

Peace Lutheran Church
2017 Pastor's Report

Pastor's Report for 2017

By God's grace the Word was preached and the Sacraments were administered throughout 2017. Pastoral Care was provided in myriad circumstances. Classes were taught, instruction in faith given to Confirmands. Council and ministry leaders received guidance as needed. I provided leadership to community and interfaith programs. Seminarians received supervision. The sick and dying were visited. I presided at baptisms, weddings and memorial services. Ministries were organized. Recommendations for professional positions were made. Contemplation was encouraged. Administrative responsibilities were taken care of. Creative worship was designed. Envisioning new directions for current and future needs was regularly practiced.

We faced a hard year for many people. We keep exploring new ways to become the Church (*"the listening ones"*) in these times. We keep examining Peace through various lenses/questions: *How does Peace help reclaim the heart of humanity? How is Peace an Affection Center bringing warmth and truth? What are those ministries/activities which make us a vital Hub in our community? As a vibrant Energy Field - how do we make healing and transformation real in people's lives within and beyond Peace?*

"*Tov*": We learned this year from the Genesis Story that when God made the Creation it wasn't merely pronounced as 'good' it was Life-Generating! That is the criteria for our ministries. In all that we do we attempt to nurture connections, affirm the blessing of this life and contribute to the life-generating work of God's Spirit.

Look at the variety of these Concerts as one form of creative outreach and encouragement: We had Baroque, Russian, Serbian choruses; the San Francisco Lesbian and Gay Band; the Sycamore Strings Academy; the Pacific Choir, Coelis Vocal Ensemble, and Chromatica Choir; not to mention the Jazz Church West and Recitals too numerous to count - probably 10/month.

Peace also Hosted: The Bishop's Chrism Mass for our Conference; the play "*Honky*" performed by the Danville Players (too hot to touch at the local theatre). Then there were Community Meetings: HealthCare, Defusing Hatred, the Bright Stars of Bethlehem urging Palestinian awareness and support; and the Hospice Community's annual Service of Remembrance. Of course, the Interfaith Thanksgiving Eve Service was well received.

Gary Sponholtz - say a prayer of thanks to God - took our singers and musicians up to San Damiano to present Taize Services for the Season of Lent (5 Wednesdays.) He gives so much love, beauty and prayerfulness to Peace. Aren't we blessed.

The gift of Solar Energy to Peace was a surprise and godsend from Arlene and Ralph Reed, from people of Peace and from friends beyond Peace who all contributed generously. Memorial gifts,

gratitude gifts, Nancy C., Tai Chi friends, the Pacific Choir, interfaith friends – all gave and it was amazing. As anticipated our Solar Panels have begun to decrease our energy bills in a major fashion. Thanks to Chair Boris Erlank and Committee members Ken, Libby, Kari and Arlene!

I hope our worship remains a profound and transformative experience for all of us. A special joy comes from our Family Services that have continued with the leadership of Charlene McPherson and Pat Leong. Who can forget the Legos Liturgy or Sweeping Up the Sanctuary! Additionally, innovative liturgies, special guests, Elizabeth Hunter Ashley's singing and initiative to create the Peace Singers continue to enrich all of us. Many thanks to Margaret Beeler and all on the Worship Team.

The Confirmation Class was a true discovery in faith. We nearly lost one of our Confirmands this year and that attuned everyone one of us to the real meaning and depths of our faith. The celebration on Pentecost was joyfully overwhelming and who can ever forget the "I Believe" statements from our Confirmands!

Education matters deeply to Peace People. Linda Benatar gracefully coordinates a variety of educational opportunities. I mention only 2 here from our Forum Series: *Reflections on the Religious Heart of Bach's Music* by Alice O'Sullivan touched us in ways that can't be comprehended; the *Weaving our Stories* process by Crystal Larsen has given us a means for nurturing friendships and spiritual connections among the people of Peace which will continue to be utilized throughout 2018.

Contemplative Practices are encouraged at Peace. Meditation is offered on Thursdays nearly year- round; Healing Prayer is a powerful gift our congregation receives every Sunday; I have taught classes with Elise and Kaleo at San Damiano on *Embodied Prayer with the Divine Feminine* and our *Abba/Imma Qiqong Lord's Prayer* which has been introduced to university students around the country, a gathering of 100 rabbis, and in numerous interfaith circles. I was also a presenter for a retreat on Compassionate Conversations held at the Tibetan Vajrapani Institute in the Santa Cruz mountains.

Justice advocacy at Peace is a crucial part of our identity. Nearly 2/3 of the congregation participate in the Women's March of January 2017. We began an exploration back in April of whether Peace should become a Sanctuary Church. Many Sunday Forums were held throughout the year examining these aspects: Historical roots, conversations with immigrants, Quaker practices and communication skills. This conversation continues. Late in the year we received word that Spoon Jackson our poet/prisoner friend who authored '*Words of Realness*' (which was performed with a Stefan Safsten and a Swedish Choir) and who is serving a life sentence - could be released. I am trying to assist in that complicated process. I received the Courage Award along with Rabbi Dan Goldblatt from the SRV Middle and High School Student Gay-Straight Alliance for the supportive work we have done with the School District advocating justice for LGBTQ for more than a decade. I was asked to speak at the *Standing Together against Hate*

gathering at Temple Isaiah in Lafayette (after Charlottesville) decrying the outrageous slurs and actions of hate occurring in our country and being sanctioned by the White House.

I served as Chair for the Interfaith of the San Ramon Valley.

Unfortunately, our Korean Church/KCOV had to close after 12 years of ministry at Peace. We wish their members well in their search for a new church home. Our financial reality has been impacted by their closing. But our solar savings and the increase in our rental income have helped balance this loss.

Art continues to thrive at Peace. Art liberates the soul in such crucial and delightful ways. Art communicates the creativity of the gospel and the open-heartedness of the Peace community. Our thanks to Bill Carmel for serving as our Curator and to the variety of artists who have contributed their imaginative, mind-stretching works including Sher and Sterling Love and Mary LaCasse. Also, First Friday Films (now Last Friday) is finding it's voice/niche in the larger community. Of course, after 13 Seasons the Jazz Church West has attained a life of its own.

It was the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. Peace sponsored Bach's Cantata '*Ein Feste Burg ist unser Gott*' performed by the Pacific Choir for our Sierra Pacific Synod's commemoration at Grace Cathedral. With the support of friends from Peace and around the Bay Area I helped to raise the \$10,000 to secure this performance as a gift to our Synod.

Endless thanks to our Peace Council: Pat Leong for her dedicated leadership, Jim, Karin, Pam, Diana, Monica, Barbara and Ken for our lovely and peaceful grounds. Special thanks to Diane for her thoroughness and clarity as our Treasurer. And gratitude to Kari Doolittle for her skills, dedication, creativity and all of her IT office upgrades. Thanks to Libby for our 2017 Calendar of Events – We are a busy community! And the Peace Counseling Center continues to thrive.

The wedding of Maja Miletich and Jeremiah Watkins (a stand-up comic) was a very special celebration! 15 stand-up comics, including Jeff Ross, from Hollywood were in the House!

Yes, Christmas, Easter and Pentecost were celebrated with abundant joy!

I celebrated the 40th Anniversary of my Ordination on December 18. I am grateful for the unfolding years of grace throughout which began at Holy Comforter in St. Louis and have continued here in San Francisco and Danville. Our grandson Joshua's baptism in Seeley Lake in Montana was an unforgettable highlight of the year! I am glad to teach Tai Chi. I am grateful for the wisdom and compassion of the gospel that has no end.

Blessings, Pr. Steve