

*What does God require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. — Micah 6:8*

## Summer Plans

It is easy for me to remember the day that I began my pastorate at Pullen. My first Sunday was on Easter in 2000. So, while Easter can come in late March all the way through late April, I still count my anniversary date on Easter Sunday each year. I just wish my wedding anniversary had such a simple way for me to remember it.

All of this means that I have started my tenth year at Pullen. Seems strange doesn't it? You folks don't look ten years older and I don't feel ten years older. But calendars do not lie and there is no denying the fact that I have been here awhile.

In my early years at Pullen I often took several weeks of vacation and combined them with several weeks of sabbatical leave to create 5-6 weeks off in the summer. I stopped this pattern three years ago and started taking only vacation time because I hoped to take an extended sabbatical somewhere down the road. I have now reached the time when I think a three-month sabbatical could serve me and the church well.

The Personnel Committee has graciously granted me the summer months off this year. My leave will start on June 1 and I will return to work on August 31. I will spend time resting and seeking spiritual and physical renewal. I will hang out with my family more and be at home in the evenings for a few months. I also hope to continue my focus on a healthier lifestyle through diet and exercise awareness.

The other major focus of this sabbatical will be writing. There are several projects I have been thinking about for some time, but finding an extended period to devote to them has not been possible. I don't know what the outcome will be of my work, but I promise not to come back at the end of the summer recommending we need more space. Some of you recall where such a comment led in 2001 when I came back from a short sabbatical with a document for the church to consider.

I feel blessed to have been accepted into a program called *Writing and the Pastoral Life*. This is a week-long retreat hosted by the Collegeville Institute in Minnesota. I will spend a week in July at the institute along with eleven other clergy who are working on writing projects. The facilitator for the week is Eugene Peterson, a well-known author, poet, and pastor who has been a model for how one can sustain a serious writing discipline even while serving as a pastor. Peterson's books are loved by clergy of all theological types. It will be an honor to spend the week with him. The best part is that the whole trip is funded by the Lilly Foundation.

Pullen's wise generosity in allowing her ministers to take sabbatical leave is something I am profoundly grateful for. While more and more churches are starting to see that such breaks are a way of sustaining lengthy pastorates, it is still a rarity in my field. I look forward to returning from this time refreshed and reenergized for my ministry with you.

—Jack



## An Anniversary Memory

*On October 29, 1950 the Pullen sanctuary was dedicated. The Rev. Harry Emerson Fosdick, perhaps the best known preacher in America at the time, was the speaker for this historic occasion. As part of our 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, we print this portion of the sermon as a reminder of the enduring value of a progressive faith:*

“Imagine yourself back some millions of years ago on this planet facing two factors here: on one side, a vast turbulence — volcanoes, huge, terrific, from the inexhaustible fires of the earth's core; on the other side, protoplasm, microscopic, invisible, along the water's edge — feeble, quiet, vital. On which are we betting, as in imagination we stand there millions of years ago — volcanoes or protoplasm? Protoplasm had no credible chance to mean anything against the violent forces of volcano and earthquake. Yet, see what God did with it at last! Life, spirit, art, music, prophets, apostles, martyrs, scientists, and saints — the utterly unforeseeable, the unimaginable did happen! Vitality is mightier than size, and because that is everlastingly true, we believe in the church's gospel.

I sat sometime since in a group of medical research scientists. They were talking about one of their comrades who lately had died. They spoke of what they called his apostolic zeal for his truth, and of his extraordinary competence as a scientist. They spoke of the opposition and incredulity he had met, and of his courage and persistence in meeting it. And then one of the group said this, ‘He was wrong for so long and then he turned out to be right.’ Very probably the speaker has forgotten he said that, but I have not been able to forget. It sums up so much human history — a vital person, confronting the massed resistance of the world, ‘wrong for so long and then he turned out to be right.’

My Christian faith takes that form now. People say that Christ is a dreamer, that his ideas may be beautiful, but will never work. Look at this lump of the world, they say, his way of life can never be introduced into it. But there he stands in a world where anti-Christ is plunging us into hell, raising a question that, for me at least, is intensely real. Which are we going to believe in, the world's discouraging bulk and bigness, or his vitality? I am not much on creeds but I have one. I believe it with deep and sometimes desperate conviction. Someday people will be saying about Christ, ‘He was wrong for so long and then turned out to be right.’

This is one reason why, were I to have another chance, I would go into the Christian ministry again, and this is one reason why today, with faith, and gratitude and confidence, you dedicate this church. We believe that the future belongs, not to arrogant pride and violence, not to the noisy, the obvious, the ostentatious, but to the vital gospel of our Lord.”