

Pastor's Reflections

by Jeffrey E. Frantz

For everything there is a season, a time for everything under the sun.

(Ecclesiastes 3:1)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it. (John 1:1-5)

2010—a year of challenge and change. As the New Year breaks upon us, always, there is an excitement in the air. As the wisdom of **Ecclesiastes** reminds us, *For everything there is a season, a time for everything under the sun.*

For us here at Miami Lakes Congregational, the *season* that is upon us is a season of challenge and change. CHANGE, because our new building (for The Growing Place expansion) will soon be complete and in no time, we will be registering three and four-year-olds for the school year which commences in August.

Our plan is to add up to 60 new students (up from our current number of 66) for a total of 126 students. With the four, new classrooms, we will also be increasing after school care program. Beyond that, we are checking in to hopefully using the classrooms for tutoring and summer school.

Bottom line: there will be a significant increase in the number of people on our church grounds throughout the week—all of which presents opportunities for the growth of our church as well. In this sense, the *change* will also be our CHALLENGE. For it will be up to us to find ways of utilizing our new building to maximize the benefit—both to the community and to our church.

Your creative musings on this are welcome, as the spirit moves.

My Sabbatical leave. The dates for this are now set: April 13 to August 13, 2010. Keep in mind that the Lilly Foundation grant to fund this leave is a grant to the church. The church is the recipient and is charged with dispersing the grant in accord with the grant proposal, the principle purpose of which is this wonderful clergy renewal opportunity.

This is a win-win all the way. To begin with, most of my four months away will be over the summer months (after TGP registration is complete and before school starts up in August). As most of you know, Dr. Paul Veliyathil, a Chaplain with Vitas Hospice, will be the Interim Pastor (the grant provides for his compensation package) for this four-month period. He is well known to many of you and is a man of keen intellect and substantial spiritual gifts.

If you are active in my time away, as we hope you will be, you will benefit from Dr. Veliyathil's sermons and from his person. He is the kind of preacher for whom the message comes alive in and through his personality. In other words, you have to experience the *Word* in and through him.

A pastor's Sabbatical leave is also a time for church members and friends to reflect on who they are vis-à-vis the church. It's a time for personal growth and creativity. Without a full-time pastor on hand (in addition to Sundays, Dr. Veliyathil will be here at least two additional days per week), there will be things that will need tending to that many of you will discover you not only *can* do but that you *do* well.

Together—with me on my leave and with you holding forth here in Miami Lakes—new ideas for our shared ministry will emerge. For example, how do we continue to build up our congregation in this increasingly Hispanic context? Gradually, we're figuring it out; but there is still much to learn. And in what ways do we do Christian outreach—reaching out, for example, to many of the families that request Thanksgiving baskets and Angel Tree gifts from us each year?

Along with the *Clergy Renewal Support Team*, there is still much to do as we prepare for this Sabbatical leave experience.

In conclusion, please know this: while I am very much looking forward to this wonderful opportunity, I will be even more excited about returning to continue my ministry here at our church. Yvette and I both like the Miami Lakes community very much and we love our church family; and furthermore, from where I sit, God still has much more for me to do here.