

Third Word News & Notes

SUMMER 2015

Pastor's Message

WHAT I LEARNED DURING MY SABBATICAL

Pastoral leaves of two or three months after seven years of full-time service are a long standing Christian tradition with roots in Scripture. The principle of a Sabbath rest is enshrined in the Ten Commandments because God rested on the seventh day. After being on call 24X7 for seven years, a lengthy period of rest from the demands of church ministry comes as a welcome opportunity for a minister to be ministered to through activities that nourish his or her soul. It allows for uninterrupted family time and time alone to pray, reflect, read, write and pursue activities that recharge one's spiritual batteries. I was very grateful when Third Church granted me a sabbatical during July and August. I looked forward to it very much and did a lot of advance planning to gain the full benefit of it. My personal goal was to do all I could to make it a mountain-top experience. I wanted my sabbatical to be a space of time when I could accomplish some personal goals and refresh my soul by becoming:

- closer to God through study and reflection;
- closer to Barbara by spending quality time with her,
- closer to this congregation by rededicating myself to my pastoral work here.

Barbara and I made travel plans to visit historic sites for my research and travel to new places for our enjoyment. We also had plans to celebrate Barbara's birthday on Aug 4 at a special place in New Hampshire with my sister and her husband coming from Seattle to see us that week. A few weeks before it was all set to begin Barbara's cancer diagnosis hit us like a bolt out of the blue. It changed everything. We were no longer in charge of our plans, but come what may we were determined to go through this "adventure" together. There were tests and consults, and lots of waiting. We were hoping the surgery would be scheduled for the week of July 6 but it was scheduled for July 31 the day we were planning to go to New Hampshire. More waiting. The day of the surgery finally arrived and thankfully it went very well. After the surgery we had to stay in town for follow-up treatment if necessary, and there was more waiting to learn if the cancer had spread. After a week we were again thankful to learn that it had not. We rejoiced at this, but our travel plans and birthday celebration were canceled. Barbara says the tests and surgery were relatively easy. The waiting was the hardest part. As July gave way to August my sabbatical was turning out to be something quite different from what we had planned. I could almost say it was more valley than mountain top. But the amazing thing we realize as we both look back at this experience, it wasn't a time of discouragement and disappointment. My sabbatical truly turned out to be the mountain-top experience I had hoped for. It gave me everything I was originally looking forward to. In fact, not only were our prayers for good medical outcomes answered, but my goals for personal renewal were met more fully than I ever imagined.

- we are closer to each other by having gone through this trying experience together.
- we are closer to our congregation because of the many cards, letters and prayers that came to us, and what a source of encouragement they were.
- we are closer to God because of answered prayers and the feeling of being cared for.

My sabbatical is now over. I am grateful for it and I feel refreshed. God didn't give me the sabbatical I planned for, but he gave me the sabbatical I needed. The main lesson I learned from it is best illustrated from an obscure episode in Israel's history. Once a neighboring king waged war against Israel and was defeated. The next year he returned with an even larger army confident of victory because he told himself that Israel's God was a god of the mountains but not of the valleys. This time he would fight and defeat Israel on the lowlands where their god would be absent. Through a prophet God assured the king of Israel of victory to teach everyone a lesson: *The Lord is a God of both hills and valleys. He is ever-present wherever we are, and even a trek through a shadowed valley can be a mountain top experience when God is with us.*

Blessings to all,
Pastor Norm



Vacation Bible School

We once again held a successful VBS. We took a Thailand Trek. Students learned about Thailand culture and language. We were lucky enough to have a parent from Thailand come and talk with the kids. She taught them the ABC's in the Thai language and showed some students how to write their name. We were so lucky to have many teens once again directed our learning centers. Gabriel Fletcher and Elizabeth Joy did our game/science center, Marina Fletcher

and Erika Hojda were our art center leaders, Collin Kennedy was the opening and closing leader. Janice Drescher was our music leader this year and with the donation of our large screen TV we were able to dance and sing along to a great DVD. Thanks to Dylan Drescher, Trevor Drescher, Corrine Sternberg, Ellie Hojda and Da Boden for their help and support. Also to the 22 students and their families, thanks for a great day!

Country Fair & Beef and Pig Roast

What a great summer day on August 15th for our first Country Fair and Roast. It was an event to raise funds for our operating budget. It started as an idea by Randy Root and the Strategic Planning Committee. We had a dedicated committee to pull this day together. We had many great kids games donated by the Clark Family and Brian Albert, Face Painting by Amber Thisdale, a dunk tank, bingo and more. Randy Root was the head chef. He had plenty of support from Tony DiMauro, Tom Law and Bill Sullo. Lori Albert, Joan Fisher and Kim Kennedy put together the activities of the day. Corrine Sternberg was in charge of advertising. Betty Shaw and her sister, Doreen, made the gingerbread for dessert. Thanks to Ellie Hojda, Barbara DiMauro, Cheri Czesak and Bettye Nosenzo for their help in prepping and baking too! We hosted more than 200 people on the day of the event, we had 12 donated raffle baskets and many donated prizes for our ring toss game. It was a great day at Third Church.

