

NEW FAITH AND VITAL FAITH COMMUNITIES

Pastor Wendy Swanson, Chair of Vital Faith Communities Team

Rev. Dave McPherson, Director of New and Vital Faith Communities

The office of New and Vital Faith Communities' role is to resource churches and new faith communities so they can reach new people in a way that will give people purpose for their lives and compassion for their communities in the spirit of Christ.

The year 2020 was more than challenging for our church leaders, but we saw so many of them step forward in a courageous way exploring new possibilities for offering worship and doing ministry. If "Zoom" was an unknown word before 2020, it is no longer! We have found ways to meet with one another virtually for meetings, counseling, fellowship, VBS, and so much more.

Both New Faith and Vital Faith Communities teams saw a way to help worshippers shift to online. Rev. Rob Rynders, a member of New Faith, put together a plan that would free up \$500,000 and provide up to \$10,000 grants to help churches cover operating expenses. New Faith and Vital Faith approved it, as did the Appointive Cabinet and Covenant Council. To date, 47 churches have received funding.

Because the pandemic continued longer than anyone first expected, Vital Faith saw a way to provide additional funding for churches who needed tech equipment and support. Vital Faith set aside the majority of their budget and designated account to provide financial assistance to 15 churches. Vital Faith also hosted a webinar called "Both/And" by Jason Moore. He was recommended to the Conference by Rev. Candace Lansberry and Rev. Michael Patzloff. Moore worked with 54 participants from 28 churches, explaining best practices for both in-person and online worship, and how we can and must offer both even after the pandemic.

Vital Faith and New Faith collaborated with the Appointive Cabinet and the leaders of Central United Methodist Church to try something bold that we hope will enhance the United Methodist presence in the central part of Phoenix. Two gifted pastors from outside the Conference became available. Rev. Rachel Gilmore will complete her work with Path 1 by the end of June 2021. Path 1 is the denomination's agency that helps Conferences start new churches and reach new people. She will be appointed to Central UMC as their Community Outreach Consultant. Rev. Brandon Gilmore will be appointed as Central UMC's pastor and will work with church leaders and Conference staff to develop and implement a turnaround strategy.

We are also working with 12 other ongoing new faith community projects.

Like most Conference teams, we are mindful of the need to deal with systemic racism in our Conference and in our communities. We are looking at ways to resource the Conference, but many of us are also working on our own biases and racism through small group study.

If you want to partner with the Conference on a project or need some extra help strengthening the church in a particular area, click on the link [New & Vital Faith Communities](#) it will take you to our website. You can also email Pastor Wendy Swanson, was0424@hotmail.com, Rev. Dave McPherson, dmcperson@dscumc.org, or Lori Davalos, ldavalos@dscumc.org.