

LISTENING TO THE HEARTBEAT OF GOD
– FROM PASTOR LAWRENCE

The final Session meeting feels significant at the close of every year. True enough, it feels special for the time of fellowship we enjoy before we officially convene the December meeting of our church council. Then there's the diligent review and discussion of the proposed ministry budget for the coming year.

This year our Clerk of Session, Judy Fisher, shared with us that it would be her last meeting as Clerk. If not for our virtual meeting via Zoom, I think we would have heard the quick intake of breath from many of our Ruling Elders. The announcement felt like we were crossing the threshold into another era.

Judy has served twice as Clerk. Her first appointment began in the late 1980s. After several years away from the role, Judy returned as Clerk in 2007 and served continuously through this year. From beginning to end, she bridged the days of the fax machine through virtual meetings on Zoom.

I imagine that many others in the congregation may join me in measuring Judy's ministry to the congregation as our Clerk through very different metrics than time, technology or the number of pages she's added to the official records of Oxford Presbyterian Church. Instead, she exemplified wisdom and faithfulness, excellence and joy throughout her service to our family of faith.

Judy was the guide who welcomed me into your ministry four short years ago. As we met month after month, she wisely and patiently counselled me in the pressing work of the Session as well as the culture of this exciting congregation.

In our Session meetings Judy was a ready font of knowledge on previous Session decisions and past practice. She knew where to quickly find any information she didn't already know. She offered excellent reports and sage advice with humility and humor. We'll certainly miss her lyrical and amusing unofficial "church year in review" worthy of Shakespeare.

Judy Fisher now hands the "Clerk's Pen" to Judy Schiller whom she will mentor over the months to come. I encourage you to express your gratitude to Judy Fisher for her extraordinary contributions to our ministry. Please also join me in welcoming and encouraging Judy Schiller in this exciting chapter of our congregation's faithful story.

In December, the lectionary offered us this passage from Isaiah 61. In that chapter, the prophet describes the children of God as

*oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the Lord
for the display of his splendor.*

Judy Fisher personifies this scripture passage. I sensed this as I walked out her door from our first meeting and through the oak leaves that had fallen to the earth around her home.

Through the seasons of life, the oaks of righteousness stretch for the light. From the youngest trees to the most mature trees, our roots intertwine across the generations to provide strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow. From the canopy, we marvel at the long view of life and glimpse how the horizon stretches beyond our view. From the acorns, we bear the promise of new life - *a planting of the Lord*.

Thank you Judy.

I believe I hear Jesus saying, Well done - good and faithful servant.