

August 28, 2016

Celebration of Appointments

By Rev. Patricia Farris, Rev. Robert English, Rev. Keri Olsen, Tricia Lindley



1 Corinthians 11:1

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Pastoral Prayer - Michael Lamb, Lay Leader

Dearest Lord – Every prayer is one of thanks for one gift or another which through your grace, compassion and love, you bestow upon us, whether deserved or not. This morning our prayer is for your Angels – the first responders you have placed in her home – Patricia, Robert, Keri and Tricia. As your proxies among us, they are called upon to do what we often choose not to do, forget to do or don't want to do.

Through their special talents and gifts of love, patience, courage and faith they provide us with a shoulder to cry on or laugh on. As part of Christ's body and our church family, they are with us for the birth of our children. Baptisms. Our first Bible. Our entry into the church family as members.

They officiate at our weddings. They teach and counsel us about our faith and the travails of our lives during times of despair, worry, fear and anger. They comfort and sit beside us when we are sick. They hold and support us and help us say goodbye after the death of a loved one.

They pray for us when we won't or can't. They never give up on us when we give up on ourselves. They share in our joys and laughter, our tears and grief. They accept our burdens free of charge. They help us to see and follow the better angels in our souls.

Through their seen and unseen selfless acts of love and grace, they serve as our unwavering compass, directing us to God in the way of life everlasting.

Lord, let us never take for granted the mercy and kindness we come to expect, but may not always merit, from you and from the Angels who serve you and us in this Church. Thank you. And thank you. And thank you again.

Rev. Patricia Farris

In some important ways, the photos on today's FOCUS ON in the Order of Worship say it all. I am so proud to be part of a church that values education and learning, that invites the whole community IN every day, and that cherishes children and through them, the future. And the thing is—we do this in so many ways, week in and week out. Through our new Community Meals, we are building closer relationship with the families and children at Family Place across the street. We host Friday Prayer for our Muslim neighbors. We host the Santa Monica Quilt Guild, the Native Plant Society, 12-step groups, the Scouts, and the Daughters of the American Revolution. We do it through music, theater, the arts, study groups, and, if I may say so myself, some of the most beautiful, powerful, reverent worship to be found. Visitors frequently report this, so I'm taking it as a fact.

We're a congregation of children, grandparents, and everyone in between. We're a 140 year-old congregation with deep roots in this community. We are grounded in tradition and propelled into the needs of the present and the promise of the future by the wind of the Holy Spirit.

I am so grateful for the privilege of serving in ministry here with all of you. We are blessed with an amazing pastoral leadership team, gifted musicians, a super talented and committed administrative and office staff, dedicated Preschool Teachers and Director, the most hard-working joy-filled custodial staff, AND lay leadership that is faithful, dedicated, invested—and not shy about speaking up with new ideas and better ways of doing things.

All together, we form a leadership team that aspires to stay open to the prodding of God, to extend the hospitality of God's love to everyone, and to praise God through our words and actions, through our lives. And as a congregation, we remain deeply committed to grow in our love and knowledge of God, to reach out and serve others with ever deeper generosity and courage, and to witness, in these frightful times, to hope and to love. Simply put: to be the church, to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

Thank you. And thanks be to God!

Rev. Robert English

I give thanks to God as I begin another appointed year among you as the associate pastor for new and emerging ministries. This beloved community continues to reach out with the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ, to love our neighbors without any other agenda other than loving our neighbors and transforming our neighborhood. I am blessed to serve with you all and I am excited about all that is longing to unfold in the coming year.

This last week I came across an article in the Atlantic about folks who are spiritual but not religious. The article outlines, with some detail, the current American religious landscape. What I took away from the article is this: 1. there is a yearning, a longing and a hunger to connect with God and to find that connection through a spiritual community 2. the logistics of getting to church at a traditional time, Sunday morning, can sometimes be the biggest barrier to participation for new people.

What an opportunity we have as the body of Christ in this place to experiment with a new model of ministry, creating simple opportunities for prayer, worship, community and service outside of Sunday morning. All with the hope and the intention of speaking to different segments of the larger community who don't already have a spiritual home. This is the vision behind our new ministries of Simple Church and Messy Church; speaking differently to different types of people with the same good news of God's grace and love made flesh in Jesus Christ.

