



SHILOH
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Pastor's Report 2018 Charge Conference

Joel 2:28 Common English Bible (CEB)

²⁸ After that I will pour out my spirit upon everyone;
your sons and your daughters will prophesy,
the old will dream dreams,
and the young will see visions.

Overview

I want to celebrate this year of ministry. We have welcomed 600+ people through our doors with an Easter Egg Hunt and Trunk or Treat. We have welcomed 7 new members by profession of faith and 2 new transfers. Together we have mourned the loss of dear friends, and spent time remembering their contributions to our lives. And as always I give thanks for each conversation I have had with people who are growing their faith with our God.

Over a year ago, our congregation spent time with Rev. John Pugh sharing hopes and dreams. Upon arriving I received that information, had additional listening sessions, and have continued to prayerfully listen through our work together. The purpose of these sessions was to hear the desires of our church and the hope of what God was calling us to as people of Shiloh. I have taken all of this information to prayer and continue to invite our leadership and staff to support those things that we identified as calls on the heart of our church. Additionally Church council lifted up two goals last year.

The callings identified in the listening sessions were:

- Quality worship
- Supporting people “like us” in age and life situations
- Reaching “families and children” with the gospel

Church Council identified two goals last year:

- Increase worship attendance
- Infrastructure improvements

In the sections below I detail how we attempted to take prayerful strides towards the goals and callings above. Additionally, the last section details some of the challenges that I believe face our congregation in the coming years. We do not live in a time where church is easy to maintain, and I think it is important that we as a congregation understand those challenges.

Those challenges are:

- Leadership burnout
- Focus on ministry, not management
- New spaces for new people

Quality Worship

Perhaps nothing helps us make the movement from our little selves to a larger world than remembering God in gratitude. Such a perspective puts God in view in all of life, not just in the moments we set aside for worship or spiritual disciplines. Not just in the moments when life seems easy. - Henri Nouwen

Quality worship was one of the desires of our church and I am so grateful for it being named in every nearly every conversation about our future. Quality worship can vary by person, so let me share the measures I put on worship to support us connecting to God. 1. Multiple people collaborated on the plan to make sure it is not the singular vision of the pastor, instead it is a call from God to our community. 2. Music, spoken words, and the order of service are prayed over to ask for God's presence being at the center. 3. Our worship is hospitable to longtime attenders and new people alike in the language we use. 4. We include people of all ages, abilities, and skills in creating a genuine worship of God from God's people. 5. What Henri Nouwen said above, that those leading worship hold at the center "gratitude" for what God is doing among us.

Supporting people "like us" in age and life situations

*Aging does not need to be hidden or denied, but can be understood, affirmed and experienced as a process of growth by which the mystery of life is slowly revealed to us.
- Henri Nouwen*

One primary desire from our community was to serve people "like us." In other words, people knew we were a community of people who are on the "older" end of the age spectrum and we hope our church can offer something to the challenges people face. Listening to this desire and also recognizing that many of our neighbors fit this profile, I have spent the last year, as your pastor, learning intimately the challenges, hopes and fears of people who are in the second half of their life. The journey has been an amazing and has brought connections to all sorts of people in our community, seeking to do the same kind of ministry and work.

In this spirit we have launched our Aging Well program. Designed to "enrich the gift of growing older." Last year we had a series of experimental lunches offering learning on a variety of topics around aging, and working to form a community of people interested in learning together. It was a success, and this program year we are continuing these lunches with attendance nearly doubling over last year.

Reaching "families and children" with the gospel

"Spirituality is not about being fixed; it is about God's being present in the mess of our unfixedness. (Messy Spirituality)" - Michael Yaconelli

A desire for our community was to reach "families with children." This stems from our roots of Sunday school" flowing out of every nook and cranny" when we had a smaller building. It also is a value that fits our context and location, there are young families moving into neighborhoods near us, especially to the south and west of our church. It will take work to reach young families, they have a large number of competing priorities to consider as they raise

children. Some parents have never grown up in a church, and don't know the value of spiritual community. Some parents are working multiple jobs, or both parents work and need support to fit in family spiritual time. Families won't just show up, we are going to have to meet them. This is why our Easter Egg Hunt and Trunk or Treat will be so key as outreach opportunities.

In response to their needs we are called to create family friendly spaces, and that is why we launched Messy Church as a weekly activity. We are experimenting with creating an alternative time and space for regular family worship. Messy Church is about families spending time together in a world where parents and children often participate in events separately. I would love for you to come join us this week to see how Messy Church works. Also, invite families and children in your life to join you. It is Messy because the kids get to participate in the service, people how they are, and we celebrate the mess of life we have been offered by God. The service starts at 5:30 and by 6:05 we are sitting down for dinner.

I am happy to add that we have 3 new families at Shiloh this fall, and Messy church has had up to 20 people in attendance. It has not drawn in anyone who has not been to church, but it has solidified Shiloh as home for some of our new families.

Church Council Goals

I invite you to look at the attached *Shiloh Playbook* to see the goals set by Church Council and the goals accomplished there. The two goals were infrastructure improvements and growing worship attendance.

