



Pastor Sorensen's January 2024 First of the Month Letter

Happy New Year!

For my final Monthly Congregational Letter, and the first letter of 2024, I will be sharing with you some of my final thoughts I shared with the Church Board at our December meeting. I also will be sharing some unsolicited advice with my own Top Ten list of ways to welcome a new pastor.

In my final Board report, as I look back, I think it is fair to say that we have accomplished much in our nine months together.

- Before my arrival the Transition Team and Writing Team were working on discerning a new Mission Statement and Core Values. In the spring their work was adopted by the Church Board. That work was then woven into our worship themes with a different part of the Mission Statement, or one of the Core Values providing worship focus. In the fall the Core Values were the basis for the fall small group Bible Studies. That new Mission Statement and Core Values will continue to guide you forward.
- Your Church Board has also done some of the mundane housekeeping items such as approving an updated Personnel Policy that is reflective of 2023 Labor Law.
- You have completed the first step in updating your constitution to both align it with the ELCA Model Constitution, as well as make some changes that better reflect your current operating structure.

- The Finance Team is in the midst of their work writing a White Paper for the rationale to begin a Capital Campaign in 2024. Such an endeavor will make your financial future more secure by eliminating your debt and address capital improvements so this very busy campus can continue to serve this community.
- An ad-hoc ministry development committee is working on ways that will best structure yourselves so the in-reach and out-reach ministries of CLC work better together.
- The congregation has experienced that it can deal successfully with changes in worship, seating arrangements, and leadership styles. Life will continue to unfold in new, delightful, and sometimes challenging ways. And that is exactly how it should be.

I heard upon my arrival that there was some concern that CLC would be at a stand-still in the interim period. You have come to experience that God's guiding Spirit is always leading, pushing, prodding, cajoling, and drawing God's people into God's future. This has been a fruitful season.

January worship Plans: I will be with you leading worship and preaching for January 7 and 14. On the 14th at both services there will be a Litany for the Departure of an Interim Pastor. Back when I arrived, we began with a litany to Welcome an Interim Pastor. It is right that we conclude with a liturgy of saying Good-bye. For the other Sundays in January, Pastor Lara Martin will be preaching and presiding on January 21 and presiding on January 28 as Noel preaches that Sunday. Pastor Sean's first Sunday will be February 4.

The words of St. Paul to the church at Philippi are my words for you, the entire CLC community, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you...because of your sharing in the gospel from that first day until now, and I am confident that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ." This has been a blessing for me to share in ministry with you over these past nine months. And I am confident that God will continue to guide you into that preferred and promised future. I have walked with you in the liminal time from one side of the bridge to the other, and now you are ready to start the next new chapter in the unfolding story that is the work of Jesus Christ in, with, and through the people of Christ Lutheran Church. Solo Deo Gloria.

And now...my unsolicited final words of advice...

Ten Things a Congregation Can Do to Welcome a New Pastor

1. Pray. Pray for continued discernment. Pray in all things and for all things.
2. Create a "visit list" of people who have been visited by pastors, staff, or others in the past, and include a short description of what is going on with each person?

3. During the first year in September, put together a small group to sit down and create a list of the congregation's traditions around Advent and Christmas. This will be more difficult to do for Lent/Easter since he arrives two weeks before Ash Wednesday, but it would still be helpful.
4. Sign up for your chance to meet with Pastor Sean when the opportunity arises. A number of cottage meetings will be scheduled in Pastor Sean's first few months in Visalia. This will give everyone a chance to get to know each other beyond Sunday morning.
5. Offer to repaint the pastor's office in a color of their choosing. Sends a message that this is the beginning of a new thing rather than the extension of what was.
6. Wear name tags ("Hello, My Name is...") for the first six months. The congregation is learning one new name, Pastor Sean is learning hundreds.
7. Assemble policies and procedures for as many things as possible together in one place (building use, staff/volunteer roles for weddings, funerals, baptisms; fundraising policies, financial record keeping, who the primary mission partners are and the extent of the relationship, list of formal and informal leaders in the congregation, list of past 5 Board presidents). This task falls on the Church Board and Staff.
8. Prepare a list of all typical agenda items for annual meetings. No two congregations vote on the same things. Do not assume your new pastor will intuit what your annual practices are.
9. The first year goes quickly, so plan to include Pastor Sean into your life and the life of the community outside of church. That is, invite Pastor Sean to every community or family event that you attend. Extend an invitation for Easter and Memorial Day picnics and local parades and graduation parties, and...etc.
10. Pastor Sean will have different gifts, skills, passions, and priorities from either myself or Pastor Brian. Celebrate and embrace those gifts and passion that will help lead you into God's preferred and promised future.

Pastor Scot