Starting on September 11th Simple Church re-launches worshipping weekly on Sunday evenings at 5pm in our chapel. This worship experience is contemplative, intimate, informal yet traditional, conversational and sacramental. Ultimately we are striving to cultivate calm, centered and compassionate lives through growing in prayer, in community and in service. Why should you come to simple church? First of all if you can't come on Sunday morning because of soccer, work, a hike with friends, that 5k you've been training for, whatever comes up, know that there is another worship option for you on Sunday. Secondly, come to simple church to experience it for yourself, especially if you have a child or grandchild, sibling, coworker, friend who is seeking an experience of God but hasn't found a spiritual home yet, simple church may not be for you, but maybe it's for them.

Along with our simple church worship gathering we have monthly opportunities for spiritual practice and service through sacred yoga and the community meal. Sacred yoga opens up some space for movement, stillness and discussion as we learn how to be more compassionate by starting with being compassionate to ourselves. We gather monthly on a Saturday in the Fireside Room for this holistic spiritual experience. Our community meal is a monthly opportunity to build community with the families of Family Place which provides transitional housing for homeless families. The meal is a simple pot luck style dinner where we all eat as one community because the real focus is on building relationships with the families. Jesus teaches us that there really isn't a better way to know someone than to sit down and break bread with them.

Lastly, Messy Church. Messy Church is a monthly worship intergenerational worship experience. We gather on the second Saturday of the month to learn about God's love through crafts, activities, song and story, and a shared meal. Messy Church really is about cultivating relationships with God and with one another. It creates a fun and interactive space for families of all different types to engage with one another and to grow spiritually. I wanted to extend an invitation to all the grandparents in the congregation; this is an amazing opportunity to find a spiritual home for your grandchildren where you can be actively engaged in the spiritual formation of your grandchildren. It is a beautiful and holy thing.

As I look toward the fall and all the new things that God is doing through this beloved community I am filled with gratitude, with hope and with love. Thanks be to God.

Rev. Keri Olsen

As many of you know, I was ordained a deacon in Full Connection in June. Thank you for your encouragement and support on my journey toward ordination. You all have certainly blessed me.

As a deacon my ministry is multifaceted; taking place here in our church and within UCLA Health Systems. Deacons are meant to have one metaphorical foot in the church and another in the world beyond the church. We seek to live out Christ's example of service, justice and compassion. Within my service to the church you have seen me up here in worship leadership. While at other times I simply offer you a smile and a hug and then worship alongside you in the pew. You will see me less on Sunday mornings in the coming months. However it's not because I'm slacking off after finally being ordained. Rather, I'll be assisting Pastor Robert with Simple Church on Sunday evenings. I am excited to be a part of its flourishing, as we grow in relationship with God, one another, and our neighbors. I will also continue on the leadership team for the young adult ministry, Cross Brew.

Now imagine me shifting my weight to my other metaphorical foot that stands in the world beyond the church walls. It is here where most of my time and passion for service are poured out. At UCLA Health Systems I am a Clinical Pastoral Education supervisor and hospital chaplain. As a supervisor I train lay people and clergy on how to offer spiritual support to hospital patients, visitors and staff. This educational process involves guiding my students to know themselves better, to examine their faith, and find the place where God dwells within them and gives them power to serve others with compassion and love.

For example, I had a student who I'll call "Jim." He had a powerful presence and a tender heart that caused him to tear up easily. One day, I observed Jim offering care to a middle aged man recently diagnosed with liver cancer. The patient became tearful as he described how unfair it would be for God to take him away from his teenage sons. I noticed Jim become tearful as well. But Jim missed the opportunity to empathize with the patient when he restrained his own tears and simply tried to change the patient's perspective to a more positive one. While reflecting with Jim about this missed opportunity for compassion, he began to cry again and shared his doubts about God using such a sensitive and emotional man in ministry. Through our exploration and prayerful tears Jim realized that his sensitivity to others' pain was a gift from God and actually made him a better chaplain rather than a weaker one.

