

Message from the Moderator

April 2016

Dear Friends,

Last month, more than 50 of our church leaders convened in the Reception Room for our annual Leadership Retreat. We are grateful that so many of our Deacons, Ministry Team Leaders, Support Board members, Church Council, staff and our clergy came together on a Saturday morning for a period of spiritual reflection and renewed commitment to serving one another and others in need.

Our Senior Minister, Reverend Dr. Matt Wooster, welcomed all in attendance and remarked on how blessed we are at the Hills Church to have such an abundance of talent, energy and commitment to service within our congregation. Further, we call others to serve with us as we build community and share the joy of service together. Rev. Judy Swahnberg brought us into a state of mindfulness and peace to support our morning together.

Mary Canavan, Church Council member, then led us through an exercise that was intended to help us discern our spiritual "personality" after which a lively discussion followed. It may not come as a surprise to you that the dominant personality types within the group were "Thinking" and "Feeling".

Bill Spencer, our Moderator Emeritus introduced the next topic of the morning during which we broke out into small groups to complete information summaries on the activities of our numerous Ministry Teams. These summaries are intended to be published later this spring in an Opportunities Book that will be distributed to all who are interested in learning more about the many diverse activities within the church, including information on how to volunteer your service.

Steve Harris, Rising Moderator, led us through the final exercise of the morning during which our small group discussion brainstormed ideas for inviting more of our membership into service. Members recounted the ways in which they became engaged in our ministries and stressed the importance of a personal invitation. Given our many responsibilities and busy schedules, we all wish to achieve meaning through our activities and a sense of connection to others. We encourage you to let us know what inspires you to action. Please email us at moderator@hillschurch.org to share your ideas.

Rev. Pash Obeng closed our morning together with prayer.

We are moving forward with our new Ministry Team focus to member engagement. In response to questions about the characteristics of an effective Ministry Team, I share a summary that was introduced by our Realignment Task Force at a Leadership Retreat several years ago. Please note the following key characteristics of effective Ministry Teams:

- They have a clear sense of their work as ministry and are purposefully engaged in ministry.
- They focus on “doing” rather than “meeting”.
- The team is both responsible and accountable—that is, it has the authority to make decisions, spend allocated resources, communicate with their congregations, and develop and recommend budgets, plans, strategies, etc.
- Laity and clergy trust and support the team. The focus is on “results” rather than who has the power to make certain decisions.
- Decisions are made in practical ways (“We do this because it works right now.”) without expectation that the decision is perfect and will become immutable policy.
- Major decisions are made using discernment.
- Team members move in and out of leadership roles regularly, recruit and train new members to prevent burnout, and share ministry. Leadership is often shared between two or more people.
- Team members are called into ministry rather than relying on volunteers. Volunteers come through the same discernment process and are open to various ministries depending on what they and the discernment sense is God’s leading.
- Clergy and experienced laity exercise the roles of ministry developer (trainer, equipper, encourager, supporter, etc.) and view ministry team member as valuable peers in the congregation.

Thank you again for your support as we take this journey together. The church is well positioned to invite more people to participate in meaningful ways of service. We have made it easier to volunteer and become involved in ministry. Such involvement is a response to God’s call to love our neighbors, and by this we are spiritually nourished.

Prayerfully submitted,

Linda H. Thomas
Moderator