

October 2018 Pastor's Letter continued

There are changes starting to show within our denomination. In February a special session of General Conference will meet and they will decide the course of our denomination in regard to LBGTQ marriage and clergy. Now they may decide to keep things the same, but even if that happens there will still be changes. As I sit here looking at all those changes, I realize that we, the New Florence UMC, need to change a bit, and I as your pastor need to change a bit also. I say this because I do not think we are living up to the potential God sees in us.

Here is what I mean. The first few years that I was here we worked hard on growth. We prayed over the empty pews (on a Saturday evening) along with praying over those in our church who were in need of such prayer. There were only a few of us, but we did it, and by golly we saw growth. But we stopped doing this. Part of that is probably from the fact that we have gotten busy, and so it's harder to meet on a Saturday evening. We have had our Kids Fun Club, but now, this year we do not. Again I get it, we're busy. Bible School changed this year. We had only a handful of kids. Maybe we forgot to invite kids. The changes that I have been seeing have not been good. If we keep on this path then we won't grow. We won't have programs for kids and families, we won't do ministry. We won't be pleasing to God. So what do we do? Do we sit and worry? Do we sit by the stream and cry (as Israel did during the exile of Babylon)? Do we give up? No, we do none of these things.

I am going to spend this next year really pushing you (and myself) to change our habits. I am going to push us to go back to doing the things that worked; the things we let slip. I am going to push to have you go outside your box. I am going to push you to give up a bit of your time to do things in the community. I am going to push you to visit church members each week (and yes, I will be visiting them also, but you, the church need to realize YOUR visit means more to the member than mine).

I am going to ask you to go beyond praying and sending cards. I am going to ask you to find ways to minister to the community. I am going to ask you to step up and help with programming for kids (we HAVE to get them early or we lose them completely). I am going to ask you to help with programming for families. I am going to ask you to step out in faith more. I am going to ask you to pray and listen to God. Where is he calling YOU? What is he asking YOU to do? He is not calling you to watch TV and eat ice cream (I wish he were...).

Now you may read this letter and think things are really bad. Let me assure you they are NOT bad. HOWEVER, I see a trend and it can become a bad trend. I also can see that we have sort of gotten lazy or maybe we have rested on our laurels.

Whatever the reason, we are not working as hard as we once were and if you are in the sanctuary during service, well you can tell we are not working as hard. We ALL need to work together in different areas. Some of us are good at prayer, and we should gather together each week and pray over the pews and over those in our congregation/town who need to be lifted up. Some of us are good at organization and planning. We need to get together and make sure things like the Seder meal, special services, and other events run smoothly. Some of us are good with kids. We need to meet together to figure out what we can do to bring kids in. Some of us are good with families, and we need to meet and discuss how to meet the needs of families so we can bring them into our congregation. Some of us are great at visioning and we need to meet and start dreaming God size dreams and find a way to reach those dreams. ALL of us need to invite and bring people to church. ALL of us need to make them feel like they are part of the family.

TOGETHER we can accomplish some great things. We can minister and witness to a lot of people. We can make those who feel lonely feel loved. We can help the lost (not just in town but those in our congregation). While change is usually scary, I am really excited to see what happens. I know that with God everything is possible. I know that with God, and our hard work our pews could be packed. Church can be more than building, and we can help and love lots of people.

Regarding the upcoming Sunday sermons, go to <https://goodnewsmag.org/> and look under ,“In the News”. There you will find articles on the one church plan, traditional plan and the connectional conference plan.

May God bless you in all you do.

Pastor Sharon