

Pastor's Report 2014
Gene McAfee

"No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bushel basket. . . ." -- Matthew 5:15

A quick glance at the Vital Statistics page near the start of this Annual Report shows that Faith is growing, a trend not widespread in mainline churches. A review of recent annual reports shows that we grew also in 2011 and 2013 (and shrank by one in 2012). The numbers aren't large, but they are trending in the right direction, as the phrase goes today. And so, for even modest gains, I am grateful to God, as I hope all of you are, as well.

From personal experience and from the testimony of others, I know that the chief reason people visit and then join churches is by invitation from a current member. Word of mouth is by far the most effective way to grow a church (or any organization, for that matter). We all rely on the favorable testimony of others to choose our doctors, our plumbers, and our veterinarians. The favorable testimony of others, in the form of an invitation, is also the way most of us find communities of faith where we seem to fit. When was the last time you invited someone to join you at Faith?

One of the striking impressions left with those of us who attended the fund-raising dinner and silent auction last October was how successful the evening was: how well attended the event was, how many guests were present, and how much money was raised for the Cleveland Food Bank and for our deficit. It's been a good while since we had so many guests in our church for such an event; what made the difference? People invited friends, neighbors, other family members, and co-workers to join them for a pleasant evening. We had fun, we enjoyed fellowship with one another, we had a nice dinner, we raised money for hungry people, and we reduced our operating deficit. What was significant, to me, was that the evening proved that the members of Faith *can* invite people to join them at this church. The evening proved, to me, that inviting others to Faith is one of the surest paths to success. If we can invite folks for a pasta dinner, can we not also invite them for Sunday worship, VBS, the Women's Fellowship, writing letters for Bread for the World, Faith Seniors, an educational program, movie group, the Homewood Service, or Loaves and Fishes?

Many years before I entered full-time ministry, I attended a workshop with a conference minister from the east coast. One of the things she said to all of us who were active in our congregations was that numbers matter, however much we would prefer that they didn't. I found her remarks mildly off-putting at the time, but becoming the pastor of a church has proved to me how right she was. Numbers do matter, and they matter very much, and they are not the responsibility of any one person (including the pastor) or ministry; they are the responsibility of the entire congregation. Faith will grow, significantly, when each of us takes responsibility for our share of making that happen. And as I talk with many of you, and hear of your sense of feeling increasingly burdened by having to assume multiple roles at Faith, I know that we must grow.

I believe in the program we have here at Faith. I believe the gospel of Jesus Christ is faithfully proclaimed, and that lives are made new because of what we believe, say, and do here; do you share that belief? If so, then let's not keep it a secret.

Yours in the service of Christ and the church,



Gene McAfee, Pastor

18 November, the Feast of St. Hilda, Abbess of Whitby