

From the Desk of Pastor Rachel



Dear Friends,

As of July 1st, I will have completed my first year as pastor here in Richland Center. As such, I thought it might be a good idea to pause for a moment to look back at the past 12 months to see where we have been and then switch directions and look ahead at possibilities for my second year in ministry with the RC-UMC.

When I arrived last summer, I came prepared to serve two congregations as they considered the pros and cons of merging together to become one church. I was greeted very warmly and given everything I needed to begin the work in front of me. By late September, after much prayer and conversation, it was decided by a majority vote in both churches that Peace and Trinity would merge on January 1st 2024.

We spent the remainder of the fall and winter looking inward, celebrating our long and fruitful history and grieving the loss of what was, as we prepared for Peace's building to be sold and for the members of both congregations to begin their lives as one church. On the first Sunday of this year, we had our first worship service as a single congregation. Then came the process of deciding on our new name. We spent several weeks looking at various options and listening to the many and varied ideas and inspirations that were presented, and in early February, we finally settled on Richland Center United Methodist Church: A Community of Faith. We are still in the process of finalizing this change, but so far, the name seems to fit and to be serving us well.

Since then, we have been adjusting week by week as we welcome not only the faces we know, but also some faces that are new to us. Our attendance has been slowly climbing and we are now averaging about 60 people on Sundays. This has been encouraging, and there is still plenty of room to grow.

Just this past week, the RC-UMC Church Council met and ratified our new mission statement:

**The mission of the RCUMC, as a community of faith, is to share the Gospel and to make disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.**

*We bring this mission to life by:*

- *Being an active and inclusive Christian presence in our community.*
- *Providing a safe and inviting place of prayer, worship, learning, sharing, and fellowship.*
- *Offering opportunities and experiences for personal growth and for supporting others in Christ.*
- *Engaging with the world beyond our walls to embody the Gospel through acts of hospitality, compassion, generosity, and service.*

In short, by working together in prayerful cooperation with each other and the Holy Spirit, we have come a very long way in just a year, and have done remarkably well to get to this point. To this I say, Alleluia! And, praise the Lord!

And because we have been successful in reaching our objectives thus far, it is now time to begin turning our attention outward and looking toward our mission and purpose as a church, and how we are reaching out and engaging with the wider community and the world.

In our 2024-2025 goal-setting sessions, the Council and Trustees have identified five areas of highest priority for this appointment year:

- 1) Discipleship -- deepening our relationship with Christ through prayer, education, and small group ministry
- 2) Nurture and support of our existing members
- 3) Outreach to the wider community
- 4) A 3 to 5 year congregational redevelopment plan with professional consultation
- 5) Refurbishing and upgrading our facilities

We have already started working on some of these, and I invite you to stay tuned to next month's (August) *News From the Center* for more details on some new and enjoyable ways that you can take part in upcoming plans and programs.

In short, we have much to look forward to in this coming 12 months, but also much to do. I predict that there will be many more successes, as well as some significant challenges in our future. Therefore, as we seek to be faithful to our mission as a church and to God's calling in our lives, I ask all our members and friends to please keep the RC-UMC in your daily prayers and good thoughts. And please know, we will be praying for you as well.

*Pastor Rachel*