

Pastor's Reflections

by Jeffrey Frantz

It's great to be back. Yvette and I are still adjusting to being happily back home in Miami Lakes after our four-month Sabbatical experience, fourteen weeks of which were spent in Aix-en-Provence, France.

For me, personally, it was a wonderful time of rest and renewal. After four months away, I return to my pastoral role, now, with new energy and with excitement about our future. To begin with, please mark Saturday, September 18th on your calendars. Yvette and I are hosting a special ***dinner/program*** at our church (in Fellowship Hall). We'll start at 6:00 p.m. and try to finish by eight o'clock.

We're calling it, ***Summer en Provence, Merci Beaucoup***. In addition to the French cuisine (*nouriture Provençal*), it will be an opportunity for us to share our Sabbatical experience with you and to thank you once again for this wonderful experience.

With Yvette's high tech skills, and with your attendance, this promises to be an evening of fun and celebration. The *Provence* region of France, where we lived, is one of the most beautiful places on earth, with its geography and sense of history. To help prepare yourselves for the evening, go to our church website (www.mlcchurch.com) and click on our blogs (right column, front page).

Funds from the Sabbatical grant our church received from the Lilly Foundation will help us with meal preparations. Come and honor us with your presence on this special evening.

State of the church: where are we? As I ease my way back into my familiar role as pastor here at church, and with the fall season before us, what is the state of the church? Where are we?

To begin with, I want to say how beautiful the grounds look and how well we (both the church and TGP) are presenting ourselves to the community. Good job Trustees and all who have helped with this!

Again, *Where are we?* Most immediately, with the recent completion of our beautiful new building for The Growing Place expansion, we are in the process of filling up our preschool and after-care. Because we did not receive the *Certificate of Occupancy* earlier that mid-July (you can't officially enroll new students without this), we got a late start on enrollment.

Still, enrollment is going well; we are currently up to 91 students in our preschool (in previous years, we were at capacity with 66 students) with a potential of 106 (with full enrollment, we would have five classes of 18 for the three and four-year-olds, and one class of 16 for two-year-olds). Next year, we hope to add an additional class (the *green room* in the new building), reaching a capacity of 124.

Because of the new building, our after-care program is also scheduled to grow from a top of 183 last year to 275 this year. Presently, we still have 54 vacancies which we expect to fill over the next couple of weeks.

With regard to income, we are projecting a surplus for the remainder of 2010 of around \$15,000, after expenses, including our payments to The Cornerstone Fund.

Having said all of this, prospects for TGP look very bright. Our parents, children and teachers absolutely love our new building, we've made improvements in the older buildings, and there's a great spirit—both at TGP and with our church.

Regarding the church, we are in the process of strengthening our attendance patterns, reaching out to people whom we haven't seen in recent months and welcoming many new faces into our church family.

This past Sunday, for the *Blessing of TGP School Year*, we had 215 people in church, about 60 of whom (20 families) were from TGP. We're following up with these TGP families in the event some of them might be looking for a church home.

Beyond this, as our church continues to move forward, I invite each of us to ask ourselves, *What do we want the life of our church to look like in three to five years?* In our worship, with our music, with our Christian Education to all age groups; with spiritual and biblical growth opportunities, in our Christian outreach ministries, and with our ministry to children and youth?

What do we want our church to look like and feel like? With what kind of a face do we want to present ourselves to the community around us? Through it all, we are *The United Church of Christ*, a Mainline Protestant denomination with roots going back to the Pilgrims. As our denomination has evolved over the years, increasingly, we have become a *progressive* denomination.

Even though we have *local church autonomy* in the UCC, still, our church, too, sees ourselves as *progressive*. We're progressive in the way we read the Bible and interpret our Christian faith. This *progressive* bent is what separates us from other churches and denominations. The question for us becomes, therefore—in these times that are ours—*How do we be faithful to our roots and to our progressive leaning, that God's purposes might be realized?*