

Moderator's Report 2014

February 02, 2015

Dear Friends,

In September as we prepared to close the sale of our property at 400 High Street, I sent a letter to the congregation that conveyed many of my thoughts on our congregation and its history, and what we accomplished in 2014 to that time.

June's congregational vote to approve the sale of the old buildings and establish Sanctuary was a true turning point in the history of the Congregational Church of West Medford and its members. Getting to that point was a challenge, and it required a committed effort on the part of many members. The decision to sell was difficult for many and traumatic for some, especially those who have been lifelong members of the congregation for 30-50 years. However the actual determination to sell was not difficult. We had very little choice.

We did have a choice between closing the congregation or transforming it into a new entity with a new mission and using our newly "liquid" assets to implement that mission. The simple, easy choice would have been to close. The difficult choice was to reorganize, to dramatically reduce the physical footprint of our facilities and to dramatically expand our spiritual footprint in our community.

Rev. Olapade bore the bulk of the burden in marketing and selling 400 High Street, in closing 400 High Street and determining what material goods would be left behind, thrown away, given away, or transported to Sanctuary. She was also responsible for establishing the vision of what 458 High Street, "Sanctuary," would look like physically, and for hiring and supervising the contractors who implemented that vision. She was the key person in advertising for, interviewing, and selecting trained professionals to work part-time to help make Sanctuary a success.

The "bad" news was that most of these responsibilities and efforts were concurrent, so the past twelve months have been challenging and demanding for our minister. We are truly blessed to have Rev. Wendy Miller Olapade as our pastor. Without her, I do not think we would be poised where we are. We must take good care of her so she is physically and spiritually at her best,

The 2015 Annual Meeting with the 2014 Annual Report represents another watershed for our congregation. We are voting on our first "new budget" with the emphasis on people and programming rather than on pipes and plaster. We are authorizing the hiring of three part-time professionals to do things we cannot do ourselves and to encourage and guide us to do the things that individual members can and should do. We are voting on a dramatic revision of the bylaws to help us literally do more with less, with fewer people

investing their time in the church but doing so more wisely, efficiently and effectively than we did before.

We are voting to establish a policy of generosity and a focus on mission to our community, rather than a mission to try to maintain a large, impressive, and expensive edifice that served a declining percentage of our community.

Perhaps more important, we are changing our personal orientation. Many were comfortable at 400 High Street. It was familiar. It was in one very real sense a family. We went through a number of changes in our worship service over the past five years, but we were comfortable. Comfortable. Dealing with the known, the familiar.

As we embark on 2015, we really don't know what Sanctuary will be, will look like in January 2016. We don't know all of what we will be doing. Little will be familiar, except for the several dozen people who moved from 400 to 458.

Sanctuary will be doing new, different, and widely diverse, things. Some efforts will fail. Some will succeed. Once we officially close 2014, a year of radical change for us, we will actually be embarking on more dramatic changes. Rev. Olapade and her professional staff will have to focus at least 75% of their energy and attention on people "outside 458." We "inside 458" must grow more self-sufficient while focusing more attention "outside 458," which will change us individually. Think of the Pine Ridge Mission. What our mission did for others. What the mission did for us, individually and as a church family.

We have to start thinking about how we envision success. How we will measure it. How we will have to plan for dramatic changes when we are successful. We will establish milestones for evaluating our programs and will have to be flexible in modifying and adjusting our programs. Flexibility will become more important than familiarity. Enthusiasm will become more important than familiarity. We will be seeking change. We will be implementing change, because that is what Sanctuary is all about. Making important changes in the lives of our neighbors and our selves. It is risky. It is scary. And exciting. Congratulations on having the courage to make that decision. Now we must have the courage and strength to live that decision. We are embarking on a real journey of faith.

God bless,

Paul

Paul M. Roberts
Co-Moderator