A Different Way Forward

By: Terry Risse

Yogi Berra, player and manager for the New York Yankees, is famous for his comical quotations and comments on life. He offered sayings that on the surface made no sense or contained improper grammar, and yet contained deeper grains of truth. One of his popular philosophical contributions was, "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." While our initial reaction may be, "Which fork?" In reality, it may not matter. Either one may be right. Both will be different than the path we have come. The key may be to take one of the forks and make it our new path. Perhaps it is more important to move ahead than to hesitate and wonder.

Many churches today face challenges as the world around them changes. Lower numbers, a combination of aging members and time strapped younger members and competition from activities outside the church are examples of these challenges. Finding ways to encourage and support members and carry out God's purpose in meaningful but realistic undertakings is the key to moving forward for the church. Like many of society's organizations, the church can be slow to recognize and even slower to embrace or adopt change.

While participating in Association and Conference meetings in recent years, I have heard testimonials from individuals and congregations who have "taken the fork in the road." The message which stuck with me was that these individuals and congregations decided it was time to stop worrying about why things couldn't be like they were in the past and move forward with the people and resources they had now. They made a conscious decision to take a positive approach and move ahead with the people and the resources they had available. They also were willing to change what they did and how they did it to fit the people who were part of the church now. They found what worked and moved ahead. The emphasis was on quality, not quantity. They adopted a positive attitude and contributed to their congregation and the community based on what they were able to support, not past expectations.

In many cases a single congregation adopted fewer missions or activities, important to their members and concentrated on those activities. In other cases, multiple churches banded together to maintain enough members to survive. These commitments often required "letting go" of traditional activities or even buildings in order to move forward. One example was of three congregations in historic churches on the east coast who merged in order to maintain enough members to continue as a Christian family. They had to give up two of their buildings and drastically change their approach to how they operated. In the end they characterized their merged church family as follows: "We serve a community meal for the poor every Saturday night. We worship every Sunday morning and we don't have a lot of meetings or committees."

The conversations we have been having about the Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations and a team-based approach to activities revolving around these five practices now have to be put into practice. We have started the process but have to really make it our own, moving forward. The church bylaws will need updating and we will have to answer questions about how the church will be organized. How will we transition from 17 committees to 6 teams? What will be the size of the consistory? How will they be elected? What will be their responsibilities? How will the teams and the consistory interact? What numbers will constitute quorums? What actually works for activities and schedules with families, young and old? There may be adjustments along the way but it is time to start our journey.

We are at a fork in the road. We can count on God's help to "take it."

ENDOWMENT REQUESTS FOR FUNDING

The Endowment Committee meets semi-annually to grant requests for **funding of mission and ministry related activities and expenses.** Please consider how Salem's Endowment Fund may offer financial support for your mission and ministry goals. **Request forms for funding will be accepted through Monday, October 14** for the upcoming round of grants. Printed forms should be available along the wall behind the Narthex or through the church office. Requests may also be submitted online at www.bit.ly/endreq. Participants must outline the need, objective(s), budget and anticipated results for each grant being requested. All are invited and encouraged to submit requests for funding. Related questions may be directed to Salem's church office or members of the Endowment Committee: Scott Bunyea (Chair), Tom Daigle, Wes Huibregtse, Mary Mullen, Mary Bender, Rev. Hoppert.