

From the Pastors Desk

## Is Your Church a Sanctuary?

A five year old boy always looked forward to going to his grandfather's farm to pick eggs in the chicken coop. With hands full, intent on picking every egg, he tries to add one more only to lose a couple in the effort. Sometimes we can be like this little boy when we try to put too many things on our to-do list.

*Our culture tends to pressure us into finding our value by what we do rather than by who we are. We convince ourselves that we can take on more and more. "Just this one more thing." Sometimes things get done and checked off the long list. Other times, we are forced to forfeit a child's recital, a wholesome meal, a good nights sleep or our devotional life.*

*How does your church offer a respite from the many things you take on each day? Some congregations begin worship with a breath prayer, inviting God's people to stop and be present in the moment. As congregations grow more comfortable with silence, the moments of peace in Christ lengthen.*

*God's people do not need "one more thing" to check off to-do lists; we long for a place and time set apart to rest in God's love and grace. May your community be that sanctuary. (Pastor Tammy Devine, "Embody Health" newsletter from the ELCA)*

I hope our church is a community where you can find sanctuary.

A church is a sanctuary when it offers opportunities for involvement but does not "ride a good horse to death", as my aunt used to say when talking about service in any organization. A church seeking to be the hands, feet and voice of Christ will invite much participation, but also a gracious "thank you" when someone finds it's time for them to step back from a ministry and consider other ways to serve.

A church is a sanctuary when someone opens up and shares pain and knows they are in a safe environment and it will be kept in confidence. In such a place, the sweet ointment of Christ's healing flows through relationships of love, gentleness, compassion and understanding.

A church is a sanctuary when people know words can hurt worse than physical blows.

*There once was a little boy who had a bad temper. His father gave him a bag of nails and told him that every time he lost his temper, he must hammer a nail into the back of the fence. The first day the boy had driven 37 nails into the fence. Over the next few weeks, as he learned to control his anger, the number of nails hammered daily*

*gradually dwindled down. He discovered it was easier to hold his temper than to drive those nails into the fence. Finally the day came when the boy didn't lose his temper at all. He told his father about it and the father suggested that the boy now pull out one nail for each day that he was able to hold his temper. The days passed and the young boy was finally able to tell his father that all the nails were gone. The father took his son by the hand, led him to the fence and said, "You have done well, my son, but look at the holes in the fence. The fence will never be the same. When you say things in anger, they leave a scar just like this one. You can put a knife in a man and draw it out. It won't matter how many times you say I'm sorry, the wound is still there. A verbal wound can be as bad as a physical one. Before you unleash your anger at a person, make sure you know why and understand that most of the time your anger is because a person has affected your feelings in some way. Accept the fact that they are your feelings, and there are no right or wrong feelings, and you are entitled to them, but how you respond can be hurtful and sinful."*

A church is a sanctuary when people are able to explore and question their faith and set aside that which no longer makes sense to them.

*A mother was teaching her daughter how to cook pot roast. After showing her how to rub various spices on the meat, she took a knife and cut part of the roast off, put it in the refrigerator and put the rest in the pot. Her daughter asked why she did this. Her mother responded, "I don't know, this is the way my mother always did it." Later that day, the daughter visited her grandmother in a nursing home and asked why she cut part of the pot roast off before putting it in the pot for roasting. Her grandmother said, "The pot was too small."*

An ancient theme in faith communities is *Ecclesia Semper Reformanda*, which means "the church is always reforming".

A church is a sanctuary when people who have made mistakes find open arms of love and forgiveness.

Many years ago, I took my car into a garage for repairs. While waiting, I noticed the mechanic working on it was sweating profusely while trying to fix something under the steering wheel. When he was finished, I got in the driver seat and smelled an odor, which angered me. "He got his body odor all over my front seat", I thought. A few moments later, I noticed I had some dog doo-doo on the bottom of my shoe. The mechanic didn't stink, I did, which is often what we find when judging others. We are all in need of forgiveness.

Thank you for helping to make our church a sanctuary.