

A Message from Pastor Shaun

September 2015

“We must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith during all your persecutions and the afflictions that you are enduring.” -2 Thessalonians 1:3-4

Greetings members and friends of Bainbridge Community UCC,

I pray this message finds you well.

I can only begin this message to all of you one way. It is truly wonderful to be back. As I write this I have already seen several folks and I look forward to seeing the rest of you in the coming days and weeks. My time away was productive and invigorating, but it is very good to be home with all of you again.

I feel like this sabbatical came at exactly the right time for everyone. For myself, I confess my life had become “entangled” with my role as your pastor in ways that were not always healthy. Getting some time away to reconnect, learn, and grow in my own faith and relationship to prayer and self-care was a gift that can only improve my ministry. I am looking forward to bringing all that I learned and rediscovered over the last month to my ministry with this church! My sabbatical came at exactly the right time for me.

And it was also the right time for the church. I have been so excited to hear all the wonderful things that have been progressing and *growing* while I was away! Seeing all of the new names attached to upcoming ministries, projects, and activities (as well as so many of the familiar ones) is exciting. There has been some continuing disagreement and struggle as well. Anyone who has read Paul’s letters in the New Testament knows that’s nothing new for faith communities! However, I also see folks stepping up in new ways, continuing to improve our communication as a community, and helping our church move on from old, unhealthy patterns of behavior. That is a change I can desperately want for this church because of all the ministry and potential I see here everyday, but I cannot “do” that for you. Ultimately the change has to come from our members if any progress is going to be made. And that is what I am witnessing upon my return. People frustrated and finished being stuck in the old patterns and tired battles are instead taking action themselves to help us jump into something new. That is amazing to see. My sabbatical came at exactly the right time for this church.

Because, we are not church for simply ourselves. With God’s help and guidance, we are church because we believe we offer Bainbridge and the surrounding communities something life-giving. We reach out to help people in times of sorrow or need. We have a Word and a life that brings meaning where the world offers only empty promises. When I stop to think about what it really means to be a church, it is exhilarating and even overwhelming. But we are not doing this work alone. God is leading us and strengthening us. It is so incredible to spend a little time away and return to see with new eyes all the ways the Spirit is moving within Bainbridge Community UCC.

Thank you for all you do. It is such a blessing to be home.

God’s grace and peace be with you all,



Pastor Shaun