

TRANSITION AND STABILITY

I sat in choir practice on Wednesday night as usual, puzzling over the hard passages with the other tenors (as usual), and being led as usual by Susan Hamilton. But that last “as usual” was about to change. At that point, we thought that would be Susan’s next-to-last choir rehearsal before she moved down to South Carolina. Change was coming.

Then we finished that song, which we were rehearsing for Susan’s last Sunday with us, April 26, and Susan said, “Now I’m going to hand it over to Sue Carole.” Sue Carole Volovsek stood and began handing out some anthems that she had pulled from the music files. Normally the choir goes on summer vacation at the end of May anyway, so we could have just called it off a month early, but the choir had voted to continue, and Sue Carole had agreed to lead us through May. Change was coming, we thought, but the choir was still going to sing.

Even though Susan’s schedule has changed, there’s something important in there, I think. As much as we love Susan, she is not the music program of First United Methodist Church. The music program of FUMC is a group of people who love to make music working together to praise God with all the joy they have. And that isn’t going to change. What matters – the love of singing and playing and ringing to the Lord – is unchanged. Watching Susan transition out and someone else transition in is a helpful reminder, though. The parts change; the purpose remains.

We’ve seen other transitions in our church, too. In the past couple of years we’ve seen two different signature outreach ministries of our church leave. The Community Christmas Dinner moved, and the Association for the Religious Education of the Handicapped (AREH) has closed. The Christmas Dinner moved to St. Paul’s UCC because that’s where the most dedicated of its remaining volunteer leaders were, and AREH closed because the group homes where most of the students lived changed their policies and stopped sending their residents to off-site programs. Change happened. But also during those years, we inaugurated our cooperation with the Homeless Coalition to sponsor their Count and Project Connect twice a year, began our new Downtown Memory Café, and connected with the first overseas mission trip we’ve done in over a decade. We realize that the outreach ministry of our church is not any one program, or even any set of programs. The outreach ministry of our church is Christ’s people working together through the church to serve people in need, wherever we find them.

One more example. Ten years ago, the church had no less than two staff-members whose job was primarily the pastoral care of our members. We had a Parish Nurse and a Minister of Pastoral Care. Well, they are both gone. Two parish nurses retired, and for financial reasons, we haven’t replaced them. The Minister of Pastoral Care got another job. Change happens. But the purpose has not changed. The care ministry of the church was not this or that staff member. The care ministry of the church is the people of God bearing each other’s burdens. Without designated staff leadership for this ministry, we have to find a new way to do it (see “Visitation” on pg. 4), but the goal is still before us. The parts change; the purpose remains.