

“I planted, you watered, but God gave the growth.” 1 Corinthians 3:6

What is the difference between the words “Growth” and “Change?”

Change can be scary; Growth is exciting.

Change can be superficial; Growth is a spiritual maturing.

Change can be good or bad; Growth is ultimately positive.

Change can be losing numbers; Growth is bonding more tightly in the face of loss.

Change doesn't mean Growth; but Growth means Change.

Our congregation is typical of many others. Sometimes we feel like we are losing in the culture. Sometimes we feel overwhelmed and irrelevant. We all want to grow in number but few want to change.

When we look at children, we see how much they grow, often so quickly. My younger son is excited every time he gets measured at the Dr's office because it shows how much taller he is than the last time.

This growth is true of adults too. As I go through my father's belongings, one of the more enjoyable, if not bittersweet, moments is looking at photos. There are pictures of my father as a young man, of my parents in the early days of their marriage. There are pictures of my parents in their 40s, which I used to think was when they were old. Now I marvel at how young they looked.

We grow; we change; it's a fact of life.

This fact applies to institutions, like the church, as well. Congregational UCC in 2016 does not look the same as it did when the sanctuary was completed in 1859. It doesn't look the same as it did at the congregation's 150th anniversary in 1983. Nor does the world around us look the same.

"I planted, you watered, but God gave the growth," Paul writes in a letter to the church of Corinth, trying to heal the divides that existed among them. This verse reminds us that Change is the work of humankind; Growth is the work of God. Change is doing things different for the sake of doing something different; Growth is becoming more like the people or community that God calls us to be. This is the challenge for us now as a church.

As the culture around us shifts, as people relate to church and plan their schedules differently than they did even 20 years ago, we need to figure how God is calling us to be church together. It may be scary sometimes. It will most certainly be exciting. But as long as we do it together, as long as we are holding God in our decisionmaking process, we will discover who God is calling us to be. And that's Growth.

Wishing you God's peace,

Pastor Lynn