

## For What Are You Seeking?

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I have a question for you: How many [*insert name of any religion*] does it take to change a light bulb?

The answer is always the same: Change??

Organized religion does not have a great history of change. Quite the contrary, organized religion often has a reputation of pride in not changing. *Yet, change is the greatest constancy of life.* Change is the hallmark of every facet of creation, every blade of grass, every human life, every birth and death of a star. Even our expanding universe is constantly changing. perhaps that's the greatest change we can imagine.

Sometimes change is very fast; sometimes it's unperceivably slow. And sometimes the rate of change is in between the extremes. With Curran's leaving, like it or not, CCC is in a time of accelerated change, a time when we need to remember Reinhold Neihbuhr's words: *Change is the essence of life. Be willing to surrender what you are for what you can become.* This advice applies to the singular "you" and to the collective "us," i.e., to CCC.

"CCC" stands for Community Congregational Church. The nature and essence of Congregationalism is that it is the *congregation as a whole* that is tasked with discerning where we think God is leading us. It's not the pastor, not the Church Council, not the Search Committee, not the interim, but the congregation as a whole community ("com" means "with," so we could say "community" means "with unity"). Once that discernment is made, then collectively as a congregation, we must come to an agreement about the type of leadership we need to help take us where we think we are being led by the universal energy source we often refer to as God. Eventually we must engage in the task of finding that leadership. That is the essence of congregational polity.

To be clear, this is not a process of "I, I, I," like we heard Thursday night from the GOP Presidential candidate, but a process of "we," we the CCC congregation. The job of Rev. Alan Claassen, our soon-to-start interim minister, is to help us with this task. How? From the perspective of systems theory thinking, we could say his job is to keep the system open, to provide the ministerial support that will allow the congregation the time and space we need to do our collective work of discerning where God is leading us. Alan's task is not to do the work for us, and this is partially because as our interim, he technically is not a member of CCC. What he can do is to help create a space in which we can do our work, and encourage us to do it well Alan's job is to work himself out of a job.

T.S. Eliot, reminds us:

*What we call the beginning is often the end. To make an end is to make a new beginning.  
The end is where we start from.*

Our first task then during this interim process is to make an end of our wonderful eight-plus years of Curran's ministry: to celebrate the gift she has been to us and to take the time, individually and collectively to mourn our loss, so that we have an end from which to start our next chapter in ministerial leadership. (By the way, in my humble opinion as an Intentional Interim Ministry Specialist, Curran has done an excellent job of leaving. Now it is time for us to focus on a new beginning.)

In our scripture today we find an example of the difficulty of making a new beginning. In the days long before electronic media, a guest unexpectedly arrives in the middle of the night, necessitating hospitality. To provide it, the host needs bread. Having none, the host goes to his neighbor, knocks on his closed door and asks to borrow three loaves of bread. The neighbor initially refuses, saying that he and his family are in bed and he cannot get up to answer the door. To understand the neighbor's plight, you need to know that in Jesus' day (and even today in some rural areas of Palestine, as I saw a couple of months ago) the family slept on a slightly raised area at the back of the house. The animals slept in the front part of the house—a practical solution for heating, especially on cold nights, as well as a security system in case the door was breached. To answer the door, the neighbor would have to get up, waking up his family in the process, and make his way through the animals (and whatever they might have left on the floor) to answer the door. No wonder the neighbor initially refused. However, Jesus tells us, he gives in, not because the one asking to borrow the bread is his friend, but because of his persistence. My RSV edition of the Bible uses the word "importunity" rather than "persistence." I like the word "importunity" (I had to look it up) because it honors the underlying importance of hospitality in that culture, a sense of hospitality that demands that even friendship and great inconvenience must be transcended.

What is it here at CCC that will wake us up and take us out of our familiar comfort level, our usual sense of who we are, what we do, and how we do it, and that, with importunity, will allow us to meet the challenges of being and becoming a church that will meet the community needs of both CCC and the wider community for the next decade? Whatever our answer, it will require change that can only be revealed through faith, the guidance of the Spirit.

Jesus reminds us that we need to "ask and it will be given to us." What will we at CCC be asking for in the way of new leadership? Jesus tells us that if we seek, we will find our next minister, and if we knock with importunity, the door we cannot yet see will be opened for us. We need to trust that this will be so.

Make no mistake, this will not be an easy task, for we at CCC are really two worshipping congregations – one that meets at 7:30 and the other who meets at 10 a.m.; yet there is an underlying ethos that makes CCC the unique church community that we are, and we do not

want to lose that. We need to find a leader who can honor the diversity which is an integral part of our unity, and help us take it to the next level. As we face the yet unrevealed aspects of our collective discernment tasks, we need to hear Neihbuhr challenging us to be willing to surrender aspects of who we are individually (both as individuals and different group within the church) for *collectively* what we could and can become as CCC.

As one of the Pastors Emeritus of CCC, I need to be very clear about my role during this interim time. I need to be more of an observer and an occasional questioner than an active participant. Having said that, I leave you with this question: For what are you, CCC, seeking in this interim time? And I offer this reminder from Gandhi: As CCC, *Be the change you wish to see in the world.*

So be it....