

2014 Annual Congregational Meeting
State of the Church Address and Report
November 16, 2014
Rev. Miller

This year our congregation has grown significantly in terms of our ministries and core leadership. It is a sign of a healthy and vibrant church when the congregation is friendly and welcoming, when there is activism and spontaneous “evangelism” (what we call outreach) because people are excited about what their church and its people are doing, when there is a culture of generosity, when the community is diverse, and when ministries are functioning well and with strong, independent lay leadership.

Many of our newest congregants have found us because of your enthusiasm and your willingness to talk to friends and to strangers on the train about our community. It is in this way that we have gained our newest Board member, three of the sweetest singing voices this side of the Mason-Dixon, two of our recent preaching “novices,” the director of the Prayer Chain, and members of the Sunday School team, choir, and Kwanzaa teams.

Open Door has built and strengthened existing partnerships in the community this year, which have resulted in a donation to WUMCO HELP of more than \$400 and 642 pounds of food. Our congregants are engaged in partner community organizations through WUMCO's Board of Directors, directors of programming with The Frederick Center, organizers and volunteers with the 4th annual Montgomery County Transgender Day of Remembrance, and volunteers with Montgomery County Homeless Resources Day. We hosted and had more than 20 people in attendance for the Fairness for All Marylanders Act training, and volunteers immediately left that meeting and went to flyer and engage with voters at the Rockville Hometown Holidays.

Our congregation has submitted more than 1500 time and talent hours to our ministries; raised \$6066 in fundraising events, including the bowlathon, Ledo and Agrodolce nights, the cabaret, and the Action Auction; and increased our giving so that our 2014 budget and again this year's 2015 budget will reflect staff salaries for the bookkeeper and Music Director that have returned to or approach the competitive salaries before our 2012 budget cuts.

A healthy and vibrant church has an active and committed lay leadership and ministries that are ongoing and that function in collaboration with but not dependent on the pastor. Open Door ministries that are functioning independently in this way include Sandy Bostian's work with DC Pride; Jim Lynch's Christmas in July; DeLaine McCord's Prayer Chain; Adam DeBaugh's and Linda's Gibeaux's work with the Action Auction fundraiser; the Grounds maintenance team that includes Colette Broussard, Tom Sumser, Kathy Nethercutt, Lin Ripley, Russell Hartung, and Linda Rawls; and the People of Color ministry that is planning the December 28 Kwanzaa service, including Gettie Audain, Vernessa Wilson, DeLaine McCord, Wendie Barbee, Cliff Kelbaugh, Adam DeBaugh, Erik Pierce, and Linda Gibeaux. With Curt Judd's leadership and the work of many of you, both the Congregational Care Team and Hospitality ministries are largely independently lay led and maintained. And the Food Pantry ministry has been well organized by Michelle Engelmann, who has collected more than \$250 in grocery gift cards from local stores.

Our relationship to the denomination has grown. Five congregants attended the General Conference in Chicago last year, and from that brought back a Diversity Assessment and a Risk Assessment checklist that the Board and Trustees have used (or are using) to better understand inclusion and outreach and to create and implement policies for staff training, building safety, and best practices. Congregants have

attended the Regional Network gatherings this year in DC and Norfolk, VA, and have returned with ideas and relationships to our siblings churches in VA, DE, MD, and DC. One of our congregants is the Communications Lead for the Eastern Network.

This is your work. This is your church. This is a congregation that cares for one another and that engages in meaningful and justice-oriented ways in the wider community. Frederick Buechner writes that “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” I encourage you to find this crossroads for yourself and jump in.

And as we grow and strengthen our work, our interpersonal interactions, and our broader and more diverse understandings of what and who is divine, we are creating a foundation upon which to build. The Board is thinking ahead and we hope that you will join us in meeting these goals.

On Saturday, February 21, 2015, Rev. Edgard Danielson-Morales of MCCNY will lead us in a day-long session to discuss and revise our Values, Mission, and Goals and to engage in strategic planning and creating a time-line for growth. Please save that date and plan to come. Your voices and perspectives are a necessary part of our intention and objectives. This work together will help us to frame our financial growth, attendance, and breadth of diversity.

And it is in that light that I raise an issue that is ongoing in our community and which is necessary for us to discuss, both as part of our commitment – and I really believe that we share a commitment – to inclusion and to respect for all people across the spectrum of sexuality, gender, race, class, and other differences and fundamentally as part of my commitment to direct communication.

As a candidate for the position of your pastor, it was clear in my application materials, in my references, and in the congregational Q & A that took place in 2011 that I identify as genderqueer and prefer masculine pronouns. In the three years that I have been your pastor, in two trans training sessions and countless individual interactions, I have consistently asked for you to use my preferred pronouns. This has been difficult for many of you to do consistently.

It's important that you know how important it is to me that you work harder and do this more regularly, preferably always. How we are reflected by one another – by the people we work with most often, most closely, who invite us into one another's homes, and break bread together, pray together, and struggle together with over life's questions and crises – how we reflect one another has a critical impact on our joy and our spirit. I need you to know that for me and for many trans- and genderqueer-identified people, it is joy-sapping and spirit-killing to be misgendered. As painful as it can be in the broad world, from bank tellers, restaurant servers, phone technicians, receptionists, and other random people, it is exponentially more hurtful when people who know me and even love me do not really take me in and reflect me back.

This is a diversity and inclusion issue. We cannot welcome trans and genderqueer people and really be a safe space for them until we fundamentally respect gender self-determination. But this is a pressing and immediate personal issue. We cannot welcome and be a safe space for me until we do so.

Thank you for your massive energy and momentum in the growth and strengthening of this church. The Board of Directors, the Ministry Leadership Team, and I are excited to discover what we can do together in the next year. Bless you and your commitment to our communities.