The infrastructure improvements have been accomplished with the leadership of trustees and staff. I want to thank everyone who has worked hard to make these things happen. Often many of the goals accomplished take years, and we have done that work in a relatively short period of time. These will help us be successful in our ministry efforts moving ahead.

Growing worship has been a more difficult goal for us. We set our sights high on this one, trying to grow to over 120 in worship for 10 regular Sundays. We did not hit that goal. However, we have seen new people coming to worship, and people from our past returning to worship. Our strides to make it quality and to provide ways for people to connect beyond Sunday mornings have allowed for folks to feel connected to worship. As we set our goals for next year, it is not a bad idea to improve upon this goal and work. I want to share one success for me is that one of our members, Eldora Brown, who can no longer join us in church, watches us every week on livestream.

Challenges

“You don't think your way into a new kind of living. You live your way into a new kind of thinking.”
– **Henry Nouwen**

Christians are a people of resurrection. Shiloh is a place where God dwells. We are a people who believe God works to transform lives daily, giving people hope in darkness and peace in the chaos. Right now we as a church are seeking ways to reach new people and to deepen the

faith of those already in our midst. As with any congregation there are challenges we need to overcome to continue to follow our call. Praying over these is the first step toward working on them, and we need to be more diligent in our prayers. Then we need to talk candidly about these challenges with a hope of letting the Holy Spirit move into the cracks we have in our church and helping to make us more whole. This means we will have to have some hard conversations in the coming future about where we are going as a church.

1. Leadership Burnout

- a. It has been clear that we have very few new leaders rising to take on the roles of the past. This results in people who are burned out or question whether they are really the ones to serve in these roles. We will need a serious influx of leaders who are excited about our ministry in the coming years if we are to achieve our hopes of revitalizing and being a healthy congregation.
- b. I continue to encourage Shiloh to consider new models of governance, including “single board” models for our future work. It has been consistently proven that these models set the motion for: 1. Less people focused on management and more focused on ministry. 2. An intentional work to call and foster new leaders into spirit filled, gifts based roles. 3. Reduce burnout by placing decision making in groups that can really make a difference. 4. Clarifying decision making processes to avoid delayed decisions.

2. Focus on ministry, not management

- a. This ties back into the previous challenge in that we currently have more leaders focused on the management of our church, than deeply focused on ministry that grows peoples’ connection with God and their own spiritual life. Churches that get focused on management and forget to focus on ministry continue to decline, instead of finding resurrection.¹
- b. Financially this is becoming clear. We have reserves to cover our deficit in our budget for now, but giving is beginning to go down. Our finance team has committed to covering the deficit for two more years beyond 2018. In this time we will need to explore the realities that people give to churches who engage in their community, to churches who foster their spiritual growth, and to churches who clearly are going where God is calling them. Additional loss in our giving will probably lead to a reduction in staff, and that will have an impact on our ability to handle the administrative load that allows me, as your pastor, and other leaders to focus on the ministry of the church.

3. New spaces for new people

- a. Creating new spaces for new people is how continue to share the gospel in the 21st century. This does not mean neglecting those already present, it means deepening the spiritual life of everyone in the congregation and providing places where new people can make a connection to find a home in our life as a church.
- b. Leadership
 - i. New spaces in leadership is hard, especially when we have held a role for a long time. However, to grow our church we as leaders have to constantly be watching for people who might take all or part of the role we currently play. If we are growing as leaders we constantly find people to take our place and move on to new areas of service. In the coming

¹ <https://careynieuwhof.com/7-subtle-signs-church-dying/> This is one of numerous articles on characteristics of churches in decline. I am happy to provide more detail on decline in congregations if requested.

years we will need to foster a culture of “call” that new members can embrace, where they feel called by leaders in the church to foster their God given spiritual gifts in our midst.

c. Worship

- i. Worship often is the first experience people have of us, and if they don't find their space early, they leave. As a pastor I try to meet every new person, but I “get paid” for my hospitality, in other words people know why I am reaching out to them. If we are to truly allow worship to welcome new people, we will need all of our members and friends to act like ambassadors of Shiloh with new people. Helping them know where bathrooms are, food is, where to get information, and go ahead and bring them to be introduced to your friends or God forbid your pastor. In the coming years I hope we work on how we welcome new people into worship, and connect them to our church. We will need greeters, a new person welcome process in place, and some hospitality training for our congregation.

d. Spiritual Life

- i. Small groups are key to spiritual life and clear paths to grow with God are vital. Currently the path for new members to gain access to the spiritual life of Shiloh is fairly unclear, especially if the person is unchurched or nominally churched. We need to develop a clear discipleship process that helps people begin, continue, or know where to go on their journey of faith. This includes listing how to join different groups, seeking to form new groups as needs arise, and making sure we have a core discipleship course to help people learn what a church can offer. Additionally, many of these small groups may need to happen off church property, so we can reach those people who are seeking the gospel message, but may be nervous to enter a church.

In the coming year I ask you to be in prayer for me as your pastor for clarity about where to offer guidance to our leaders. I ask you to pray deeply for our leaders that they can open themselves to God’s call to reach out with the gospel and engage new people with the love of Christ. Finally, I ask you to be in prayer for our church, to listen deeply for God’s call before we take steps in ministry, so we are centered in the very being of what God wants for the church called Shiloh.