

## PASTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2016

**"No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others . . ." Matthew 5:15-16a**

In every year there seems to be a unique calling in God's church. Never is it ordinary. Never is it "business as usual". Always, we are called to something new. This year, I can feel the church, across denominations, being called outside ourselves. Called beyond our doors into the world. There are times the church is called to care for those within its walls. There are times it is called to repentance or transformation. And there are times it is called to speak boldly of what we believe, and then live that bold speech in action. This is such a time.

This kind of a calling is in the fabric of a church like Bethlehem. In a number of ways, we lived into that calling in this last year. We participated in El Camino del Immigrante, a walk of support and awareness for immigrants in our community. We partnered with other congregations in the interfaith shelter network. My thanks to Diane Langager and Blair Lindberg for faithful, heartfelt leadership. We continue our work with T.A.C.O., Bethlehem Serves, the Pajama Project and quilting ministries. During Lent we supported world hunger needs through Lutheran World Relief. We began a partnership with Ocean Knoll to create a walking school bus and assist young children and parents in our neighborhood. We invited interfaith leaders to come and speak with us and broaden our partnerships and understanding. Through the giving tree, we are a congregation that takes on 12 opportunities a year to be of service. In the coming year we will intentionally focus on equipping ourselves for service in God's world. Each month we will provide education, resources and connections to organizations and opportunities to do faithful work in our world. Our goal in 2017 will be to reach as far as we can in Jesus' name.

Staffing has been a major focus in 2016 and remains so moving into 2017. Jonathan Garman will leave us March 31, 2017 after 14 years of faithful service to the congregation and the youth. A stay of 14 years is exceptional for any youth director and we look forward to ample opportunity to thank Jonathan and to celebrate him and bless him into the new opportunities that are before him. His leadership, personal faith, strong theology and deep connection with the youth have created an exceptional youth program that fosters faith, shapes and changes young lives, and gifts the congregation in every aspect of its ministry. Jonathan we wish you Godspeed in all that God is preparing for you and your family. As we move forward, we are in conversation with St. Andrew's Episcopal Church. They too are in search of a youth director. We have created a shared position between the two congregations. This has many advantages. Given that the cost will be shared, it allows us to offer a full time, fully benefited position and attract the most qualified and experienced candidates. It also affords the synergy and ecumenism possible between the two youth groups and congregations. The youth director will work individually with both youth groups and combine events like summer trips. The job description will be posted this week with the intention of having someone in place by April 1, 2017.

Mary Shaima arrived to do her diaconal project with us in June. She enhanced greatly our understanding of worship equipping us for service. She has remained on staff in a contracted way, filling a large void left by the open pastoral position. I am grateful for her exceptional leadership and much needed gifts. Mary has begun several new ministries and completed multiple projects. I refer you to her report. The open pastoral position will be filled in the coming months. The budget anticipates a part time pastoral associate. We will be seeking either a Word and Sacrament or Word and Service rostered leader.

Last year, we began a congregation wide conversation about the possibility of becoming an All Inclusive Church. I am grateful to the many people who lent their voices to the conversation. The conversation included: 5 forums and educational opportunities; written information in bulletins, handouts and newsletters; a table staffed by members of the committee throughout the year; individual conversations and opportunities for questions to be raised and answered. In November, a survey was taken to discern the congregation's desire moving forward. That survey indicated the congregation's strong support, 94%, that we become an All Inclusive Church. I am particularly grateful to those who attended the forums and voiced their concerns and opposition. Bethlehem is a diverse congregation with diverse opinions and that is one of our greatest strengths. We vote today on a final decision in this year long process. It is my hope that we, both become an inclusive congregation, and that our diverse opinions are welcome and our faithful, compassionate conversations have just begun.

This summer we will complete necessary upgrades to the family center. The family center is in need of essential upgrades if we are to continue to offer a first class accredited preschool program. Ceiling work has been completed and the remainder of the work will be done this summer. The preschool programs will be funding the upgrades from carefully reserved resources. I thank Debi and Gail for their willingness to expend significant funds on behalf of this extraordinary ministry that we share.

The eblast was expanded this year to provide up to date and increased communication and information. In this coming year we will be working to update and upgrade the website. Our Facebook page, thanks to Skye, continues to be a wonderful communication tool for the congregation. Several new fellowship and fundraising events were held this year. Thanks to Roger Lakey and Joanne Manzi for their work in creating a great deal of joy.

This year we began a full year stewardship program headed by Dick DuBois. My thanks to him for engaging us in a process that greatly expanded our understanding of our role as stewards of the gifts God has given us. Dick, thank you for your stewardship. Last year, we created a finance committee as well as an endowment committee. Both have done faithful work this year. We will end this year with a surplus and a carefully considered budget for our ministry and staffing in the coming year. My thanks to Beth Nelson and all those involved in this significant work.

Finally, my personal thanks to Mike Ontiveros. Mike has served faithfully for three years as the president of this congregation. His presence of mind, his wisdom, his tireless determination and courageous leadership have seen this congregation through significant challenges and joys. I am indebted to him for his partnership and his leadership. Mike, on behalf of a grateful congregation, thank you for your stewardship.

Thank you all, for the privilege it is to serve together with you, as witnesses to the grace and hope of Christ. I look forward to the ways in which we will make Christ's love known, in word and deed, together.

In Christ,

Pastor Laura Ziehl