

June 1, 2014

By Debbie Ambrose, Church Council Chair

Last January we at Salem found ourselves at a crossroads in the story of our church and our journey of faith. Changes in our financial situation led to a change in our pastoral leadership as we determined that we could no longer afford to be served by two pastors. With that decision, we bid a fond farewell and Godspeed to our beloved deacon Rev. Janet. We had faith that though her future was unknown to her and to us, God had a plan for her. Very soon her wonderful gifts found a new home and congregation to serve at Metropolitan Memorial.... And then there was...us. What would our lives be like as we moved forward? We were still blessed with Rev. Sue who shared with us in loss of her colleague and friend. At Janet's leaving, Sue served us rock steady with wisdom and kindness as we all looked forward. We were moving into a new time for our wonderful little church. We needed to pause, take a breath and inward and outward at our lives and work as Disciples of Christ. This meant taking a careful look at our mission and vision. Working through the process has been challenging, difficult, energizing, tedious, and in the end a very exciting way to honor who we are and what we do, and discern God's will for what we are called to become. I have been asked to reflect on and share that work with you today.

In 2000 Pastor Don Bailey led a faithful group from Salem through a year- long process of this kind of self-examination. That work resulted in the Mission and Vision Statements which have guided our work for the past 14 years. They were familiar statements of purpose and faith that have been printed in our bulletins, recited in during worship and used to guide our work.

The value of a clear Mission and Vision can be seen through the dilemma faced by Alice in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*

As Alice finds herself lost in Wonderland she meets up with the Cheshire Cat

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.

"I don't much care where--" said Alice.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.

"--so long as I get SOMEWHERE," Alice added as an explanation.

"Oh, you're sure to do that," said the Cat, "if you only walk long enough."

God's work at Salem is too important for us to just wander, walk for a long time and end up somewhere. We want to be sure that as we continue on our individual and collective faith journeys, we are pointed in the direction God wants us to be and are faithfully doing his work in the world. Proverb 29: 18 reminds us, "If people can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves, But when they attend to what he reveals, they are most blessed." In Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus he offers "I pray that the eyes of your heart will have enough light to see what is the hope of God's call." The verse printed on the front of your bulletin is a fitting prayer for us today.

The Bible is filled with God's call and vision for the world. There is vision of a beautiful creation completed by God. There is the vision of the Israelites freed from slavery in Egypt. Moses and Aaron heard this call saw this vision through. There is the vision of living in right relationship with God and each other. The Ten Commandments light our way to understanding this relationship. The vision of forgiveness and salvation is made real in Jesus response to the call to the cross. And there is call to the disciples to go into the world and make disciples of all

nations to fulfill God's vision for the transformation of the world. We continue the work of that vision in our world today.

Salem has been guided by people of Vision through her 180 year history. Through the years members of the family of believers that make up our church have gathered, worshiped, loved, cared and served in the name of Jesus Christ.

In the early 1800's a small group of people led by Thomas McCormack, the 7th postmaster of Brookeville and a Methodist pastor, had a vision. Their little town, settled by the Society of Friends in 1794, needed a church to serve the needs of those of who identified themselves as Methodists. The vision of this little group of our founders was realized on May 26, 1833 with the dedication of the new Methodist Protestant church in Brookeville. Located across the street near the site of the plumbing shop this church served our congregation for 77 years until 1910.

- In 1908 a new vision guided the members of Salem. Through the energies of their pastor C. E. Dryden, (who is remembered in the window above our altar) they imagined themselves worshipping in a new and larger church. They set about acquiring land and found a site diagonally across the road the site we occupy today. The land was donated by Mr. and Mrs. John Parsley. The lumber was donated from huge trees on the property of the local residents. The cornerstone laid on Aug. 4, 1910. The stained glass above the door stood for years as the road sign to that beautiful new church - Brookeville MP (Methodist Protestant) Church.

- Other visions led to the purchase of Orndorff Hall from Montgomery County Board Of Education in 1938 with money bequeathed by Mr. Sewell Orndorff.

- The change in March of 1980 of Salem from a circuit church when we shared a pastor with 3 or 4 other churches in the area to a station church – one church served full time by one pastor. First service of the new station church was held in July of that year – Rev. James Ditto – pastor.

- 1996 – Addition
- 2003- Memorial Garden
- 2008- Community Playground

God has called us through our history and we have answered his call. And so in January leaders of our church discerned that it was time once again, to pause, pray and examine carefully and purposefully who are we, what do we do and what is God to be calling us to do and be<sup>2014</sup> and in Brookeville, our larger community and the world.

