

*We are called into fellowship (koinonia) with Christ by God (1 Cor. 1:9).  
This partnership with God is meant to lead us into  
meaningful partnerships as siblings in God's family (1 John 1:3).  
For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. (1 Cor 3:9)*

## **Pastor's Report 2023**

Dearly Beloved,

These past few years have been the most exhausting, exciting, and inspiring of my ministry—now over thirty-years' worth. You (Sanctuary's faithful leaders and friends), Rev. Tom Hathaway and the Hillside Community Church, our many ministry partners, our civic community, and the Holy Spirit are the reason that is so!

So I thank you with a gratitude that explodes from my heart and soul. Thank you for being the unique church that is Sanctuary. Thank you for making God's love real through the arts, outreach, and service. Thank you for sending me into the city to be the hands and feet of justice. Thank you for struggling with the tough moments and tough questions. Thank you for trusting that we would find our way. And thank you for allowing me to be your pastor and teacher. I continue to learn from you and our community.

As we proceed to live into our call to be Sanctuary, I continue to be deeply appreciative and inspired by the collaboration and connections of our ministry and mission. Investing in partnerships was one of the core values we claimed when—as a small, postmodern, local UCC congregation—we let go of everything we had as an institution (the building, the historic congregational identity, the organizational structure, and even our classic worship model) and rebooted as an emerging, mission outpost that followed Jesus into the streets to spread love, care, and the gospel in the streets of Medford, MA.

Without these classic “things” we needed partnerships to do ministry. Convincing others to join us in new models of mission was often met with resistance, individual and

institutional ego, and even fear. The theology of scarcity is a pretty powerful player in the world and in the institutional church!

But, the perpetual pandemic pivots in which we found ourselves broke down barriers and motivated amazing, life-giving, inspired partnerships for us and for others. Necessity is still the mother-of-invention. Needless to say – our shared mission and ministry with Hillside is a gift of the pandemic that has expressed itself exponentially!

A commitment to collaboration, finding the gifts and graces of partnerships is my hope for the post-pandemic church and for Sanctuary and Hillside. We cannot go back. So let's put our old models (and our individual preferences) in our pockets and build partnerships that drive cultural competence, increase understanding and diversity, tackle inequity, and make love and justice real.

We can partner with God to lead with love across communities and the region. We can connect across differences, across denominations, across faith traditions, and across civic, non-profit, and for profit organizations. We can ground our partnerships in shared values to multiply resources, create complementary collaborations, engender creativity, and support each other to be the blessing we want to see in the world.

With God and partnerships, the sum is always bigger than the parts. In partnership our pastors and people are not isolated. And together we become a source of mutual care and healing, shared experience and story, connected kinship, and...precious partnership.

I can't wait to see what is in store as we pursue a dynamic koinonia — guided by the Holy Spirit, inspired by Christ, and grounded in God's Grace.

With Gratitude,  
Rev. Wendy Miller Olapade  
June 24, 2023