

2019 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PASTOR

At the thresholds of time such as a new year, I often find myself singing “Seasons of Love” from the Musical Rent.

Five hundred, twenty five thousand, six hundred minutes.

How do you measure, measure a year?

In daylights, in sunsets,

In midnights, in cups of coffee,

In inches, in miles, in laughter, in strife?

How do you measure a year in a life?

I first measure this year in the life of our congregation with the three timeless marks the Apostle Paul offers at the close of 1 Corinthians 13 – faith, hope and love. As I cast my gaze back upon 2019 for this annual report, I offer up the following moments as ways the ministry of our church transformed individual lives, impacted the Oxford Community and touched the world.

- Faith on Christmas Eve when my heart swelled to the point of bursting as the sanctuary filled with so many people from diverse backgrounds coming to touch the holy story that our Creator so loves this world that Immanuel took on our human flesh – God-with-us.
- Faith in the midst of post-film dialogue at Seminary Cinema that was so lively and engaged it could have been mistaken for a conversation amongst Jesus’ disciples.
- Faith in worship when the gates of eternity seemed to open wide. The first moment occurred on Easter Sunday when the choir and organ, brass and percussion joined together for three transcendent anthems. The other moment took place when our congregation worshipped in the sanctuary of the Seminary Church for the first time in decades. At the beginning of worship on that Sunday of Memorial Day weekend we sang out the hymn that so often opened worship at the Seminary Church – *Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God Almighty*.
- Hope when the confirmands read their Statements of Faith that I felt humbled to be in the presence of such practical and honest theologians along with their wise mentors. These youth are a witness to the future of Christ’s work in this world.
- Hope during the Easter Vigil lead by the Pastor Marc and the students of the Campus Ministry when I saw not only Jesus’ growing disciples – I saw the future of his church.

- Hope when Jesus himself seemed to laugh with those around a table at the Community Meal through sharing the humorous stories as strangers became neighbors.
- Unforgettable love when members of the congregation and staff shared their stories in worship of Jesus' calling in our lives with such grace and authenticity.
- Amazing love between Jesus' disciples around the world when the 2019 Russian Mission Partnership Team presented our sister church in Zlatoust with the quilt so beautifully designed and lovingly created by members of this congregation. One quilt with images of both congregations to bless the ties that bind us together.
- Generous love as over eighty people from this congregation and community gathered in the Community Room of the Seminary during the Global Food Week of Action. For the second year in a row we packed more than 15,000 meals for children in need of nutritious meals at school and for disaster survivors around the world.

I also measure the year in the moments that challenged us and called for continual improvements and growth. This is such an exciting and dynamic time to be part of Oxford Presbyterian Church. In 2019 we accepted the invitation from Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary to join seven other Presbyterian Congregations in the Myrtle Collaboration. During the process of worship experiences, congregational journaling, small groups, and retreat we claimed the journey as our own by renaming it "Called to Life!"

The goal of the "Called to Life!" journey is to discern a primary call for our ministry. This call will not diminish or replace the mission work and relationships already woven into our ministry. This vision for our future will be a guide and gauge for new mission work and relationships.

To the Apostle Paul's list of faith, hope and love, I would add the word gratitude. I measure so many moments of 2019 through the perspective of gratitude, yet I will limit myself to these three:

- Gratitude at the dedication of the ramp at the entrance of the Memorial Church sanctuary that symbolizes our belief that Jesus fully welcomes all people to participate in his kingdom fully just as they are and so do we.

- Gratitude on World Communion Sunday when the youth streamed to the Communion Table with bread from around the world and then handed out acorns to everyone in worship during the Time with Young Disciples as seeds of peace, faith and hope.
- Gratitude at the growth of our stewardship as a congregation as we continually strive to change lives for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

To serve God alongside each one of you is a great gift that inspires and humbles me daily. Along with Pastor Marc and all of your ministry staff, we always put forth our best effort to serve the Lord Jesus Christ and you with faith, hope, love and gratitude.

Gratefully,
Pastor Lawrence

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Please contact our church office for your copy of the full 2019 Annual Report.