

Pastor's Annual Report for 2016
January 17, 2017

As I considered what to include in this year's report, I am recuperating in vocal silence. I've learned a lot this week, including that silence makes room for healing. Therefore, instead of a lengthy report on this year's accomplishments (that's in the Report on Mission Progress, if you're interested), I give you an excerpt from one of my favorite authors, Kennon Callahan:

"Small, strong congregations do not try to do everything. Many small, strong congregations do not deliver numerous competent programs and activities. They may or may not have open accessibility or high visibility. They may lack adequate land and parking. They may not have adequate space and facilities.

Over the years...I have learned that small, strong congregations focus distinctively on certain qualities of being a congregation together. You can grow and develop some of these qualities as you help your congregation. These qualities are present in many small, strong congregations across the planet:

- *Mission and service*
- *Compassion and shepherding*
- *Community and belonging*
- *Self-reliance and self-sufficiency*
- *Worship and hope*
- *Leaders and team*
- *Just enough space and facilities*
- *Giving and generosity.*



Wherever some of these are present, with excellence and strength, you are likely to find a small, strong congregation...

The psalmist describes the strength and steadfast love of God. Our strength is not in bigness, buildings, and budgets. We do not match the culture bigness for bigness. Our strength is in God. Our strength is not of our own doing. Our strength is the gift of God. Our steadfast love with people is the gift of God. We are steadfast in our love because God is steadfast in God's love with us. We are not fleeting and fickle. We do not waver and wander. Our love is steadfast.

People who discover our congregation discover the strength of God and the steadfast love of God. They live strong, healthy lives, rich and full with the love of God. They live with trust in the grace of God, the compassion of Christ, and the hope of the Holy Spirit.

*Small, strong congregations live with this confidence and assurance: they know **small is strong.**"*

(pp. 28-29, from Small, Strong Congregations: Creating Strengths and Health for Your Congregation by Kennon L. Callahan, © 2000, Jossey-Bass)

Friends, this is who we are! Bask in God's love for a while, feeling it soak into your body and soul.

Hear the way Eugene Peterson paraphrases this passage from 1 Thessalonians 1:2-5.

"Every time we think of you, we thank God for you. Day and night you're in our prayers as we call to mind your work of faith, your labor of love, and your patience of hope in following our Master, Jesus Christ, before God our Father. It is clear to us, friends, that God not only loves you very much but also has put his hand on you for something special. When the Message we preached came to you, it wasn't just words. Something happened in you. The Holy Spirit put steel in your convictions."

He speaks what is in my heart. I give thanks to God for each of you, and for how you manifest the Body of Christ in your daily lives and together as Celebration Lutheran Church. It is an honor and a joy to live out my pastoral calling with you.

Your Sister in Christ,

Pastor Heidi Fish

