

## Pastor's Reflections

*This will be my last column for our monthly church newsletter until the September issue, after I return from my four-month Sabbatical leave. As noted in recent issues, I am using the column to reflect on different aspects of this Sabbatical experience, both for me and for the church.*

**Hope to see you at the *bon voyage* party on Sunday, April 11<sup>th</sup>.** By now, most of you know that my Sabbatical leave is from April 13<sup>th</sup> to August 13<sup>th</sup>. This has indeed been a long time in coming. Yvette and I have been scurrying about, trying to take care of more details than you can shake a stick at. Turns out, we had to get a long-term *visa* for France, which we should receive before the end of March.

I do hope that most of you will be able to stop by (only stay as long as your time-commitments allow) for our *bon voyage* party on Sunday, April 11<sup>th</sup>, from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m. at Shulas.

Yvette and I are very much looking forward to this experience. However, please know: we will be very much looking forward to our return to MLCC as well. In many ways, this is an opportunity of a lifetime for us. Four-months pretty much with *no* deadlines, fourteen weeks of which will be in Provence in France—all paid for by the grant our church received from the Lilly Endowment, Inc.

We are both grateful and humbled at this opportunity.

I've never really felt that I was *burned out* as a pastor, although the constancy of weekly deadlines does wear on me at times. However, I *know* that this time away will be renewing of me in multiple ways. It will be unbelievable to just *be* for a time. I have no interest in retirement in the foreseeable future but it will be refreshing to fall back into a life style of leisurely reading, writing, reflecting and *beaucoup* conversation with family and friends.

I'm sure I will spend many hours envisioning for our church. I feel God still has much for me to do here. We have a wonderful church family. We're a small congregation, but yet a congregation with a contagious friendliness (visitors says this about us all the time) and a big enough heart and spirit to welcome everyone in.

Still, how do we see ourselves continuing to unfold in the months and years ahead? In what ways will we continue to grow our church—expand our outreach ministries, develop a youth ministry, and continue to provide spiritual and theological growth opportunities for our people, all in the rich tradition of a progressive Christian faith?

**My hopes for you over this four-month period.** To begin with, let's tell the truth: these four months will fly by. Before you know it, mid-August will come around and you and I will be back to doing our thing.

In the meantime, however, there are some things I hope you will do while I'm away:

1. Take care of one another. I know you'll do this; but, still, I'm counting on you to do it. When the situations calls for it, call or email one another, visit one another and *be there* for one another as a church family.
2. Welcome first time visitors with the friendliness you have always displayed. The hard part here might be identifying the visitors to begin with. Nancy and Dawn will be leading the way on this, along with support from Mariliz and Maggie.
3. Support Rev. Dr. Paul Veliyathil, the interim pastor for my four-month Sabbatical leave. He's a great guy and a deeply spiritual pastor; but, still, he'll need your support, your prayers and your friendship along the way. With regard to Dr. Paul, if you need him, for whatever, call him. He's expecting you to not hold back.
4. Do your own envisioning during my time away—forming your own ideas and vision of what you hope our church might look like five to ten years down the road.

How can we continue to attract new faces and continue to develop and expand the ministries that we offer?

How can we be a progressive Christian Church, where *progressive* means open and inclusive to all of God's people, with an enlightened and evolved understanding of the Scriptures and a global view of the world unfolding around us?

Having said all of this, take care and may the God of infinite understanding and mercy hold you all, and those whom you love, in the palm of his hand. Au revoir!