

Dear First Presbyterian Church friends,

June 2018

I want to tell you a story.

This is a story of gratitude for God's leading, for divine abundance of the Sower, for the extravagance of spiritual gifts gathered in this community. We are called to use our gifts to serve God's world and our community. Remember, we are Easter people who believe in new possibilities – astonishing new realities.

*"I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." ~ Isaiah 43:19*

In the first eleven months as your pastor, I've delighted to become acquainted with you! I've been learning about our histories, our spaces, our legends, our biases, our truths, and our possibilities. We are at a new point in our life as a congregation. We have new leadership, new members, new friends and neighbors. Therefore, we need to attend to our new purpose. **My pastoral goal for this year is for us to discern our mission now.** How do we define mission? How do we live as Jesus' disciples today? How do we care for God's people and creation? How do we experience the Spirit leading us in 2018?

*"God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams." ~Acts 2:17*

This month Session approved a proposal to offer a three-hour workshop called "**Geography of Grace**," led by Molly Grisham. These workshops will be creative and introspective while we explore living with courage and wholeness. We will experience a sense of faithful community and mutual support while we listen deeply to God and one another. We would like to offer as many of these workshops as our members would like in groups of 24. Please watch for dates and times this summer.

More exciting news is that our congregation has won a small grant from the National Parks Service and the National Fund for Sacred Places to complete a "**Community Asset Mapping**" project. This is a way for us, as a downtown church, to learn more about who our neighborhood partners are and for them to learn about us. Sarah Watson and I are working on this project. If you are interested in helping, please let me know.

Our committees are also creating new **Discipleship** forms in which each of you in this faith community can share the kind of activities that bless you. What do you love to do? The parts of your life about which you are passionate are your gifts! How can these spiritual gifts shape our ministry together?

Once we have deeper clarity about our mission, gifts and partners, then we will consider how we adapt our facility to serve our purpose. To be good stewards of our resources, we need to make better use of our space. To this end, Session has asked the Building and Grounds Committee to rewrite our policies to **extend hospitality**. We want members to use the building. We want our neighbors to be mission partners! We have already begun this work by sharing space with two musical theater productions, Faith Coalition for the Common Good, and a new exercise program for people with Parkinson's begins in July.

The other critical part of being good stewards of our facility means addressing its **need for accessibility**. Stairs make the basement and second floor inaccessible for many. The entry next to the handicap accessible parking has stairs, meaning it is not accessible. Other questions about our future use of the building need to be considered. However, I'm convinced that the building adaptations need to serve our mission. We need to let God's vision for our ministry guide us. When we are ready, we will use professional assistance to help us decide how our facility can be adapted to serve our future purpose.

*"When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.'
Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.'" ~John 21:15*

One of the great pieces of news we learned this spring from Springfield Fire Safety and the Building and Zoning Department is that **we can cook in the kitchen!** We have had lots of conflicting information about what we can and cannot do in our kitchen, so we went to the source. The only limitation is that we may not cook fatty meat (like bacon) until we change out the pipe above the vent. This is good news since Jesus tells us to feed his sheep and we like to cook for one another and eat together! Our Food, Fun & Fellowship Committee has been taking the "Safe Food Handling" class through the Public Health Department so all requirements will be met. Thank you!

The last topic of exciting news I share is that we have a **new lease on the St. Andrew's property** to the west of the church buildings. We paid off the mortgage in October. The new 20-year lease was signed in April. This means that we will have new financial resources and exceptional opportunities for ministry. We will have many discussions about how we faithfully use these funds. We will have lots of good ideas and some disagreements. Let us love one another as we move through these conversations. Session will be providing structured times for work on identifying our mission and purpose. We have an amazing opportunity to make a significant contribution to God's work in the world. May we be faithful each step of the journey..

*"Be at peace among yourselves... always seek to do good to one another and to all.
Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances;
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." ~from 1 Thessalonians 5*

Blessings for new faithful stories,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Pastor Susan Hill". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.