

August 26, 2010

Dear Advent members and friends,

Time is precious. Your time is precious, and we honor your time. Some conversations are worthy of taking time. How our congregation works together to grow, and to welcome others, is one such conversation. We hope that you will take a few minutes to read this update and proposal for action from your Church Council and Pastor and consider offering some of your time in moving our congregation into our shared future.

Some background

Advent was organized in 1973 and has enjoyed growth or stability in a growing community since its founding. Many appreciate the wonderful people, culture and spirit of our congregation, and our outstanding music ministry. These have been positive factors throughout Advent's history, and they have also evolved over time in how they are expressed. Recent years have also brought growth at Advent in gifts-oriented ministry, in empowering leadership, and in youth and family ministry.

A church is an organism, not a machine. Healthy organisms grow, and we are called in Christ to be a part of the growth of God's kingdom in this world. There has been lively dialogue among the Church Council leaders and others in the congregation, especially in the last 18 months, about what we can do to encourage growth in our congregation. Growth has two different aspects: spiritual growth among the people in the congregation, and growth in the number of people who participate in Advent's ministries. We believe that it is best that both kinds of growth happen simultaneously.

How do we reach out to our neighbors?

Much has been written about the decline of mainline denominations in the United States over the last four decades. By any measure, all mainline protestant denominations are declining numerically. This is even more pronounced in regions of the US, like the West Coast, where a minority of people participate in church life.

What is our response? Past generations have engaged in neighborhood canvassing, or have hired a staff person to "knock on doors." Recent local efforts along those lines, however, have not been effective. Other approaches, such as marketing-driven growth campaigns, do not fit Advent's culture and could leave people who may wish to find a church home here feeling manipulated.

Our study of the issue has led us to conclude that we are called to act in new ways that honor who we are, a people called together by the Holy Spirit to love God, live as the body of Christ, and serve our neighbors as the Spirit empowers us to do. We have divided the outreach/evangelism work into three very practical areas: Inviting, Welcome Mat, and Faith Journeys.

Here's where you come in. We will launch working groups in each of these areas on **Saturday, September 18, 9 AM and ending by noon**, in what we are calling **Growing a Welcoming Community**. We will briefly meet together for an overview, then split into three working groups. Child care will be provided. There is practical work to do in order to become more effective in our outreach, and we invite you to get in on the ground floor of this work. Your gifts and interests will match one of these areas over the others.

Inviting

How can I grow in personally inviting others to grow in a life in Christ? I don't want to be insensitive, or break rules at work or social rules among my friends. If you have thoughts like these, and if you want to help all the people of Advent grow in our ability to invite others into a life in Christ, check out this group.

Welcome Mat

Are you a "doer" who is good at accomplishing physical tasks? Do you have a good eye for design? Last year some "Weaving 101" meetings generated some good ideas but no volunteers to carry them out. We need a group who will improve signage around Advent; assess what visitors need and want in their first three visits to our congregation; discover new ways of connecting people with our congregation, and provide appropriate and welcoming follow-up.

Faith Journeys

How does someone with spiritual questions grow in their life of faith? How does someone new to faith grow in life in Christ? Faith Journeys will be weekly small group gatherings to reflect together on the Sunday scriptures, sermon and worship as well as our lives. Faith Journeys is a simple, authentic and non-pressured way of accompanying people in growing in life in Christ and it is for people at every stage of their walk in faith. If you would like to participate, accompany or sponsor others on their faith journey, or help us prepare ourselves to begin Faith Journeys for adults in the end of November or early December of this year, check out this group.

Prayer

Last but not least, we invite any who are especially called to prayer to begin praying for Advent's work in **Growing a Welcoming Community**. We will have a prayer vigil on Friday evening and Saturday morning before and during these working group meetings. We will invite you to sign up for a time to pray when you come to worship on Sunday mornings.

Thank you

Thank you for reading this far into the letter. Your leaders have been praying about our outreach to our neighbors without a church home and believe that God is calling us to work together as a congregation in some traditional and in some new ways to support individuals and families in knowing and living the grace, truth and hope of Christ in the world. Come and work and pray to bring about this vision of our church community's life.

In Christ,

Anita R. Warner
Pastor

Sean A. Rositano
Church Council President

Reminders:

Prayer Vigil

Friday, Sept. 17, 6 PM - Saturday, Sept. 18, 12:00 Noon

Sign up at church for your prayer time

Growing a Welcoming Faith Community – working groups

Saturday, September 18, 9 AM – Noon

Please RSVP your attendance when at worship, or call the church office