

Report to Congregation Council

September 17, 2024

This past month I was on vacation for two weeks of it, so my activity level was less than usual. Nevertheless, here's what transpired while I was both present and away. On Sunday the 25th we had our outdoor worship service. This year 6 of us led the musical part with our guitars. From what I've been told it was great. We rehearsed twice leading up to the worship service, and it was a joy to play with them. The outdoor worship service involves a bit more preparation than might appear, as altar guild, recording, sound, musicians, and rostered leaders have to all transport items that are normally in place here at the church building. It went smoothly this year. We shared in a potluck and fellowship following the worship service.

While on vacation for the two weeks I performed two graveside services, since I was local and not on my bicycle trip to upper state New York as originally planned. The first was for Gary Kelling on September 2 at Western Reserve National Cemetery, followed by a luncheon back here at the church. The second was for Janice Seale, a family with connections here at the church, who were in need of a pastor. While away on vacation I received word that Bev Carter entered the church triumphant, so the day of my return to the office on September 11 I met with her daughters to plan for her funeral service which was held Saturday the 14th.

During this shortened month I also visited with a few of our homebound members, met with a couple that will be getting married here at the church later this month, attended a Finance meeting, participated in a mandatory Synod Zoom meeting pertaining to IRS expectations of serving a congregation as a leader and what we "can and cannot do," taught both a Bible & Brews class and Adult Sunday School, and had a wonderful breakfast with some of the men of the congregation. This list doesn't include specific administration and other weekly duties like meeting with and working with staff each week.

Further thoughts and reflection:

For over 18 years I served as the sole pastor of St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Marietta. Most congregations, if they're lucky, have a called member of the clergy (many don't or can't afford it due to size or finances). St. Matthew is blessed in that we have two called members of the clergy. This isn't the norm, as most only have one. I hope, as a congregation, we are able to appreciate this fact.

With that said, while I was a solo pastor, just like now, I would take time away for vacation or continuing education. And prior to my time away, I would line-up emergency coverage from another clergy. The church always survived while I was on vacation. Sometimes I was close by and could adjust my vacation to address an emergency if it arose. Other times I was far away, and so the emergency coverage clergy covered the need (which happened while I was on a 3-month sabbatical). And although it maybe wasn't ideal that the emergency clergy, who didn't know a member of the congregation like I did, ministered to that member or to the family of a deceased member, nevertheless the presence, mercy, and promises of God were present.

As a congregation with 2 clergy, who are both granted time away for vacations and continuing education, and who both have lives outside of the congregation, there may be times when we both are away. I wouldn't say that it would be a common occurrence, but it will and might happen from

time to time, especially if there's a continuing education event we'd both like to attend, or a multiple-day youth event like the ELCA National Youth Gathering. And just like when I would leave for vacation while serving St. Luke's those 18+ years, or like all the other congregations out there that only have one member of the clergy, the church will survive.

With that said, to learn that there are those in the congregation who feel that Deacon Lindsay and I shouldn't be away from the congregation at the same time is upsetting and unreasonable. I'm not sure where those feelings come from on the part of those who think this way. Is it a need for control over the called leaders and their lives? Is it anxiety of having someone ministering to you that doesn't know you? Is it entitlement, that because St. Matthew can afford two clergy that we shouldn't have to worry about this issue? Can you tell me from where this belief is coming? Because, coming from where I sit, as a member of the clergy, this is an unreasonable expectation placed upon us. The church will, and always has, survived.

I share this thought with you to "name" what I believe is a hold-over from times past, when this was an unhealthy and unreasonable expectation placed upon the rostered leaders of St. Matthew. I would like to encourage those who hold this belief to search in their hearts and their thoughts as to why they feel this way, because it is an issue that resides in them, and I say this with utmost respect.

In Christ, with Christ, for Christ!

Pastor Steve