

Dear friends,

Transformation has been on my mind. I remember one of the Hebrew Testament professors at Eden Seminary, Prof. John Bracke, saying that the goal of reading the Bible was transformation, transformation of our selves, transformation of our culture. No doubt Prof. Bracke hoped that those of us who, presumably, were going into some sort of professional ministry would remember that imparting knowledge alone rarely offers transformation.

I think of transformation as an outcome of discipleship. We seek to deepen our relationship with God and how we follow the path that Jesus trod. In doing so, we encounter transformation and become agents of transformation ourselves.

Most recently, transformation has been on my mind because of the Annual Celebration of the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ. Our keynote speaker, Diana Butler Bass, made the following statement: "Change happens; transformation is intentional."

Dr. Bass was talking about the "Church" but her words ring true in all areas, I believe. It isn't really news to most of us that the world we live in is seriously different than it was 50 years ago, or 20 years ago, or even 10 years ago.

While some in the church bemoan the loss of central standing that Christianity and the Church had in our society 50 years ago, many of us welcome the growing freedom of thought and expression and understanding that has developed in the interim. There is something both scary and exciting about new ways of being. Again, perhaps the key is to be intentional. Take the situation as it is and transform the change into something that gives meaning or renewal or greater clarity.

As we reflect on our own church life here at Congregational UCC, we have signs of transformation and renewal. Congregational has ministry teams that tend to be more gift-based than traditional committees. There is room for transformation within this kind of structure, too, to be more fluid and open to all people and their gifts, interests and time availability.

There are more opportunities to explore faith, through service, through gathering in prayer, through education and through fellowship. We have people with all kinds of ideas that are looking for ways to bring those ideas forward. How can we make sure that happens? We have youth who have the fresh eyes to look at what we have been seeing. How do we invite them to shape us and the church. We have guests who come to eat with us. How do we invite them to transform us?

We are in a historic week. The Supreme Court of the United States advanced the civil rights battle of the GLBT community even as it set back the rights of African-Americans and other ethnic minorities to access the ballot box. Both are opportunities to participate in the transformation of our culture.

Let's take that energy and apply it to our lives and our church as well. We are in the season of Pentecost. The season that celebrates the enlivening of the Holy Spirit in our church. Listen to the Spirit blow. Where do you think we might be called to go? What opportunity for transformation and renewal awaits?

In God's Peace,

Pastor Lynn