

Our World is changing. Accepted Norms are changing. Church History identifies that the Church has changed over and over in 2000 years, and I believe GOD will find a way for the Church to endure. Possibly Churches will not have Stained Glass, there may no longer be need of PREACHERS, every person has GOD's COMMANDS Written on the HEARTS. In 1978, this was the fastest growing church in the country at 1600! From 2000 until 2019, we went from 1600 members to 350. 10 years ago, the Commission on Ministry created an Administrative Commission to work with the Session, to cut \$300,000 of overspending from the Budget, and to address Conflict. In 2016, our Pastor took his life. This Presbytery, our Presbytery, provided incredible support. The Sunday following, 26 Ministers from our Presbytery were in attendance here on Sunday morning, to provide support and witness. From which we adopted a new Mission Statement based on MAKING CHRIST KNOWN THROUGH RECONCILIATION.

Today, our Presbyteries are excited about the Certification of new CRE Commissioned Ruling Elders, who represent an incredible new means in the PC(USA) for Church Leadership. For those I don't know, I often introduce that my Father-in-law, Father & Mother, all graduated from Seminary. My Mother in 1950, could not be ordained as it was 7 years before Margaret Towner as the 1st Female Minister. Margaret celebrated her 99th Birthday recently, we were good friends when we both served in Milwaukee; and over 22 years in Syracuse I worked with the Church that had called her in 1957 for sale of their assets.

The roles and responsibilities are exactly the same for Commissioned Ruling & Ordained Teaching Elders; yet those to be Ordained must stand before their Presbytery for Oral Examination, on whatever anyone wish to ask. Mine, was the year of ReUnion so I was examined both by Detroit & L Michigan Presbyteries, and each of those Examinations went for over an hour and a half. At the end of the 2nd, one man asked: "SIR, If there were an Island of people who had never heard the name of GOD, and a Tsunami came and wiped them from the face of the earth, would they get into Heaven?" I thought for a moment knowing he wanted me to say NO, before saying: "I thank GOD, there is a GOD, and I am not responsible for Salvation. What I believe is GOD loved the world so much GOD gave GOD's only begotten child, knowing full well the Human Will, that we would and did kill him, YET even that did not separate from GOD's LOVE. I believe GOD would not condemn a people for never having heard the name of GOD, that TRULY GOD SHOWS NO PARTIALITY, ACCEPTING EVERY ONE WHO FEAR HIM AND DO WHAT IS RIGHT." There was a hush across the Presbytery as I was escorted out of the Sanctuary. During the next 30 minutes, I could hear heated debate. After which the doors were opened and I was brought in, with the singing of the GLORIA PATRI. I asked whether I had answered correctly, and was told "We do not know, the Presbytery was divided, but following your Witness we decided to trust the Love of GOD."

Years ago, I researched Churches stuck in Conflict, who repeated the same circumstances over and over. What I came to believe is that in order to Change, churches need 4 essentials: It seems so basic, but a Church must understand itself to be "The Church in this time and place", not simply a club, a non-profit, a family, nice people, we are Called by God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to love one another. 2nd Trust and Conflict are in opposition. Change requires a strong level of trust, a low level of conflict. 3rd Whether buildings, population, finances, there must be resources to change and make a difference. 4th Churches need to have willingness to use those resources. Sometimes we have so locked earmarked designated giving, ...never having done things that way before, that we cannot act in faith.

One church, started in 1801. In the 1840's that church went through a major conflict. Conflict is not new. It seems to have begun with two Elders in a fistfight, I wish it was over a Sermon, or theological issue, I believe it was over a Soprano in the Choir. One of the two, came to Session to repent. The other refused, stating he had been right, and had nothing to ask forgiveness for. Over the next 5 years, one pastor in the

same building served 2 First Presbyterian Churches. The only evidence of this was that all records of those years were torn from the Session Minute Book, with the inscription on the next page: "We crucified GOD! We broke the Body of Christ, doing harm to the Church and each other! We so repent, that we are starting over as a new creation."

In the last 5 years, even through COVID, in a retirement Community, GOD has led us through resurrection. A year ago in worship, we read the Story of the man called LEGION, whose own community had chained and abandoned him outside society as rejected because of his problems; when it occurred that this is one of the few stories where Jesus instructs the wounded not to follow him, but to go and work on RECONCILIATION with those who had abandoned him. Recognize what RECONCILIATION means, when we needed to accept former members who had very publicly, and with great woundedness left this church for other churches. Annually, we have ended each of the last 5 years with surplus income, we budget 18% for missions and give twice that amount; and although we honor the resurrection of 40 and more annually we welcome more new members than we lose, such that we are now a 425 member congregation, who at Easter had over 600 in worship.

Following October 7th, we have regularly prayed for the 1,200 Israelis and 33,000 Palestinians who died. We developed new relationships that had broken down with local churches with our local Synagogue. December we held an ecumenical celebration of Hannukah and Advent; we partnered with the Synagogue for their commissioning creation of the 5 Scrolls of Torah, which meant that they had a Jewish Scholar preach here and lead an Adult Forum on the Biblical Nature of Evil. Earlier this week, their Scribe visited with one of the Scrolls he is hand Caligraphying, where he gave a presentation on the Torah, and as Gentile Christians we each had the once in a life-time experience to calligraphy a Letter on that Scroll.

Last year, our Session learned that we had received several Memorials from long-time members. These donors had given these UNDESIGNATED to be used. Our Gifts & Memorials Committee and Session did a bold thing, deciding that these Memorials would be used to make a difference. We sent out a Request for Proposals, for what could be done. No decisions have yet been made, however, suggestions have been

1. assisting the Papago Church replacing their Kitchen roof;
2. an after-school program and books for Tohono 'Odham children who commute 40 miles/day;
3. assisting an orphanage in Mexico to connect to the Electric Grid;
4. assisting homeless Youth in Tucson with scholarships for College Education;
5. rebuilding the Shelter for Hands of a Friend in Sahuarita;
6. using our Church's Food Truck, to provide a free regular Meal for people in need;
7. constructing a new Bible School in Juba, South Sudan;
8. helping the Arab Christian Ministry in Tucson develop the resources of their ministry;
9. creating a new Bi-National Overnight Camp for youth at the Tucson Borderland Ministry;
10. transportation for the Korean Church to have outreach for College students;
11. assistance for Montlure Camp;
12. installing Latrines in 31 Villages across Pakistan for those identified as Un-touchable
13. re-building a School and Orphanage for Girls in Pakistan
14. updating our 45-year-old Kitchen.
15. what if, we could build storage units on our existing property for our annual Patio Sale, giving to Missions what we had paid annually to rent units?

Over the last dozen years, our Associate Pastor helped this Church to recognize, THE CHURCH is not the Building, THE CHURCH is not Worship Sunday Morning, THE CHURCH is not our Financial Giving. THE CHURCH is THE BODY OF CHRIST!