

Report to Congregation Council  
February 20, 2024

*96:<sup>1</sup>O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. <sup>2</sup>Sing to the Lord; bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. <sup>3</sup>Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples. <sup>4</sup>For great is the Lord and greatly to be praised; he is to be revered above all gods.*

“That’s what we’re here for: to make the world new. We know what to do: seek justice, love mercy, walk humbly, treat every person as though she were yourself. These are not complicated instructions. It’s much harder to decipher the directions for putting together a child’s tricycle than it is to understand these.” Nancy Mairs

There’s been a “new song” being sung around St. Matthew this past month! Have you heard it? I know I have. As I sat and listened to the 20+ speakers at “The Future as I See It” evening, and the chatter the following 45 minutes after the event was over, I hear a new song being sung. It’s a song that includes hope, and joy, and excitement over what God has in store for us! Have you heard it? If not, maybe you’ve “seen” it being lived out through some of the events of this past month: like the 3 new people that joined the Bible & Brews study of Proverbs; or the 20+ youth that gathered together on a Sunday evening for 2 hours as they prepare for the National Youth Gathering this Summer, and the dozen middle-schoolers that got together on a different Sunday afternoon to go bowling together; or the \$330 dollars offered through a Noisy Offering one Sunday in support of the Loads of Love ministry, and the 25 volunteers that helped out; or the intergenerational event that took place during the Sunday School hour in order to cut and tie 20 blankets given to Akron Children’s Hospital; or the “new” volunteers that are being not only asked to serve, but are doing so with joy and appreciation of being asked; or the many members that were “inactive” for many years that have recently returned; or the fact that I’m once again having to plan another New Member class for those that have expressed interest in becoming a part of the mission and ministry of St. Matthew. Have you seen it? Have you heard it? Thanks be to God!!

Lent, as you all know, is a busy season of the year around church. Not only the extra mid-week services in the first and last weeks of the season, but the mid-week gatherings that must get prepared requires extra time for those of us in charge of preparing/leading/set-up/etc. Translation for me: I have less time to do the other things, as much as I may like or enjoy doing them. With that said, please be patient with my rounds of visitation during this period ... I wish that I could be out every day visiting with those that are homebound, or in the evenings doing home visits/dinners. But blocking out this extra time during Lent with added events and inserting it into a schedule that’s already packed with many other items/activities which are required of me, only leaves me with less time. It’s during Lent that I especially give thanks for Nurse Brenda’s visits, and the Care Connection’s efforts to stay in-touch with our members! Thank God for the priesthood of all believers!!

Lastly, I want to report on the two continuing education events that I participated in this past month. The first was the Youth Extravaganza in New Orleans. Although this youth leader training occurs every year, this was the first year I've ever attended. All week there were classes from which to choose that pertain to youth ministry. Deacon Lindsay and I attended some of the same classes, but not all of them. We were especially interested in the one being offered about the National Youth Gathering. For what it's worth, the overall event was very well done and provided lots of good, useful information. It's a shame this event is terribly expensive because I could see myself (or Deacon Lindsay as Director of Youth and Family Ministries) attending it every year. I wouldn't say that about every continuing education event I've attended over the years. And as a bonus, we stayed in the same hotel we will be staying at with the youth this summer, so we were able to familiarize ourselves with the hotel and the surrounding area of New Orleans. We were both very pleased! The second event I attended was the All-Ohio Synod Rostered Ministers Retreat, held at Sawmill Creek every year. Part of the retreat is continuing education, where they invite a speaker to come and lead/teach on various topics. Last year I wasn't blown away by the event. This year was even worse, in my opinion. I had a difficult time connecting with the speaker as well as with the topic being discussed. Each year one of the Synods in Ohio is responsible for planning. Next year it's NEO Synod's turn. So, with that said, I may or may not choose to attend this continuing education event next year, based on who our synod finds to lead. I've already spoken with one of the conference deans to share with them my opinion from this year in hopes that next year will be more appealing.

In Christ, with Christ, for Christ!

Pastor Steve Mahaffey