



**Annual Meeting**  
**Sunday, May 21, 2107**  
**State of the Church**  
**The Reverend Amy Starr Redwine**

In just a couple of years, our community will celebrate two anniversaries; the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our oldest founding congregation, Second Presbyterian Church, and the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the coming together of the three congregations that formed the Church of the Covenant. What incredible milestones that show not only God's steadfast faithfulness to us and those who have gone before, but an incredible example of the faithfulness of the members throughout those years to listen for and heed God's call and the movement of the Holy Spirit.

The Sunday after Easter, I had the opportunity to join the church where I was ordained, Firestone Park Presbyterian in Akron, for the celebration of its one hundredth anniversary. During the worship service celebrating this momentous occasion, I realized something about this congregation that I had never put my finger on while I was their pastor: this is a group of people that takes their faith very seriously, but they don't take themselves very seriously. This is probably because, as a church, they've been through some very difficult times when they've had to really come to terms with what being a church is really about. They have had terrible battles that nearly split the church. They have faced financial crises that they truly didn't think they would survive. They have dealt with serious and unexpected maintenance issues in their building. These are the kinds of things in their history that remind them of God's faithfulness, because somehow they weathered them all and continued to faithfully live out their calling.

As you can see in this year's annual report, we have found many new ways this year to be faithful to our calling, and to be faithful stewards of our many gifts. As we continue to grow and learn more about each other, my prayer is that we would continue to take our faith seriously, while trusting that, in order to thrive, we will need to be open to new forms of ministry, new ways of sharing the gospel and making disciples in this time and place. And if you're wondering exactly what that looks like or how that is going to happen, the truth is, I don't have the answer. And I don't have the answer because it isn't up to me. It's up to all of us to live into the future God has in store. As a friend of mine likes to say, "Faith is not a spectator sport." This is why we've invited you to share your thoughts about the church today. And we hope that you will leave asking yourselves how you can be part of the opportunities and challenges you identified.

And if you are looking for something concrete you can do to help move Covenant toward the future God has in store, here are three places to start:

1. Faith formation – as in, your own personal spiritual development. Faith is a journey and it needs our attention. Come to a Bible study, or theology on tap. Come to the enneagram group and find out what it's about. Start a book group that discusses books that touch on faith. Joining a group helps because it provides accountability, but you can also start or continue a spiritual discipline that you practice alone: prayer, meditation, reading the Bible. But pick one thing to deepen your faith this year.
2. The second thing is something we Presbyterians don't like to talk about much, but it is right there in Jesus's last instructions to his disciples that we heard today: go and make disciples. Some people call this evangelism, but it's really just being willing to share with people that our faith brings meaning to our lives. Imagine: if each one of our members shared their faith in such a way that it brought one new person into our community, we would double the number of people here.
3. The last thing is the issue of stewardship. As you can see from our financial statement, we are unbelievably blessed by the generosity of those who have gone before us. But we are also running our church in such a way that we are dependent on the use of those funds to meet our expenses, since giving from our membership supports about a third of our budget. We can continue this way as long as our endowment continues to maintain or grow. But imagine what we could do – for others, for our building, for our community – if our member giving provided a bigger portion of our budget, freeing up funds that could be directly channeled toward ministry and mission. But like faith formation and evangelism, when it comes to stewardship we must start with ourselves and ask, “how is God calling me to use my resources in such a way to faithfully support God's church?”

I understand that not one of these three things is easy – for any of us. There are lots of other ways we might prefer to do the work of the church. But our tradition teaches us that we must start with ourselves: by attending to our own faith journey and spiritual development; by sharing our faith however and with whomever we can; and by thoughtfully and generously giving to the church of our time, talents, and treasure. Our Day 1 calling is relational and outward-focused, to be sure: go and make disciples. But Jesus gives us another Day 1 calling that is intensely personal and just as important: pick up your cross and follow me.

In these last three years, I have seen incredible examples of individuals who have done these things, and as I have come to know Covenant's history, I have come to appreciate ways this has happened throughout this church's life. I am so honored to be your pastor and to work with you to love God by loving others. I look forward to another year together.



The Reverend Amy Starr Redwine  
Pastor/Head of Staff