

Sabbatical Report  
Marlene Pomeroy  
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I spent the first month of sabbatical recovering. I was not aware of how fatigued I was after the church move and was really feeling depleted both physically and emotionally. We traveled to Ireland and N. Ireland and really took the time to relax, sightsee and experience these two beautiful countries. My energy began to return during this first month.

In June I was able to attend my daughter's college graduation in Oregon and then drove down with her afterwards. It was a rich time to be with her during this pivotal moment in her life. I also was able to take my 88 year-old Mom on a trip to New England so that she could visit her old friends and see places where she has lived.

I guest-preached for two churches and had conversations with those church folks about where they experienced vitality in their churches.

I did three, 3-day trainings – one on storytelling and healing, one on spiritual practices for healthy relationships, and a third on Celtic Christianity. All were very educational and fulfilling and had practical applications to my life and ministry.

Everywhere I went I talked with pastors about their churches – were they growing, remaining steady or on the decline? Most were steady or declining and very few had young people. I talked with them about what they were doing that was exciting and the answers fell into three categories: they felt a sense of compassionate community with each other, they engaged in a few meaningful outreach activities that connected them to the world outside their church, and they nurtured their faith through their church programs.

As I reflected on our church and the future I am excited about being settled in a beautiful, welcoming and affordable building space. I am relieved that the decision about selling our building and moving is past us and that we can now focus our efforts on nurturing our faith and getting involved in the world beyond us. My hope is to concentrate our efforts in two areas:

- Plan and engage in regular spiritual practice and nurture together (intentional meals and meetings, ½ day and annual retreats, reading books, Soul Collage, nurturing our children and youth, faith sharing, trips and conferences (such as Wild Goose, etc.) ...simple activities done with intentionality to deepen our commitment to God and one another.

- Increase our partnering with others to do outreach and engagement in our community and beyond. Ideas that excite me include: working with the First United Methodists on events – musical, outreach, educational, worship, etc. Continuing to deepen our commitment to the work of Friends in Deed to provide services to our

community (serving meals, serving at Bad Weather Shelter, attending their fund-raising events, bringing food and supplies to the pantry, helping with school supplies drive and Christmas giving, etc.) Partnering with the San Marino UCC Church Food Forward program - which harvests local fruit and donates it to food agencies, etc. Also, continue to partner with and support the work of non-profits such as Aid Africa, My Refuge House, CROP, etc., so that we are working with others who already have programs up and running to reduce suffering and raise the wellness in our world. By partnering with groups outside of ourselves, we will engage the community and increase our visibility as a church.

I want to say in closing that I am deeply grateful for the work of this church and the courage it took to release ourselves from a building that had so many memories and was also depleting us with its needs. I admire the commitment of our church members and the dedication that you all have to building a progressive Christian presence in our community. I look forward to the coming years to see how we can invest our time and energy in new kinds of ministry. Thank you for letting us take the time to rejuvenate, rest and reflect. I look forward to working together to increase the health and ministry of our church.

I'll close with a quote that inspires me from the Rev. Michael Piazza's new book:

"Who would we be if all God's dreams for us came true? Who would we be if we were instruments in God's dreams for our community?"

- Marlene W. Pomeroy

### **Sabbatical Reflections**

- The simple time off from work offered the opportunity to rest, heal, daydream and imagine next steps at the church
- We could use pictures and text outside our office and our Chapel that show – who we are, what we do and some

simple statements about why we do it (our beliefs in plain language)

- I have 17 years of consulting experience with Kaleidoscope Institute – would Council like me to share any of those tools with the congregation? (Money to Blessing, Taking the Church into the World, Text Sharing, Wellness Walk)
- Would anyone besides me like to start a garden for Friends In Deed – where could we plant it and who could help maintain it
- Can UC Funds give us direction about setting up a reserve Fund or Operating Fund that would help us grow just past the rate of inflation and sustain the basic operations budget of the church without arguments and cuts?
- Do we want to do anything beyond worship, education, outreach – and can we do it all in small groups to build relationship?
- What if we began a “New Gospel Project” that allowed us to interview folks in our community – in church and out – to describe in our own words what our collective experience of God is in our time and our place? Could we do it as a film? Art project? Could we show it or display it in worship/education time?
- Could we begin a simple program of “faith support conversations” – folks sign up to visit with someone face to face or online or over the phone – and respond to a couple of simple questions – where and how do you experience God, and what nourishes your faith?

-Rev. John H. Pomeroy