laughter in the room.*

From the neighborhood canvassing project putting the crocheted bags with homemade brownies, cookies and information about the life and ministry of MCC Richmond on doorknobs I have had many positive conversations with our neighbors. One neighbor has joined the Handbell Choir and is having a *wonderful time getting to know the congregation.* She and her husband *walk their dogs by the church but didn't know much about it.* The success of the crocheted bags also has resulted in a volunteer crocheting prayer shawls that are

taken and given on hospital visits. The more people get to know MCC Richmond the more we have opportunity to be relational and helpful. One afternoon a young child came to the church to ask me to *do a funeral for her parakeet that died*. Together we said prayers and buried her bird. Every time I see this sweet girl she says, *Hi Pastor Kenny* and shares whatever is on her mind ... much to her mother's embarrassment!

As I go out into the community, I often come across people who tell me stories of knowing our congregation for one reason or another. As I listen, I am encouraged and proud to hear comments of how MCC Richmond is making a difference ... as we touch the lives of people who are an extended part of our church community. Thank you for all the daily ministry you do as together we *love God by caring for and serving others!*

And as a pastor within the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC), my call is not just to this congregation and community but to the wider church as well. This year I continued to serve as a coach to four pastors engaging in the ReVitalization Program and regular attendance in a Community of Practice support ministry with three other clergy. Through the Office of Formation and Leadership Development I also mentor a pastor of an Emerging Church who prior to coming to UFMCC served as a Lutheran ministry leader. He is now ordained within UFMCC and the Emerging Church is doing well. Rev. Elder Mona West encouraged me to serve as a mentor pastor through the Thriving in Ministry program. I also served on the Intentional Transition Team who worked on building a strategy for a smooth transition from the Interim Moderator to our Elected Moderator.

It was invigorating to learn much about UFMCC as I stood for election to the Governing Board. Even though I was not elected to serve on the Governing Board several of those who were elected have reached out to me for support and encouragement. It is rewarding to serve a congregation that understands and encourages me to use my gifts to serve beyond our local ministry. It is a joy to share my experience and what MCC Richmond teaches me with other pastors and those preparing for pastoral ministry.

Another part of our church community I see is the hard work which takes place daily to allow MCC Richmond to move forward with integrity and grace. The Financial Team has implemented and learned QuickBooks Online which has provided more timely and accurate financial reports, more transparency and a clear understanding of the church finances and designed funds. We have rallied to support five major fundraisers which has strengthened our financial position to support our various ministries and church operations. We have experienced the sadness and disappointment of two resignations from the Board of Directors. We give thanks for the contributions these individuals gave and celebrate those who stepped forward to fill the vacancies. We have also addressed issues and behaviors that have caused frustration and pain within the congregation. Together we have experienced healing and the transforming love of God profoundly!

It's been a tremendous year of ministry in each of these parts of MCC Richmond. We have every reason to celebrate and be proud of our collective work and ministry efforts. God is certainly blessing our church community and we are a blessing to God. I look forward to joining with you as we continue to expand and discover what it means to be church together in this community.