

Interim Pastor Report 2018

11 ½ of my 14 months as your interim minister have been in the calendar year 2018, and there's lots to report as we close the interim period between Pastor Kerri and Pastor Bryan!

The energy level of the church has been steadily building, and many have commented on the pleasure you're finding in noticing the fruits of your work together. As we finished the remodeling project last winter and lived through the temporary disruptions brought by drywall dust, new paint and floorings, we all settled down into the Lent and Easter season, and beyond. Involvement in worship, music life, and educational activities continued to grow, we started to get our financial house in order, our active outreach ministries blossomed, and the Pastoral Search began. Leaders stepped forward to contribute time and talent to whatever needed doing.

I notice how you're a "self-organizing system" in that you all have a way of knowing what needs to be done, how to do it, and then get it done. Leadership is distributed, as various ones step up for various tasks. This is truly "a church with heart" as you've shared your love with each other and the world around you in a multitude of ways.

Worship

Worship is a blend of formality and informality. There is great joy and anticipation each week. We've experienced different musical styles, from keyboard to guitar to brass to percussion. The choir sang monthly and added so much to worship, along with ensembles of church members and other musical guests. You've responded well to using more visuals with worship presentations not only through words of prayers but also with photography and art to make messages understandable, memorable and colorful. You've joined in prayer, song, and action songs with your whole bodies. We celebrated Communion in July around tables in the social hall with bread, juice, and fresh fish fillets, and made our own art with representations of the meanings of Communion. The children's table continues to be important so children may feel they have a place in worship, and can contribute artistically as they listen. A monthly "More Music Sunday" was welcomed, which featured a musical center to worship, including special guest musicians, the Men's Quartet, and hymn requests. A revitalized sanctuary decoration group has added fabrics and florals on a seasonal basis. There were several baptisms, and we hosted the community wide Baccalaureate Service for high school graduates in June.

Education

Over the year we developed a vibrant educational life. The Messy Church group met monthly to plan themes, craft activities, and supper for the monthly session. New this year was inviting the youth, and a newly-started Confirmation Class, to participate in Messy Church with their leaders. We began a weekly Bible reading group after worship, and joined in reading various scripture passages and discussing them for about 45 minutes. The Youth Group participated in activities included the "Knock Knock" retreat at Pilgrim Center and an overnight at the church, along with fund raisers and mission projects. New this year was the start of a Film Group, which featured looking at several film clips and discussing them from a faith/life perspective, and also viewing and discussing one popular feature film, "Black Panther." A trip to the UW Chazen Museum of Art captured the interest of a good number of adults, and a second visit was arranged with the Confirmation group. A friend of the church gave \$2000 to support post-high school education plans for two of our graduates.

Mission Service

The McFarland Food Pantry continues to receive support from our church through food drop-offs and special fund raisers like Sundaes on Thursday in the summer, and the Valentine's weekend theater. Members also volunteered to provide meals through the Community Meal, The Crossing campus ministry, and gifts were made through the Giving Tree program at Christmas. We were a way station for the Annual AIDS Ride last summer. The church aims to give a tithe (10%) of its budget to support OCWM (Our Church's Wider Ministry) through the Wisconsin Conference UCC, and in 2018 we were a "5 for 5" church by giving to OCWM, and One Great Hour of Sharing, Strengthen the Church, Neighbors in Need, and the Christmas Fund offerings. There were drop-ins during the year when people in need came to the church for assistance with rent, eviction prevention, utility costs, gasoline or auto repairs, and food. These needs were evaluated and then provided for with gifts from members or from the Pastor Discretionary Fund. We once again hosted the "Free Sale" for the community, where clothing, books and toys are made available for free to any who come to the event.

Financial Stewardship

2018 was a year of transition in our financial life as we installed a new treasurer and financial secretaries. The learning curve with the church software is a bit steep, but by late summer we were able to accomplish goals of being more transparent with members about the financial needs of the church and how well we're doing in meeting them. Finding ways to be grateful to all of our givers has been another goal. A Finance Committee was activated to help with this work.

The Building and Facilities

The remodeling project was completed in 2018, leaving a few unfinished plans included steeple repair, shoring up the north outside entrance, and repaving the parking lot. Those who pledged to this project are encouraged to continue to stay on course with their giving plan so we can complete the final phases. There were several clean up days inside and out, lawn care and snow removal needs, and regular maintenance. The building is used weekly by a large number of community and musical groups, and the McFarland Community Gardens organization continues to enjoy the plot of land we've offered for their use. In late December we received the amazing gift from John Reed that pays off the mortgage on that 2.2 acres of land adjacent to our building, and to retire an interest-free loan from the national UCC, in place for many years!

Leadership

Your SaLT leadership team has met monthly, and one of their ongoing goals is to match up the energy of the congregation with the work and ministry we share. One way of doing this is to find ways to organize and structure working groups (what is often called "committees") so there is mutual accountability and commitment. As I said earlier, it's been really fun to see how you self-organize and how your leadership and involvement is quite "organic" in that it matches up with the needs at hand. You wish to be the Body of Christ with all parts working smoothly together.

Pastoral Care

As you might expect, during the last year I've been involved with what's called "pastoral care" including hospital visits, counseling, phone calls, emails, notes, baptism consultations, new member inquiries, and informal conversations.

Communication: "A Church With Heart"

Over the past year we've resolved to send out a weekly "Pulse" which is an emailed reminder of the coming week's events and activities. We also began a monthly newsletter called "The HeartBeat" intended to give more detail, including financial reports, a look at the month's worship and education plan, the monthly church calendar, and any other documents that describe the ministries of the church in more detail. The church has a web-site and Facebook

presence, actively managed by Office Administrator Melissa Mendl. We receive good comments from people, and this regular communication is all part of keeping everyone “in the know.” Information is energy, and this regular communication may well have helped build energy over the last few months.

Church Staff

Besides the pastor, you have paid staff including the Office Administrator, the Pianist/Organist, a custodian, and a nursery attendant, and a volunteer choir director. Your SaLT leadership team continues to keep track of the staffing needs and help guide and evaluate their work, in coordination with the pastor.

The Pastoral Search

The Search Committee was commissioned last winter to find a pastor, and this included a self-evaluation of the congregation and preparing a document that would communicate this church’s identity and mission to prospective candidates. They reviewed pastoral profiles, interviewed potential candidates, and selected one, the Rev. Bryan Sirchio, who was called by vote on December 2 to be your pastor and teacher. The Committee fulfilled its work, and now the church is ready to move into a new year, and a new season in the life of the congregation. Praise be to God!

It has been my great pleasure to serve among you for 14 months! I’ve had such a good time with you, appreciating your loving kindness, active engagement, and enthusiasm. That word, “enthusiasm” of course comes from two Greek words, “en” or “in” and “theos” or “God.” Enthusiasm means being in God, and that’s what you are!!! I close with this scripture passage from the Apostle Paul’s letter to the church, because I think it’s true for my experience with you, and I share in this hope with you:

“I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now...And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.” (Philippians 1:3-5, 9-11)

May the Peace of Christ be with you all!

Rev. Michael Bausch