

2024 Lead Pastor's Report

Be still and know that I am God. – Psalm 46:10

Be still and know.

Be still.

Be.

Dearly Beloved,

As I reflect on the past year, I am filled with gratitude for each of you and the unique journey we have undertaken together. This year has been a profound exercise in faith, patience, and deep listening, as we navigate our questions, our future, and the possibility of merging with Hillside Community Church. In my experience of us - it has been a year marked by significant spiritual and practical growth as we have settled into being Sanctuary in uncertain times - without fear. I have never been more glad to be a pastor because of you. I have experienced your practical support, your presence and investment in our process, and your confidence in our community. Your support of our collective leadership model, your willingness to remain on the way when we do not know where we are going, and your courage in surrendering to where and how God has asked us to be - is not only a blessing but it is an inspiration - and a source of courage for me and for each other!

Embracing the Pace of Grace

As we turn our attention to next year's mission and ministry and the ongoing discussion about sustainability and our future as an institution – your courage gives me the courage to embrace the pace of grace. Together, as we lean into the uniquely Sanctuary ministries that we do so well, we are also encouraged to slow down and be present in each moment, trusting that God's timing for our institutional process is perfect. The pace of grace is not hurried or frantic but measured and mindful, allowing us to both experience our ministries (and our lives) fully, learn from and be guided by each experience, and trust the process - hearing God's gentle whispers guiding our path. I love the truth observed by saint Anne Lamott that "Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you."

From Advocating to Attending

In this spirit, I am also committed to leading us all in the spiritual shift of moving from advocating and striving for some preconceived endpoint - to a posture of attending to what is. Advocating often involves pushing for specific outcomes and driving forward agendas with a sense of urgency. While there is a time and place for advocacy, this year has taught us the profound value of attending—of being fully present, listening deeply, and being open to what is emerging.

This shift has been particularly significant in our merger process with Hillside Community Church. Rather than rushing to merge our two communities or pushing for immediate integration, the Holy Spirit has reminded us of the need to take time to listen to one another, understand our respective cultures, and discern God's plan for our shared future.

Listening for God's Plan

Like with The Circle Way we have practiced at Sanctuary – listening, surrendering, attending, and holding – will be our best way forward. While we have held a few sessions with a small group of leaders to get started – we have more ‘attending’ to practice at the ‘pace of grace’ to ensure that all voices are heard and each question and concern is acknowledged. The work of discovery and discernment will bring us closer as a combined community that has different histories and cultures and yet has a shared calling to be love and justice in our city. By embracing the pace of grace and attending to each other with care and compassion, we create space for the Holy Spirit to move among us – and the quiet we need to hear the still, small voice of God revealing insights and directions that we might miss if we try to advocate solely for the agenda we imagined in our 2023 discernment process.

God is already doing for us what we would not have done for ourselves. Our journey has been blessed with deepened and strengthened relationships. We have come to know each other more intimately and we will be able to carry that into the merger process, understanding the hopes, dreams, and fears that we carry for Sanctuary. We have grown spiritually and experienced a wider range of spiritual and theological practices through our partnerships and communal life. Our faith and mission life has been enriched greatly in our partnership with Hillside - and through that we have been drawn closer to God. And by slowing down and listening attentively, our vision for Sanctuary's future has been clarified by our response to the process. That vision honors and empowers the unique gifts and callings of both our congregations and

Looking Ahead

As we move forward, I commit to modeling the pace of grace and the posture of attending. And - **when I get afraid and falter, I ask you to call me back to that commitment.** Together, we can trust that God is at work in our midst, unfolding a future that is filled with hope and promise. Our merger with Hillside Community Church is not just a logistical process but a spiritual journey that requires our patience, humility, and openness to the Spirit's leading. We will continue to hold spaces for listening and discernment, ensuring that our decisions are grounded in prayer and mutual respect. We will celebrate the milestones we achieve and learn from the challenges we encounter, always mindful that God's grace is sufficient for each step of the way.

In closing, I want to reiterate my heartfelt gratitude to each of you. Your faith, resilience, and willingness to embrace the unknown have been truly inspiring. May God bless us and guide us as we step into this new chapter, confident that we are being led towards a future filled with God's Grace, the call of Christ's mission on our hearts, and the guidance and goodness of the Holy Spirit in each step along the way.

In faith and gratitude,

Rev. Wendy Miller Olapade

Lead Pastor, Sanctuary UCC

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