The First North American Virtual LEAD Retreat Completed

On the weekends of March 13-14 and March 20-21, 2021, ten lay leaders gathered via Zoom for the first-ever North American (NA) Virtual LEAD Retreat, pursuing a certificate in the UFMCC Laity Empowered for Active Discipleship (LEAD) Program. The LEAD Program has been in existence in MCC for 10 years, and has held twelve North American LEAD retreats, as well as retreats in Australia, the United Kingdom, the European Network and abbreviated retreats in the Philippines and Brazil. This most recent virtual retreat is part of the North America (NA) LEAD 12 cohort group, which was scheduled to meet in late March last year, but was postponed because of the COVID pandemic. This winter, ten of the approved applicants for NA LEAD 12 signed up to be the first retreat participants in a virtual context, now referred to as the NA Virtual LEAD 12 cohort group. The feedback after the retreat was extremely positive with participants commenting: “I loved it—the faculty is to be commended in translating the retreat into a virtual retreat”; “This retreat was phenomenal! This felt like the same space that would have been created with an in-person retreat. Nothing was lost by doing it virtually”; and “I prefer in-person retreats, but this was great”.

[Image of participants]
The NA Virtual LEAD 12 participants spent the two weekends learning leadership skills in the four LEAD competencies: Spiritual Maturity, Diversity and Cultural Awareness, Developing and Equipping Others, and Situational/Strategic Leadership. The retreat ended with the participants spending time discerning their call to lay ministry and sharing this call at the closing ceremony. It is anticipated that the participants will complete their certificate requirements within 12-18 months. The LEAD certificate qualifies LEAD graduates to take on leadership roles in the local church or in the denomination, depending on the graduates’ call to ministry.

The participants attending the NA Virtual LEAD 12 retreat included:
Gisselle (King) Blay, North Florida MCC, Jacksonville, Florida, USA
Sandra Daughtery, Eternal Joy MCC, Dayton, Ohio, USA
Janet Fitzsimmons, MCC Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Kathy Hanas, SunCoast MCC, Venice, Florida, USA
Kim Martin, Queen City Worship Center (formerly MCC Charlotte), Charlotte, North Carolina, USA
Soleil McCants, Love MCC, Las Vegas, Nevada, USA
Crys McDonald, Wichita Falls MCC, Wichita, Texas, USA
David Reesman, King of Peace MCC, St. Petersburg, Florida, USA
Shelley Tibbs-Moore, MCC of Greater St. Louis, St. Louis, Missouri, USA
Kaye Young, upRising MCC, Austin, Texas, USA

The faculty for the NA Virtual LEAD 12 Retreat was comprised of Elder Velma Garcia of Austin, Texas, USA; Phil Griffin of Topeka, Kansas, USA; Barry Hundley, of Atlanta, Georgia, USA; and Elder Nancy Maxwell of Kansas City, Missouri, USA.

This NA Virtual LEAD 12 cohort group, together with NA LEAD 10 and NA LEAD 11 cohort groups, are part of a pilot project, developed by Rev. Karen Thompson and the leaders at upRising MCC, Austin, Texas, USA, which provides the funding for 90% of the participants’ costs associated with the LEAD certificate program. This generous financial assistance has resulted in greater participation and increased diversity in the LEAD program.