

## **Common Table, 2-12-2018**

**In Attendance:** About 30 congregation members, as well as special guests Jacob and Joan Zhang

Brad welcomed everyone, and we shared a delicious meal of soup, salad, bread, and desserts, compliments of Joe, Patty, Laura, Melinda, Dorothy, and Jean. (Did I miss anyone?)

Introducing Jacob and Joan Zhang: Brad introduced Jacob Zhang, pastor of Rock Church, and his wife Joan. Jacob shared some of the spiritual journey that brought him to Bellevue, and it was an inspiring story indeed. He grew up in an underground house church in China, where his father was a leader. Such churches are illegal in China, and although things have loosened up in the last 20 years, when Jacob was growing up, it was still dangerous to be part of a Christian church, and his father spent two years in a labor camp because of it. Jacob himself never received a high school diploma, because he was expelled from high school for refusing to join the communist youth group there. (In order to join, you had to sign an agreement saying you didn't believe in God, and that was something Jacob couldn't bring himself to do.)

Jacob came to the U.S. to continue his education. He ended up at a Baptist school, where he met his wife Joan. His original intent was to return to Mainland China, but his father told him that it was still too dangerous, so he prayed about what to do. A friend informed him that the Seattle area needed Chinese pastors, and he ended up here. He firmly believes that God opens doors, and he has performed 21 baptisms in the last year.

Rock Church is the only church in Bellevue that is Mandarin speaking. Other churches in the area are Cantonese speaking. Jacob's church has filled a need for many folks in the area.

Joan also spoke about the Sunday school she provides for the youngest members of Rock Church. She helps them retain their Chinese, so that they can worship with their family in that language as they grow older. She mentioned that some American born Chinese lose their Chinese language skills, and sometimes they end up unable to comfortably worship with their parents.

Jacob talked about how they were unable to continue their church in its old location, because their contract expired at the end of 2017. After emailing Brad, they connected with him, and that is how they ended up currently at Aldersgate.

Rock Church also hosts an ESL class at Aldersgate in the youth room on Fridays. Although it is focused on Chinese speakers, Jacob said that recently a Ukrainian young woman joined the group.

I cannot do the Zhangs' story justice. I'm sure they would be glad to tell you more if you get a chance to chat with them. They ended their presentation by answering questions from the group, and at Brad's request, Jacob prayed for us all in Chinese.

Report on the Commission on the Way Forward: Laura went to a clergywomen's retreat recently, where the bishop shared the work of the Commission on the Way Forward. This is a commission assembled by the global Methodist church to look at the "denominational gridlock" we face on the subject of LGBTQAI+ people and the church. The commission was tasked with finding a way through the gridlock. In surveys, about 80% of the global church expressed the desire to remain together as a denomination.

According to the bishop, the commission came up with three possible ways to move forward, listed here in no particular order (I am transcribing them directly from handouts received by Laura at the conference, hence the quotes):

- "Affirm the current Book of Discipline language and place a high value on accountability. The church policy book says the practice of homosexuality "is incompatible with Christian teaching" and lists officiating at a same-gender union or being a "self-avowed practicing" gay clergy member as chargeable offenses under church law.
  - Remove the Book of Discipline's restrictive language and place a high value on contextualization. This sketch also specifically protects the rights of those whose conscience will not allow them to perform same-gender weddings or ordain LGBTQ people.
  - Create multiple branches that have clearly defined values such as accountability, contextualization and justice. This model would maintain shared doctrine and services and one Council of Bishops."
- From Heather Hahn, a multimedia news reporter for United Methodist News Service.*

Laura was given to understand that the first possibility listed here is no longer being seriously considered.

Laura also shared an image from the writings of Reverend Doctor Gil Rendel, who has worked with conflicted congregations, the idea of a "one-footed rock."

"...what would it be like if everyone in a congregation had to keep one foot steadily anchored on the rock-hard center of the purpose of the congregation, but were free to dance with their other foot to follow the passions and discipleship of their own lives? [this invites people] to pursue at least two necessary conversations: What makes up our central rock?...[and]... How far can we dance?"

According to Dr. Rendel, United Methodist essentials for our rock include

- "The scope of grace (in two senses):

- God's love extends to all of God's creatures and not just to some....
- ...God's grace is transformative...
- ...connectionalism....an ethos and practice of mutual support and mutual accountability...strengthening of all by the gifts of all.
- ...a commitment to theological reflection as the task of the whole church."

Brad shared that the bishop is hosting table talks starting on April 28 for those who want to know more about The Commission on the Way Forward.

Pastor's Sabbatical: Starting on April 1, right after Easter services, Brad will be taking a sabbatical, planning to return on May 20. This is not a vacation, however. Brad will be hard at work, using the time to investigate ways to nurture and create a sustainable church. He will be connecting with a variety of knowledgeable people and visiting churches and academic institutions with the goal of bringing back information and ideas that will strengthen Aldersgate.

While he is gone, he has arranged for speakers to cover all Sunday services, and he is currently making sure that pastoral care duties are covered.

Stewardship—Coming Soon to a Church near You!: Melinda announced that our stewardship drive will start on April 8, with Pledge Sunday on May 6. We encourage everyone to pledge what they can, and we are still in need of funds to pay off the kitchen loan by March of 2019. We know we can do it. After all, we decided to hire a Youth Ministries Assistant, and Griffey has already started, with enough funds pledged to cover his whole first year. Together we can accomplish great things!

These minutes respectfully submitted by Robbin Price. All omissions and errors are mine, and corrections are encouraged and gratefully accepted.