

THRIVE! CAMPAIGN REPORT-2020

“Stronger and Better Together: Joining Jesus in the Restoration of the World” is the compelling vision that has been guiding the work of the synod and its staff since being adopted at the 2016 Synod Assembly. Fulfilling the vision, however, has been hampered by decreases in Regular Mission Support that occurred for various reasons over the past two or more decades.

“Thrive! Equipping a Vibrant Church Together” is the 3-year mission campaign created in consultation with GSB Fundraising, and officially launched on January 1, 2020, to fund the synod vision in a sustainable manner. During the fall of 2019, over 120 representatives from fifty-five churches were trained to lead *Thrive!* campaigns in their congregations. Numerous congregations planned to hold campaigns in the winter or spring, and additional training was planned for churches still waiting to come on board. Excitement over the campaign grew quickly, spurred by news from the seven congregations that held amazingly successful campaigns in 2019 or early 2020. It is worthy to note that each of the seven congregations not only exceeded its non-binding goal – by as much as three times in one case – but also reported experiencing a great sense of fulfillment, joy and hope. Commitments received or made to the campaign from all sources, plus projections from non-binding goals set by congregations awaiting to hold their campaigns, totaled over \$650,000 as of February 1st.

As we are now too painfully aware, our personal, congregational and national plans were put on hold or significantly altered due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Fittingly, plans for *Thrive!* were put on hold because the focus of the synod and its staff needed to be on caring for congregations, rostered leaders, and communities whose lives have been upended, if not devastated, by the pandemic. Providentially, two congregations had volunteered to serve as “early adopter” test sites in 2019, five congregations were able to hold campaigns early in 2020 before the pandemic required in-person worship services to be suspended, and numerous other gifts to the campaign were received from individuals, organizations and congregations. Income received from those sources allowed the synod to move forward on several goals of the *Thrive!* campaign, providing training and support for congregations and their leaders before the pandemic, and now *Thrive!* is helping us navigate through it. Here are some examples:

- A virtual hub was created at the synod office allowing staff to lead and/or more easily take part in providing online meeting and training experiences, thereby increasing efficiency and reducing travel expenses
- *Effective Congregation Council Training* led by Pastor Mike Ward of GSB Fundraising was provided to over 125 church leaders across the synod
- A 2nd Coaching Cohort was funded allowing Pastor Mike Weaver to mentor ten additional pastors in how to lead more effectively
- Funding was provided for three pastors to be trained to become mentors for the Coaching Cohort program

- Matching funds were provided to 14 congregations taking part in the 2-year Stewardship for All Seasons training program
- Sixty-eight congregations took part in “*Keeping Stewardship Strong During Uncertain Times*” online workshops, led by Pastor Ward, to help them navigate through the uncharted waters of the pandemic
- Online worship and educational resources produced by churches and individuals of our synod are being provided on the synod website as a way to collaborate with and mentor one another in ways to care for our congregations during the pandemic
- A *Thrive! Worship Team*, under the leadership of Josh Brodbeck, has been called together to develop training and resources that will enhance the vitality of congregational online and in-person worship throughout the synod

Clearly, *Thrive!* is already having a positive impact on life in our synod and is arguably even more important now in light of the pandemic. We anticipate relaunching the campaign when it is again safe and appropriate to do so. When that may be unclear and, depending on what happens with COVID-19, *Thrive!* may look differently than originally conceived. Yet, in whatever form it may take, we trust God to guide us, and pray *Thrive!* will continue to bless the congregations and people of the Southern Ohio Synod as we join Jesus in the restoration of the world. Indeed, we are *Stronger and Better Together*.

Grace and peace,

Pastor Larry Donner
Thrive! Campaign Manager