

The Pastor's Report

To our church family,

I trust that these words find you and your family well, that you shared a festive Christmas with those you love and that you now turn toward the new year with a renewed vigor and vision of hope for what 2018 may bring you, our church & the world.

A few weeks ago I preached a sermon entitled, "Anticipaaation" (remember that Carly Simon tune?). In it I shared my Christmas wish to be *overwrought* with anticipation; a visceral expectation fill with both hope and excitement (like a kid at Christmas). Well, I must have been a good boy this year, because that is exactly what I received this Advent Season.

I'm sure I am not alone in recognizing the great deal of energy and spirit at work in our congregation these days. Worship attendance has been terrific (presence on Sunday morning is the most important form of stewardship that one can offer), the music dynamic and uplifting (thank you Laura!), and the Kids! To see so many kids in church, littler ones and teenagers, is a congregation's (and pastor's) dream come true.

Though my excitement may begin in worship, it certainly doesn't end there. Kim is doing wonderful things in church school *with* all of those kids, and I was so impressed with, pleased by, and proud of all the parents who have stepped up to help. This was certainly evident in the Church School Christmas program, the practice and pizza party the Saturday before, and the caroling which took place afterward (people were

thrilled to see the kids come, unexpectedly, to their door). All the while Beth and Mary have been providing fun, fellowship and service opportunities for the youth group (thank you for all the cookies our teenagers baked and distributed to the congregation). At the other end of the age spectrum, Vern and Arvilla continue to provide love and care to our little ones down in the nursery; we are blessed by their commitment and service to the future and families of our church.

What a delight it was to see about 80 people gather in Fellowship Hall for our Christmas Pot-luck, and to witness the deepening connection between the people of our congregation.

It was also a humble privilege to be able to distribute \$6,000 to almost 50 hardworking families through our Christmas Giving Program. Thank you for your extreme generosity in making such a miracle possible!

And, if all of this wasn't enough to make me feel overwrought with anticipation about the future of our church, the real kicker was the recent Session budget meeting. Yes, we will still need to transfer funds from our endowment to meet operating costs, but the good news is our Stewardship Drive is slightly ahead of last year (even though we lost 6 long-time givers due to death or relocation). Most exciting, though, was to be joined by a roomful of wise and committed Elders helping to lead our church into the future.

With visceral hope & excitement,
Rev. Mike

"Therefore, return to your God, Observe kindness and justice, And wait for your God continually.."

- Hosea 12:6