

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year 2010! How grateful I am for all the gifts and cards, kind words and best wishes I received from so many of you. I love the goodies and the special remembrances. I have never had a special stole for Christmas Eve so wearing my new United Church of Christ one was a special treat for me. It was also wonderful to have so many give "end of the year" gifts of money to keep our church serving others. Thank you for your generosity.

Listening for God's lead was our Advent theme. I enjoyed many visits with members and friends in homes and care facilities, serving communion and sharing a carol. Even talking to people on the phone makes listening to stories a wonderful way to celebrate our love and heritage as a church family. Our Parish Care committee delivers cheer and poinsettias. Church School and choir help us prepare for the Christ Child and of course the simple beauty of Christmas Eve is always special.

Now we turn to January as the daylight extends longer day by day. I look forward to working with the Interim Team as we launch the share and prayer triplets. We will continue to focus on spiritual growth with conversations and learning opportunities. I will also focus energy on what it means to be a member of this church and what qualities of leadership we offer one another. Church planning is key for us as we enter the final stages of the interim time.

I would encourage our leadership to engage in planning. This means that all of us will be a part of a comprehensive plan in prayer, in study and in discernment. Here is one definition:

“Church planning is a means for churches and their leaders, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to be purposeful about developing a course of action to carry out their mission.”

Churches undertaking systematic, detailed planning have found:

- People gain energy and enthusiasm from having a sense of direction and from understanding procedures.
- People feel God's mission and the ministry of the church are theirs to accomplish.
- People are motivated to carry out the mission and feel responsible for it.
- Leaders have a clearer picture of what is expected of them.
- Leaders know where they'll get support.
- The church is united in common commitments and feels a sense of wholeness.
- People are making a statement of their faith. A statement of what the congregation wants to accomplish is a kind of personal witness as well.
- Programs and activities of boards, committees and organizations are effectively coordinated.
- People can evaluate what is going on. They can see when it is time to stop doing some things and when they are being called to do others.

I look forward to assisting all of us in being open to the Holy Spirit as we head into a new year 2010.

May we seek peace, reconciliation and a new vision from God for our lives.