Although I primarily supervise chaplain students like Jim, I also serve as a hospital chaplain myself. One early morning I was called because a patient went into cardiac arrest. When I arrived the staff was distressed. Despite how smart and hard they worked, the patient's pulse would not return. In the midst of this, I stood with the physician as she called the patient's daughter about the patient's likely death. After hanging up the phone, she looked at me with tears in her eyes, and said, "I just ruined her. She is hysterical." I responded by touching the physician's shoulder and firmly saying, "No, the possibility of her mother dying ruined her. You compassionately offered devastating news. You did a good job." The physician looked me in the eye and nodded, then headed back into the room to figure out if there was anything more they could do to save the patient. In chaotic, emotional circumstances like this I try to be a peaceful and powerfully loving presence. I know this to be Christ's ministry through me. I enter into the chaos, aware that I will not eliminate it, but confident that I can be a pillar of light and strength through the Holy Spirit who empowers me.

On a different occasion I offered grief support to the sister of a patient who had just died. Being overcome with grief, I recognized that this woman had descended into the "darkest valley" described in Psalm 23. I sought to embody the good news by meeting her in that dark valley, serving as God's rod and staff of comfort. I did not leave her alone as she waited for the rest of her family to arrive. I sat with my arm around her as she cried over the loss of her sister. As she questioned God's involvement in her sister's illness and death, I modeled that faith can include doubt. I assured her that God knew her grief and cried along with her. As a representative of the church, in service ministry to the world, I offer love and compassion to the needy and marginalized: those who grieve, those who feel distant from God, and those facing trauma alone.

In all these ways: within our church, as a supervisor and as a hospital chaplain I seek to live by Christ's example of service, justice and compassion. I am always open to share more about who I am and what I do. So please don't hesitate to ask. Thank you.

Tricia Lindley

Before coming here, I would have said, "Sure, it's important to include youth and children in the church." But I wouldn't have given it much thought and I wouldn't have known what that meant.

Then I became an intern and worked with our youth. A year later, I came on part-time to work with both our youth and children. And now going into my third year here and because each of you decided it was an important ministry to support, I am full-time as Director of our Children and Youth Ministry.

Each week with our children and youth, I learn about God, about what it means to be in community and to grow in faith. This past week, one of our youth counselors helped me re-think something: they told me that we often say "our children are the future of our church, of our world - but they pointed out that they're not just the future - they're the church NOW" That youth counselor was so right - they are part of our church family right now and they help us to be the hands and feet of Christ today.

- They are the church when our YSP teams travel to New Orleans to rebuild after Katrina or Smith River to repair homes for people who would otherwise not have the resources.
- They are the church when they fill the backpacks with school supplies you've collected for Family Place.
- They are the church when they teach Sunday school or help with Messy Church.
- They are the church when they tell their friends about VBS and invite them to come.
- They are the church when they crucifer or acolyte or help serve communion.
- They are the church when they share their faith on Children's Sabbath and Youth Sunday with us in worship.

In my work here, I'm beginning to understand how absolutely necessary it is for our children and youth to not just be here at church but to participate and lead. Their faith is important for us to better know and understand God. Their faith can help us to re-discover our own faith.

Our church has grown in so many ways since my first coming here - diving deep - growing in faith, challenging ourselves to be God's hands and feet of love in the world.

In youth - this is a year of building community 9 seniors graduated and we are feeling a big hole that this change brings to our youth group. Yet in the midst of this change, we are also excited to greet our new 6th graders and see what this new youth community becomes.

For our children,

- We celebrate a successful VBS this summer: 52 children plus 30 volunteers who learned about *Catching the Wave of God's Amazing Love* for ourselves and sharing it with others.
- Sunday School - starting our second year with the Deep Blue curriculum and new Bibles that our children love.
- We are hard at work practicing music in Children's Church with Janet Searfoss and planning our next Children's Sabbath, which will be in October.

In this coming year, I hope that my work here continues to create spaces for our youth and children, this amazing part of our church community, to lead and teach us about God and what it means to love as Christ loves us.

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