We began the task on a Saturday in February (8) when the Church Council met at the UM Conference center in Fulton. We were guided by Christie Latona, a mission strategist the from the Baltimore Washington Conference. There were 17 Disciples of Christ, spending day beginning the process of evaluating, imagining, discerning and forging the next mission and vision for Salem (raise hands). Before that day we were each asked to read the book of Acts so that we would be reminded about how the disciples set about to fulfill the commission given them by Jesus at his ascension – to be witnesses to him in every part of the world. With those words on our hearts we began our work that day.

Our opening scripture that morning was our second scripture lesson this morning.

Romans 12: 2-3 states, “But be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to

everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”

We were about discerning the will of God for Salem.

We set to work by reviewing the 2000 Mission and Vision Statements. Then we thought about ourselves and YOU! Who are we? What is the heartbeat of Salem? What is our collective passion?

Perhaps your ears were burning when we described Salem with words and phrases such as:

- Ups and downs-like family
- Community of believers
- Deeply rooted in the community
- A place where Relationships are important.
- Full of the Spirit of Service
- Sense of family/caring
- Compassion for others
- Welcoming
- Active and full of Activity

Then we named our gifts and blessings:

- Charming Building, Kitchen/Hall, Community Hall, Large Parking Areas, Playground, Flower Gardens, Cemetery, Location in Brookeville, mortgage free property, plenty of pew space
- Talented & Hard-working people with many gifts, Creativity, intellectual capital, members w/a wide variety of practical talents
- Talented leadership
- Mission Activities, Vegetable Garden, Prayer Shawls,
- Strong connections to the larger community with many Families associations and service organizations civic-minded, people

looking for service opportunities, giving hearts, , , strong business community, community identity, family sports/activities, people looking for options to grow and be inspired, concern for the environment, , active inter-faith community, interest in global missions

We looked at demographic information about the people in our larger community. We learned important characteristics about the people who live in a 7 square mile radius from our church. We learned that the fastest growing age group is that from 55-65+, the number of children in the 5-17 age range is declining, the average household income is \$150,000, 2% of the people live below the poverty line, and only 13% of the people say that their faith is really important to them.

Armed with what we know about ourselves and our community, we then tackled the Discernment questions. “God, who are you calling us to be and what do you need us to do given the assets you’ve entrusted to us, so that more people in Brookeville and Olney can know you? Where should we be spreading your word beyond our little 7 mile island?”

Discerning the Mission would help us answer the questions “What are we doing now that we should continue, start, stop, change?”

Discerning the Vision would help us to know, “Who do we need to be to bless those in our local and global community?”

We are blessed. We have what we need.

Where is the movement of God?

We asked those questions that day. But the work was not finished. We decided to continue to work through the forum of our Church Council meetings so as not to overtax already busy people. We scheduled work sessions beginning with the February Church Council Meeting. We

worked in small and large groups, all the time listening to what God was asking us to be about. We discussed, shared, word-smithed, charted our ideas, shared them with each other, edited, revised, voted, went home and came back again in March to do more of the same. We did not meet in April. Instead we studied and prayed individually as we listened for God's wisdom in the quiet of our hearts at home. In May we came together one last time for the final discussion. Through study, prayer, an all day meeting and three council meetings, we finally agreed upon our new Mission and Vision. They are printed in your bulletin.

Our Mission – To grow in Christian faith and express God's love through serving others.

This is what we do. We do this through worship, through music, through our gifts, through witness, through study, through fellowship, through relationships, and through compassion for our church family and beyond.

And what are we called to be: Our Vision: To be a signpost of God's grace to the world: in our ministry to our Church Family, Our Brookeville Family, Our Community and Our World. We will go forward, in the tradition of this congregation, as Christ's disciples, and be about the work of sharing God's grace and inviting others to discipleship.

These statements are important. They will serve as the roadmap for our work as we move forward. Equally important is the process we have followed, - the thinking, praying, discussing, gently arguing, discerning the will of God for our family here at Salem. And even more important is what we will do to make them come alive each day in our work. As a signpost of God's grace to the world, using the many blessings that we have, and with the knowledge that Jesus is with always I am excited by

the prospects of our bright future ahead. From Ephesians scripture lesson, “For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.”

As you reflect on these words, consider these questions:

How do I see this Mission and Vision already alive in this church?

What else might we do to act on these words?

What part will I play in the work of growing in faith, serving others and sharing God’s grace in the world?

Current Mission (2000), Vision (2000), and Values (2012)

Mission: To glorify God in worship, introduce others to Jesus the Christ, and help persons of all ages grow in faith, knowledge, love, and service.

Vision: To be a Living and Active example of Christ’s love. We will put GOD first in our endeavors to provide ministry to our Church Family our Community, and our World. Our members will make vital this Vision by commitment to worship, study, and serve.

Values: We value: Inclusive Word of God, Christ transformed lives, diversity of opinion, relationships with each other, intimacy that exists in a small congregation, mission and service.