

November 15-16, 2025, the Bloomington Visitation committee made up of Donald Cassell, Jeff Jones, and David Hanson was hosted by the Bloomington RPC. Prior to our arrival, Bloomington RPC completed the presbytery visitation form, providing all the necessary background information for our visit. Of note, the elders instead of answering all of the questions themselves, tasked appropriate people with answering particular questions, so that in the outreach, deaconate, financial, and physical plant sections answers were provided by various committee chairs. Even this evident delegation gave early indication of the leadership structure which we observed throughout our visit.

Our visit began on Saturday afternoon with a three-hour ministry review followed by dinner at the church building. All of the active elders except for one were able to participate. We began with a devotion from Psalm 23 and then spent the next hour and a half discussing encouragements in the congregation. Realizing that we were going to run out of time and energy, we cut short the discussion of encouragements to move into a discussion of the challenges facing the congregation for the last hour. Sunday morning, David and Jeff returned for Sunday School, worship, and lunch. Donald was unable to return Sunday because of a significant presbytery report being given during the Sunday School hour at 2nd RP.

Our summary observation is that God is blessing the Bloomington congregation. There is evident unity, affection and appreciation within the session, from the session to the congregation, and from the congregation toward their elders. The congregation has received nearly 50 members in the past 2 years from a wide variety of sources including conversion growth. Increases in financial giving, small groups joining together for Bible study, Psalm singing, service projects, prayer, and fellowship are just a few areas of evident progress. Most of these areas of growth have been organic in nature, indicating that the preaching and shepherding are effectively motivating the people of God to love and good works! There are over 50 people involved in one-on-one mentoring relationships which is just another way in which newer members and younger believers are being incorporated into congregational life and encouraged in spiritual growth. The youth Sunday School classes, nursery, and youth group are all lively.

The session is to be commended in the midst of tremendous growth for pursuing a visitation program aimed at maintaining close contact with all the membership. In addition, God is raising up additional laborers for the work of ministry through this congregation. In addition to John Punt there are 2 other men who are exploring the possibility of pursuing pastoral ministry. Also, there are young men who have evident gifts and interest in serving as ruling elders.

God is showing mercy to Bloomington, and it seems to our committee that our presbytery would do well to seek to learn from and incorporate practices from Bloomington's example of a healthy congregational life.

In the midst of these encouragements, there are a few challenges. Most notably, the facility is inadequate for the size of the congregation. Specifically, more auditorium seating, classroom and fellowship space, and restrooms are needed. The current facility is landlocked. Contact has been made with the adjoining lot owners, but neither is currently interested in selling even though both properties are used as rental units. Furthermore, there are not available properties to purchase nor is there an obvious place to plant or daughter a congregation outside of planting a competing RP congregation within the city of Bloomington which is not an optimal solution. The congregation works well together to optimize the current facility, but the building is definitely a limiting factor.

In addition to the building, the elders also expressed concern for enfolding some of the less active members of the congregation and finding ways to more effectively use administrative help to lighten the load of the pastors. It was clear that while the elders want to rejoice in God's faithfulness that they greatly desire to continue to excel by tackling challenges in a timely way.

On Sunday before and after classes and following worship, we were able to visit with many of the members of the congregation and receive ample confirmation that the congregation's view of the session and the ministry aligned with what we heard in our visit with the session.

Along with the above report, we shared some additional observations with the Bloomington session. These observations were minor suggestions and considerations as the ministry continues forward.

Join us in giving thanks for the blessings and evident outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the oldest congregation in our presbytery. We pray that the Lord our God would continue to prosper the Bloomington congregation in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In Christ,
Donald, Jeff, and David