

Hello to you near and far;

With spring growing around us and the church's annual meeting behind us, we recognize that summer is approaching. We are beginning a new year of leadership and budget. Change is always present. Most church committees will not be meeting in July. We will enjoy special music on Sunday mornings with our choir on vacation. The trend suggests that worship attendance will be lower numerically. Surprise yourselves! Attend Sundays when you are in town.

A year ago, the Interim Team conducted cottage meetings. Our conversation included the question: What is the purpose of the church? (What was your answer?)

The following are some of the answers:

Worship God Tell the good news of Jesus
Celebrate baptisms, marriages and funerals
Support members in various difficulties of life
To feel closer to God Bring people together
Learn how to live a Christian life – study of the Bible
Remember our heritage and use as an anchor
Be alive in the community Safely question assumptions
Explore and recognize things beyond ourselves
Maintain the building and live within our means

I was encouraged to write these answers down and study them. They offer balance with little mention of maintaining a building, using up the endowment, cutting pastor's ministry or paying our bills. In these answers there could have been more conversation about mission and outreach but they do show a balance between the practical and the spiritual. What we need to address is not mission that gives money but the "hands-on" mission that changes lives for the better; even our own.

I was not encouraged as I participated in our annual meeting that spoke more of finances than faith. This discouragement has happened to me before. Would you call it an occupational hazard? Are we preoccupied with the endowment and cutting expenses when we might choose to seek ways for the income to increase? What measures have we taken to "grow" the church? If we want to grow, what are we doing to nurture growth? My discouragement has now moved into prayer. I wonder how God will help me lead a church with a growing faith and a renewed commitment to discipleship.

Rev. Anthony Robinson wrote an article entitled, "Changing the Conversation: Nurturing a Third Way for Congregations." His basic emphasis is on changing the conversation in churches. Of course, this assumes that we have conversations not just debates or silence when speaking might be more helpful but riskier! Tony suggests we can talk about our loss but we need to learn new ways to explore what it is we want to do and how to live in Jesus' name. Is it time to change the conversation in our church? Stay tuned!