

Pastor's Blog

Rev. Laura Baumgartner

May 10, 2018

This week will be the last week of Pastor Brad's sabbatical. As we begin to prepare for his return, I have written an open letter to him, from one of your pastors to another. I hope it will be a conversation starter about how you see these past six weeks preparing us as a congregation for the work that the Spirit has for us in the future.

Pastor Brad,

I hope your sabbatical time has been productive for you. We have prayed for you every week in worship and throughout the time you've been away. Our prayers for you have become not only that, but also prayers for our own future. We have prayed that your time away would be a time of renewal and spiritual growth for you, but also that your work while you are away will be work that in time can renew the congregation and lead us to spiritual growth as well.

As you arranged before you left, we have continued to encounter the Risen Christ through the end of the gospel of John. We listened as Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love me?" and then received his instruction to feed the sheep. We watched as Jesus appeared on the lake shore and 153 fish were caught and brought to shore. We tasted as the Risen Christ and his followers broke bread together and shared signs of peace among them and with those gathered.

This has been a time when the congregation experienced change, not for the sake of change. There was change as we experimented with how we are being called to be church in our context. Beyond the changes associated with your absence and new preachers in worship, there were changes that required personal investment too. We worshiped at 9:00 one week and 10:00 one week. We formed new teams for Mission Sunday and invited the Islamic Center of the Eastside to teach us about their mission projects as we taught them about ours. We held our annual stewardship campaign and the leaders have proposed their budgets for the next year. During this period, the Spirit has been preparing us. We anticipate that you will bring new ideas back with you and we will experiment with them as well. May God make us ready.

I attended two district trainings while you were gone. Both times I was accompanied by others from Aldersgate. First, two of us went to the Love Thy Neighbor conference on church revitalization at First UMC, Seattle. Once there, we recognized Thomas Yang, whom you know because he preached at Aldersgate last fall. That was a full day of dipping our toes into the waters of rebirth. It was a time of reimagining what it would mean to think first of God's plans in our community and second about what is comfortable for us. It was a day of great energy and creativity, as well as deep thinking. Then, seven of us went to Edmonds UMC for the Table Talks, designed to facilitate conversations about topics on which we may disagree around sexuality. This experience was an afternoon where many heard hope and the possibility of a future together, unity without uniformity, and peace among many who have strong feelings. If I am honest though, it was also an afternoon of challenge and questioning for some. It was a time when we started to imagine how the United Methodist church may be changing in the next year. As you return, I hope that our connection to the wider UMC is something that we continue to hold carefully and prayerfully.

There is much news to share and I'm sure you'll hear it from many sources. However mostly I want to be the first to say, Welcome Back! We have waited for this time and are anxious for your return. We hope to celebrate with you the successes of what you were able to accomplish. I hope many of us will be able to lend a hand to whatever work is ongoing that you have begun. I want to affirm the places where your work and our work in your absence may have synergy. I look forward to the challenges that you will set before us and the work that we will do together in the coming weeks, months, and years.

In service to God's church,

Pastor Laura