

Report to Congregation Council  
July 18, 2023

This month's report will cover the time between the May 16<sup>th</sup> council meeting and the current one:

Never a dull moment here at St. Matthew. Whereas many congregations "slow down" during the summer months, there's always plenty of activity here! The last two months have been full of visits to the hospital and related offices, home visits, shut-in visits, lunch and dinner visits in restaurants and at homes, visits to the ball fields, and visits for celebrations (graduation parties). It's always great to connect with the membership outside of Sunday mornings.

Committees and various sub-committees continued to come together to plan and work. Probably the most significant accomplishment from the many meetings was the completion of the Constitution and Bylaws. Although the ad hoc committee will continue their work to address the continuing resolutions and the creation of a leadership manual, the many hours of tedious work combing through the outdated document has been completed. The next steps (after continuing resolution/handbook) will be to share the proposed changes/updates with the congregation for a "loose approval" before sending it on to the Synod for approval. Once the Synod gives us the green light (which may come with alterations to our proposals) then it is required to go before the congregation for an "official approval." So, we're getting there!

Speaking of the Synod, the Systems Team continued their work that was initiated by Pastor Bill Diehm while serving as Interim Pastor, conducting interviews of staff and nominated membership, while also receiving written responses from any who chose to complete the same 5 questions. The report IS being generated by the Systems Team, however there is a delay in getting it finished due to a health challenge of one of the members. Once the report is ready, they will contact us to schedule a date when ALL might hear it together. After that we, as a congregation, can choose how to proceed.

Regarding worship, our summer worship time began June 4. Aside from one Sunday, most Sundays we've averaged a little below or slightly over 100 worshippers in attendance. It's been wonderful to see the congregation this full on a Sunday during the Summer, which I've been told is different from years past. On July 2 Isaac Dale Linden was baptized and became our newest brother in Christ. There has been special music as a part of worship, from Rachel Knaggs playing her trumpet to the women of the choir singing a selection. Speaking of Rachel, she was hired during this time to serve as our Kids of the Kingdom Choir director. She dove in headfirst shortly after being hired, leading the "music" portion of this year's VBS. It was a very fun and successful VBS this year, with many of the children being overheard saying they want to "come to this church."

The Dandelion Team received their "coaching" during this time, and now that we have a better understanding of the survey are making plans as to how to release it to the congregation. Additionally, the Team has been tasked with homework during the summer months to "reach out" into our neighborhood to get to know those in the direct vicinity of the church building, as well as some of the "leaders" of the community, and to assess what the perceived and met needs of the community are in which we reside. This will help us during year 2 of this program in identifying our Mission and Direction for ministry for the immediate future and years ahead of us.

The congregation conducted another blood drive during this time in connection with the Red Cross. Thanks to Melody Costello for once again organizing this, and to John Baker for designing and

constructing the ramp that allows for easier access to the fellowship hall. Although Deacon Lindsay will report on it, I attended Cedar Point with some of the youth and their families in July, as well as spent a Saturday morning/afternoon bicycling a part of the Towpath trail. I also attended the first of many planning meetings for the 2024 National Youth Gathering, which was led by Deacon Lindsay.

On a personal note, I exercised my second week of vacation for the year, going on a small family reunion cruise, followed by a day at Disney. Immediately following the vacation, I used a week of my continuing education to attend Lutheran Week at Lakeside, sponsored by Chautauqua. The speaker for the week was Rev. Dr. Michael Beck, pastor of a Methodist congregation in Florida. The focus for the week was on “being church in a post pandemic setting,” and the many ways in which “church” has changed, from how it looks, to where it happens, to who is attending and who isn’t. Although there were nuggets of good information, much of what was described wasn’t something “new” to me, and I would summarize it as describing much of what we “accomplish” through our many small group activities within St. Matthew, i.e., Bible & Brews. Thankfully I also took with me two books, which I was able to read in their entirety: *The Post-Quarantine Church* by Rainer and *We Shall Be Changed* edited by Edington. Both books dealt with the same topic and were a great addition to driving home the point that the world and the church have changed dramatically from Covid, and as Church we will be required to “think and behave” differently if we are to continue to reach people with the Good News of Christ.

Continuing on the personal level, during this time I finally found a home and was successful in purchasing it. It’s located just south of Rittman, off St. Rt. 57. I want to thank the congregation for allowing me this past year to live in Faith House while I learned the area and found a community in which to reside. I’m excited to get settled, as I continue to slowly move in over the month of July.

Finally, as we look ahead to the next month, the remainder of the summer, and the months following ... we have lots of irons in the fire! The Renovation Committee is busy and attempting to remain open to the many voices of the congregation in guiding them with the endless choices and decisions; the Dandelion Team is active and attempting to assess our future direction; the youth are getting together and planning for the fall events; the Block Party Team is actively planning for what will hopefully be the largest event yet! That’s just a few of the many things happening which can be celebrated. Related to all of this, however, are other items that will need to be addressed ... like assembling a Nominations Committee to fill the positions for some of you who will be stepping aside after your faithful service; and a Stewardship Team to plan and execute a Stewardship Campaign, which will also hopefully address the current giving status that supports the day-in day-out ministries and these many wonderful activities. Prayers are always needed and helpful ... but if you have the Spirit nudging you to get involved in any one of these needed areas, please speak up. As a congregation we have many gifted individuals, and many who are eager to serve but not getting asked to share their gifts. So, if you think of someone who might be a great fit but have never been asked, don’t be afraid to approach them. We’re all in this together!

In Christ, with Christ, for Christ!

Pastor Steve