

October 17, 2021 Pastor's Report

Sincerely and humbly submitted by God's Grace by Rev. Dr. Derrick L. Doherty
Middletown United Methodist Church, Pastor

**"He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."
Philippians 1.6**

The Lord has been faithful and is carrying out God's will for God's glory through us and sometimes despite us. March 15, 2020 is a date that I will always remember. That is the date of our last in person worship before the COVID pandemic. We are still living in this pandemic and praying with God's grace that we will reach *the new normal* soon. Within the life of our church we are already seeing strong signs of *the new normal* coming.

In February 2021 our Leadership Team participated in the "Future Church Summit" virtually hosted by *Fresh Expressions*. We learned together the importance of creating new places for new people to experience the grace of the Living God. Flowing forth from that conference the Leadership Team has had very healthy conversations about how we all can reach out and 'Offer Christ.' As a result of the conference I have been challenging all of the church's various teams to not just 'restart' ministries and programs that stopped due to the pandemic but instead to intentionally reevaluate the ministry and make appropriate adjustments.

An example of an appropriate adjustment would be the new 'Teen Service Group.' Our youth ministry was struggling before the pandemic and during it suffered even more. As a result, we have recently launched a new ministry with teenagers offering them a wide variety of ways to be in service together within the community. This group is almost completely lead by high schoolers. The Teen Service Leaders Group will be meeting at least twice a month, deciding and coordinating the monthly service projects. This is a new fresh expression of our youth ministry. Amen!

Another example of an appropriate adjustment is with our Sunday morning worship schedule. Pre-pandemic we had two worship celebrations with an average in person worship attendance of about 110 and 10 devices via the livestream. During the pandemic we went with one combined worship celebration. Currently we are worshipping at 10am in person, via the livestream, and also with the conference call. We are averaging 40 people in person, 40 devices on the livestream, and 2 people on the conference call. At this time, we do not have plans to relaunch a second Sunday morning worship celebration. We do however have strong plans to launch a Sunday evening worship celebration not as an alternative to Sunday morning (although we know for some people this will work out) but instead as a new way to reach new people.

Throughout this year many other areas have been reimaged and blessed by God! Some examples: Learning Path Preschool has record enrollment, Goodness Now has shifted from weekend meals for children to a full food pantry for families, Summer Camp with 40 children and 40 helpers successfully happened while adhering to COVID protocols, new small groups continue to start, and multiple people will be starting the new member journey this fall. God is doing a good thing in us and through us at Middletown UMC. This has certainly been an interesting year. We have discussed wearing masks, vaccines, human sexuality, how to make disciples post pandemic, how to fund ministry during a pandemic, and many more things. I am confident that God who started a good thing in us over 55 years ago will carry it out to completion until the day of Christ's return.



Report of Layleader for 2021
Respectfully submitted by Dianne Thompson

During this past year, I have been a support for Pastor Derrick as well as chair of the leadership team. I set up a "pray for the pastor" emphasis during Easter when Derrick's family experienced a great loss. I have worked extensively on the COVID Protocols that were initially written last year and had at least 2 revisions. I also worked with Derrick on the Fresh Expressions workshop, attended all the sessions in our weekend and assisted in the listening sessions. I attended another class on generosity as well and will share that information with the Stewardship team and the Finance chair.

I have been reading "I'm Black. I'm Christian. I'm Methodist." and I have shared with Derrick my thoughts on the PBS series "The Black Church: This Is Our Story, This Is Our Song". I had noticed and commented on Derrick's use of black imagery in his sermon illustrations and that had led to these discussions.