## From the Prez (for Sept 20 newsletter)

## Our Change Point

In Western popular culture, the Chinese word for "crisis" is often (incorrectly) said to comprise two Chinese characters meaning 'danger' and 'opportunity'. In fact, I've learned that the second character is only a component of the Chinese word for *opportunity* but has multiple meanings, and in isolation means something more like 'change point' or 'inflection point'. Either way, our Music Director, Mike's, leaving us at the end of December, is both an opportunity and a change point.

Actually, I like change. I like having opportunities to change things up, try new things, experiment. Don't get me wrong, I love Mike and the sound he creates with our talented choir. I love the anthems and his offertory pieces. What a gift I've enjoyed over the past 2.5 years!

And now we have an opportunity; we are at a change point. This is an opportunity to hear more from the very talented musicians within our congregation, both in the choir and in the congregation. This is an opportunity to consider creating a children's choir or even integrating kids into our choir. This might be an opportunity to experiment with different types of music, instruments, and musicians.

In Bloomington, Indiana, there is an annual time in early fall called the Lotus World Music festival which, for a decade, had been one of my favorite 4-day periods of the year. For 4 nights, across 9 venues around downtown Bloomington, musicians performed from all over the world. I discovered that I love Mongol-Tuvan throat singing, the didgeridoo played by an elderly man from the aboriginal peoples of northern Australia, toy pianos. I've heard the haunting melodies of the Indian oud, a Ukrainian bandura, a benju, (a keyed zither that is a folk instrument of Balochistan, a province of Pakistan), and so such more. Perhaps we can't be quite this creative! Still, my point is that we are limited only by our imaginations – and, unfortunately, our significant budget deficit.

At the meeting Rev Denis and I had a few weeks ago with members of the choir, people felt that with the time needed to rewrite the MD job description and then the holidays, it likely wouldn't be at least until February before we could hire a new MD – not to mention whatever notice that person might have to give. Given that the summer choir recess begins only 4-5 months later, several folks at the recent listening session suggested that it would make sense to postpone hiring until at least September 2025. During that period, we have so many options to create wonderful music together – think of duets, quartets, small combos, local musicians, URI students … I agree with Rev Denis that given the abundance of skills within our community it could work out well.

As president of this amazing congregation, it is my obligation to speak as a fiduciary, that is, someone bound by legal and ethical obligations to protect the organization's best interests, regardless of personal preference. As such, I must be clear that, in my opinion, hiring someone at this juncture, when we have a budget that forecasts a $30,000 deficit, is irresponsible. It is rare that non-profit organizations have an opportunity to catch up – even partially – to a budget deficit and move toward regaining financial sustainability. On top of the deficit, the Board recently approved finding another $15,000 to urgently replace the two small roofs – not to mention other significant capital needs, like replacing the large roof, the exterior moisture issue, windows…. We must take our budget shortfall seriously. Saving one salary will not balance the budget but it will be a huge help as we replace the roofs and see what this year brings us.

In the meantime, does anybody play the didgeridoo?

In peace,

Nancy