



**Central United Methodist Church  
State of the Church  
Charge Conference  
November 18, 2018  
Will Malambri**

Throughout 2018 the Church Council began each meeting with a reflection on what it means to be "church." We reviewed references to church in the gospels, epistles, the Revelation of Saint John, and the 2016 *Book of Discipline*. We concluded that church is a body of Jesus' disciples who are connected in him, forgive as he taught, seek to live the faith together in vibrant ways, and are the primary locus for disciple-making.

We have born that out in too many ways to account for here, but it can be illustrated by the week Hurricane Florence came through, and the week after that.

In the days leading up to Florence and during the worst of the storm, members and staff were in conversation about what needed to be done to care for one another. Decisions were made with due diligence, born of concern for safety, but also a recognition that what we do as a church matters greatly and that whenever we cancel and close it comes at a notable cost.

Thankfully, Central's church family was not terribly affected by Hurricane Florence, which put us in a position to respond to others' needs. Church members were ready to help when asked to be hosts for the American Red Cross shelter housed at Central. Staff members helped make the shelter a well-supported reality and assisted the Salvation Army with what they needed to prepare meals. When the Davis Center was no longer needed for a shelter, church families were given the opportunity to use that great asset for children and youth to get together for recreation and, perhaps just as important, adults to get together for conversation.

Through it all we learned lessons about how to prepare for future disaster response. We also practiced what we talk about year-round.

We don't need a storm to make us into church. We're already church and what we do on weeks when we are not facing a crisis is what trains us for weeks when we are.

Central remains the kind of church that, week in and week out, is actively caring for neighbors within the congregation and well beyond. Our outreach is strong and growing. We are refocusing on the importance of evangelism and hospitality. Congregational Care comes from a significant number of committed visitors and Stephen Ministers. Excellent education, spiritual growth, and fellowship occurs in a variety of ways for children, youth, and adults. There is something nearly every day, usually multiple ministries each day. Our meaningful worship services continue to be designed with God as the audience, all in attendance as participants, and devoted leadership (musicians, staff, and clergy) that seek to give their best every service. The Trustees lead us by tending our facilities well and the Council's authorization of a Building Committee may lead to important facility upgrades in the years ahead.

What this means is Central will be church in 2019, and well beyond. We will work through challenges and opportunities together knowing that what matters most is that God is loved and neighbors are loved and that these happen through our following Jesus together.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "W. F. Malambri" with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rev. Will Malambri, Senior Pastor