

Pastor Christine's Corner

I hope this September issue of the SPIRE finds you well and enjoying another season of change. Please note our church calendar, especially the Homecoming Sunday celebration. It will be good to once again have the choir in the chancel and to see many of you back in church again.

As we commence a new season for our intergenerational church school and worship, committee meetings and the continuation of an interim time a quote from the study book, "Facing Change" by Leah Matthews came to my mind. "Changes in our lives sometimes leave us filled with thankfulness and other times fill us with anxiety and dread, confusion and uncertainty."

Does that quote seem relevant for your life of faith? Is change something you dread and fear? Is it something that brings promise and excitement? I think your answer, like mine depends on the circumstances. Sometimes change is a mixed blessing for each of us, even within the church. A baby born into a household, family and community brings excitement with the change. It also brings new responsibilities and some loss of independence and spendable income. We cannot revel in the spender of God's paintbrush in autumn without knowing that winter will follow. Of course many of us live in VT because it has four seasons! The nature of change actually changes all the time.

My "lead-in" paragraphs turn us to a major change within the life of our congregation. At our church's annual meeting last May, there was a majority vote on the budget that brought change to our family of faith. Beginning December 1, 2009, the pastoral compensation package and hours will be for three quarter time. The decision was first and foremost financial but this decision directly affects the call of a pastor and the job description. I need to adjust my work and my budget losing about \$1500/month of income. I hope to work three weeks as usual and take the fourth week of each month off. Indirectly and much more subtly, this change affects what the congregation thinks of itself and what it plans for its future. This decision is another one of those mixed blessings and holds consequences for all of us.

The way we make decisions as a congregation has captured my imagination as an intentional interim with you. We will need to intentionally change the conversation to include both the practical aspects of future ministry, like use of the endowment, and a discussion of our spiritual call from God to be church in this time and place. Changing the conversation is essential for this church as the labor pains of new birth are felt. We are the broken Body of Christ offering our lives for the good of others.

I look forward to a focus on the practice of discernment in your decision making. For many years we have established patterns of decision making and accountability that have not always served the church well. I pray that the change from full time to three quarter time for the pastor will become an opportunity to be transparent in our motives, re-invent our ministry, be thoughtful in our planning and, open in our discussion and decision making. We need to live within a church where we clearly understand our commitment and what it means to us to follow Jesus in these times of change.

Finally, begin thinking about the following questions: What does God say about change? Does God change over time? Who is God in the midst of change, in the very inside of our lives? Those larger questions need to be asked now? Make your calendars for two new events in the life of our changing church and changing conversation. First, mark your calendar for the first Sunday of the month. We will hold a HEALING SERVICE in the chapel/fellowship room immediately following worship. Second, mark your calendar for the third Sunday of the month. We will hold a Faith Formation Session on God. We will use the Bible, personal experience using nouns and adjectives to assist us in this time of change and discernment. See you there and may God bless you with abundant life and a growing faith.

Peace,

Pastor Christine