

December 1st, 2021

Subject: End of Year Letter to Staff and Lay Leadership

Isle of Faith Leaders,

Thank you! I know your time is valuable, and I ask that you please set aside some dedicated time to read this letter and then reflect for a bit. Even though the subject of the letter reads “End of Year”, I will focus primarily on the future. In this letter I will reflect on some of the work we have accomplished in the past regarding Vision and Mission. Then I will do my best to communicate the present Call of God on Isle of Faith UMC as discerned through prayer and our relationships with one another.

A few years back we spent some time in intentional visioning for the church. We asked important questions like: Who is God Calling us to be? How does the community see us? And How are we progressing as disciples of Jesus? The word that continued to come out of our work was “Mission”. We overwhelmingly concurred that God is calling us to be in Christian mission to the community, near and far. Our work also revealed that we as a congregation have a variety of ideas concerning what mission looks like and how we can best live into this Holy Call.

Since that time, we changed our “Mission Statement” to the official UMC statement: *“Making Disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the World”*. We renamed our Fellowship Hall the “Mission Hall” and claimed that space as a reminder of who God calls us to be. We adopted the goal of investing in our campus, undertaking many much-needed upgrades and repairs (kitchen, roof, landscaping, flooring, parking lot, parsonage repairs...). We dedicated ourselves to providing a “Community Engagement Park (CEP)” for our community as a place where families can join us in ministries such as UPWARD, a Christian focused children’s sports ministry, our annual Pumpkin Patch ministry, and our CEP improvement plan that is projected in pictures in our Welcome area. We created a new staff position, Director of Community Engagement, to focus on out-reach, visitor retention, and integrating families into the life of the church.

We cannot move on from this reflection on where we were and where we are, without acknowledging the huge impact the COVID-19 pandemic had and still has on our worshipping community. Our staff and lay-leadership did a remarkable job of balancing keeping us safe while providing worship and service opportunities as was possible. Many difficult decisions were made, and we continue to learn from our mistakes as we discern how to “Be the Church” in this new reality.

And finally, where we are and where God calls us to be. Trying to practice what I preach, and have intentionally applied the practice of Spiritual Disciplines in order to best hear and discern

God's call on the people of IOFUMC. I know I am not alone in this and that you, our leaders, also seek discernment through prayer and other disciplines.

I strongly sense that our primary mission to make disciples of Jesus has not and will not change. After all, that is the call of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20). The question I repeatedly set before God is, "How do we, IOFUMC, best accomplish this great task?" The answer I discern is, "*We must look inward, if we are to see outward.*"

You have heard it called many things, Christian Education, Spiritual Formation, Bible Study, Sunday School, Small Groups... We must as a Church, not just the core group, but the entire body, **MUST** take the Word of God seriously and dedicate our lives to growing closer to God. Encountering God in God's Holy Word is the foundation of our and anyone's spiritual growth.

How can we effectively share the Gospel story if we are not united in understanding its meaning?

How do we, specifically, change the culture of our Church so that all understand the imperative nature of this task? The scope of this question is too broad for this letter. I have many ideas and questions, as I have heard many from you. How and what do we pray? How do we best study the bible? What resources should we use? How do we reach all generations? And much more...

Between now and the beginning of LENT (March 2nd, 2022) I ask you to take a look at the way you currently practice the spiritual disciplines (prayer, fasting, study, worship...) and make a real effort to spiritually prepare for the season of LENT when we will focus, as a church, on how to transform our church culture into a more focused and equipped disciple-making agency for God.

Please feel free to contact me anytime between now and LENT with any questions, comments, or to simply pray together. If you need guidance concerning spiritual disciplines, give me a call or visit.

Blessings Abound,

Pastor Will Clark