

“Moments like this were designed for the church”

University of Dubuque President Jeffrey Bullock talks leadership during the pandemic

by Mike Ferguson | Presbyterian News Service



LOUISVILLE — Now in his 22nd year as president of the University of Dubuque, the Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Bullock still finds he has a lot of work to do — even during a pandemic at a university and seminary well known for distance learning. Bullock, a Presbyterian pastor, scholar and administrator, was the guest Wednesday on a Facebook Live interview. The topic was leadership during a pandemic.

Bullock, who left parish ministry to be the dean of the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary and accepted the presidency of the university two years later, said the university’s team of administrators, faculty and staff “is rowing together. Prior to COVID-19, you’d have dustups here and there, because we are human. But once this hit, everyone is focused and rowing in the same direction. This team has not wavered a bit.”

“We all have gifts, and we are to use them for the glory of God and to bear witness to the good news”. “We all have responsibilities, and if we do them together, we are serving students in the way we are intending to serve them.” He and his team “believe that organizational culture trumps organizational strategy every time,” he said. “We communicate a lot. We know we are going to get through this because we have a strong culture and God has a purpose for us.” And as for the church, “moments like this were designed for the church,” Bullock said. “If we can’t find a way to be useful, productive and helpful in the midst of all this, it’s time to do something else.” This is a time we should really shine. We have the opportunity to point people in a direction that is hopeful, rather than fearful.” He said that Habakkuk, a prophet who constantly wonders when God will bring judgment and release, remains one of his favorite books of the Bible. “The end of that little narrative is, ‘Yet I will rejoice,’” Bullock said. “That is how we were designed as faithful Christian people, and that’s part of the witness of the church at this time.”

Begun about 15 years ago, the seminary’s distance learning program has “demonstrated outcomes equal to or superior to many residential programs,” according to Bullock. It’s also made UDTS one of the most diverse seminaries in the nation: The seminary serves students in 30 states and 10 countries. And, he added, “we have seminarians on the (university’s) tennis team and the golf team. With God,” Bullock said with a grin, “all things are possible.” “Be people of hope,” Bullock said in a charge to wrap up the interview.