

Pastor's Report 2013  
Gene McAfee

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice." -  
Philippians 4:4

We reached a significant milestone this year: ten years together as pastor and congregation. And the comment I heard more than any other as we neared that anniversary was, "Has it been that long already?" I take that as a good sign, based on the folk wisdom that says that time flies when you're having fun. We must be having a blast.

Which is not to say that we haven't had some tough moments; we have. Some are well known, some less so. But we've managed to get through them relatively unscathed and have emerged, I believe, in better shape than we were before. We also had some wonderful experiences. Let me give a few examples.

As you can see elsewhere in this annual report, we are facing the largest budget deficit next year in almost a decade. These sorts of shortfalls were not unknown prior to my arrival, but together we managed to get them under control and even operate in the black for a few years. Next year's deficit is due to a significant loss of income (from pledges and the use of the building), not a significant increase in spending. But despite the increased deficit, neither the Finance Ministry nor the Ministry Leadership Council proposed reducing our mission giving from previous years, and mission giving is always one of the first targets for deficit reduction in churches (and look at the programs Congress is proposing to cut - programs that benefit the poor, especially poor children). This makes an important statement about Faith's commitments as a church. We can and should continue to increase our giving - tithing at least ten per cent of our income has been a desideratum for a number of years - but not to retreat on mission giving in the face of income loss is, to me, a sign of spiritual vitality.

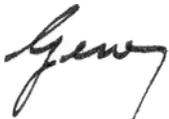
I also think we grew spiritually in the area of hospitality. I am proud of the Brinton weekend. Faith rose to a significant challenge and provided a real learning opportunity to a large number of our neighboring churches, not just by what Henry said, but more by our own example of extending hospitality. I believe the lessons we learned that weekend are still being lived out; guests to our church have told me as much. And Henry tells me, as he continues to travel the country speaking on hospitality,

that his weekend with us has turned out to be one of his most successful, largely due the careful planning we did. I think we took a big step as a church that weekend, and I would like to see us take others.

I believe that the departure of Emmaus Bible Fellowship, while a loss from a financial point of view and from the perspective of some personal friendships, brought to a conclusion a relationship between our congregations that had never been as satisfactory as some of us had hoped it would be; there were kinks in our relationship that we never could seem to get worked out. I personally learned a great deal from the seven-year Emmaus experience that I will bring to future conversations about the use of our building by non-Faith groups, and I hope you will share with me your counsel as to how to be good stewards of our physical plant without creating unnecessary difficulties for ourselves or others.

Finally, as you can see from the Vital Statistics that open this report, our membership increased this year by seven, partly from confirmands being added to the adult roll and partly from new members being received. The number is hardly staggering, but it is moving in the right direction, and for that I'm very grateful and hopeful.

I could go on and continue to list strengths and weaknesses, advances and retreats, successes and failures, but the bottom line is stated at the top: rejoice in the Lord always. We will face our challenges most gracefully and successfully when we keep Paul's words to the Philippians in our hearts and in our minds and rejoice in the Lord always. To rejoice in the Lord is not to deny realities; it is to celebrate the vast, undying love that makes every reality an opportunity to live more fully into our calling as followers of Jesus the Christ. To the fully Human and fully Divine One be the glory and praise, now and always.



22 November 2013  
Feast of St. Cecilia, virgin and martyr, patron saint of church music and musicians