

Pastor's Report

2020.11.01 - 2021.06.30

"I will take you as my people and I will be your God. You shall know that I am"

—Genesis 6:7

"Being the Church in this Liminal Season"

Beloved –

Since our December, 2020 Annual Meeting and our January, 2021 Visioning Gathering—and as our church and the world has come out of this past 20 months of pandemic challenge and racial reckoning—Sanctuary has been able to do good church!

By the grace of God, through the resources left to our stewardship and care by our forebears, and through partnerships with Hillside, other Medford community groups, and individuals who have shown up to make God's love and justice real—we have maintained our commitment to our mission and purpose. It has looked and felt different (as it has for all of humanity these past couple of years) but we have nonetheless followed Jesus through action, humbly worshipped and formed faith, and loved God and our neighbors – extravagantly.

The mission and purpose we envisioned seven years ago when the Congregational Church of West Medford sold its property with a vision of following Jesus into the streets of Medford to start a new thing as Sanctuary UCC has continued to unfold. These words from the vision continue to inspire all of us to our purpose:

God calls us to care for and meet people where they are; share a life of prayer and joyful service with all; and together-- worship, rest in, and serve God. We are seekers of justice and lovers of all of God's creation. Through the community formed by the Holy Spirit, we are consoled, forgiven, refreshed and inspired.

We **are** consoled, forgiven, refreshed, and inspired by just **being** the church—in every form and at every turn.

This year we continued to meet people where they are—with deep engagement in activism for equity and social justice in our city and in the racial reckoning in which our country finds itself. We have grown in our understanding of whiteness and the impact white supremacy has on social policy, civic practice, and our own privilege as a church and as Christians. We have pivoted to social media for all of our engagement—with excellent online worship and intimate connections—as well as an even more public expression of Christ's mercy for all. In our online ministry (youtube, facebook live, Instagram) we are expressing a progressive, inclusive, ONA theology through worship and the One-Minute-Word format. Through the huge Micropantry Mission we facilitate in the city of Medford and our staff's continued leadership in civic and community actions groups such as Medford Health Matters, Mobilize Medford, Safe Medford and the Food Security Task force we are "out" in the world, carrying the gospel and making love and justice real!

As we turn the corner to what is to come, knowing that we remain in a time of transition—a liminal time between what was and what is to be—we are encouraged and blessed, especially by the joyful and rich partnership we have had with Hillside. There is much to discern and discover about what it to be post pandemic—for all of us as individuals, for our city and nation, for your families and workplaces, and for us as church. But, there is no going back to what has been. That is not the Way of Jesus. Nor, do we do not know what will be. That is just the way that it is! Nonetheless, we do know that we are God's beloved ones and that God has a call on our hearts, souls, mission, ministry plan, and purpose—that call is to *be the church* in Medford. God has provided what we need and God will show us the Way—provided we allow God to be the Way.

Susan Beaumont in her direction about leadership in liminal times such as these suggests three counter-cultural, spiritual shifts that will support our finding our way to God's Way:

- From Knowing to Unknowing: when we shift in this way, we can drop our opinions, position, and ego and tap into spiritual intuition and God's Way;
- From Advocating to Attending: when we shift in this way, we can cease to fight for our way and be fully present to what is unfolding and happening, attending to what is to discern what is becoming;
- From Striving to Surrendering: when we are striving we are vested in self, success, the way we think it is supposed to be; when we surrender we yield to the powerful reality of what is real. To surrender is to take a long loving look at what is, including the mysteries of God that are ahead of us. To surrender embraces the reality of what is, leaving us to discover what we need to learn, become, and see about the mysterious future.

Beloved, I pray that we might all ground ourselves in these spiritual shifts as our way to be together in this liminal time—as we find God's Way for Sanctuary to be the church unfolding, as we live as Jesus' Hands and Feet in this unfolding, and as we listen for the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that we might become sustainable in the unfolding!

God bless you and may God Bless Sanctuary UCC and Hillside Community Church.

Rev. Wendy Miller Olapade, Lead Pastor (and connector in chief)