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Whenever we take the opportunity to look back upon an entire year and reflect, it is amazing to realize how many decisions, events, and opportunities were significant, even if we did not realize it at the time. Historians do an important job of recording the facts, of listing people, places, and events and drawing conclusions. But, in truth, that is only *part* of the story. No historian looking back later on, can completely reconstruct the thoughts, motivations, or responses of human beings in real life situations. But, as people of faith, we trust that God has the fullness of our human history in His heart. It is up to us to pass down the meaning and significance of pivotal events, and bear witness to how the guiding Hand of God has been at work in our lives.

In reflecting upon the year of our Lord, 2011, three events take center stage in my mind; the dedication of our **Memorial Garden**, our **210th Anniversary**, and our **Space Sharing with St. Martin's**. Why this trio of events? Because they encompass the historical perspective of past, present, and future. Beyond their factual and practical significance, they are each meaningful to us in ways that someone outside our community, or outside the perspective of faith, might not fully understand.

In reading up on Bethel's 210 years of history, I was warmed by the thoughts of oyster suppers in the Old Sanctuary and the wagon drawn surreys bringing members to worship in bad weather. It was fascinating to read about all the many different pastors that have served Bethel, as well as the numerous decades without an installed pastor, and the references to theological disagreements. But, through it all, Bethel sought to plant new churches and partner with existing ones, in order to further ministry and mutual support. These facts and descriptions give us hints and glimpses into a specific time periods, like snapshots in a family photo album. But further insight is gleaned when we recognize that despite the many 'pictures' that are missing, it all sounds remarkably familiar. That is because the

fundamental challenges of being the Body of Christ that faced our ancestors, still face us today: seeking to maintain cohesion as a community, financial challenges, the need for leadership that seeks to move us forward, while holding fast to the foundation of faithfulness, the ongoing maintenance and improvements necessary to our facilities, and the constant challenge of living and serving together as people of faith, in an ever changing world.

While history may record the data, it is up to us to share and pass on the personal, theological, and spiritual significance of being the Body of Christ at Bethel. We do that through the relationships we forge by faith. Our goal isn't for 'the world' to remember what we do here—for the things of this world will pass away. Rather, what matters is being faithful **NOW**, because faithfulness is forever. What we plant now, by faith, will bring a harvest in the future. God is cultivating His garden through us. I pray that 210 years from now, our brothers and sisters in faith will read of *our* roast beef dinners, complete with pickled beets and deviled eggs (yum!), the work of our WFC, Deacons, mission giving, the use of audio/visuals to enhance worship, and the efforts we have made to honor loved ones and support brothers and sisters in faith, and marvel at how our story echoes their *own* struggles and triumphs. The names change, but human nature, the challenge of faith, and the blessings of serving the One True God, will *still* be familiar.

One of the ways we have chosen to pass along the deeper meaning we share by faith, is through **our Memorial Garden**. By creating a contemplative space, we honor the memory of loved ones who have served the Lord and made their mark on our hearts. This ever-changing and ever-growing Eden, bears witness that love and faithfulness *continue* to grow and blossom, when we serve the One True God. As we tend this garden, we honor that truth through our prayers, our thoughts, and an ongoing cultivation of our history as God's people. We declare together,

‘Jesus, remember me, when you come into Your Kingdom!’

One thing becomes clear when we look back upon our long history; God is a God who brings people together. God has sewn us together by faith into a living patchwork quilt of relationships. These relationships exist not just to bring comfort *to us*, but are to spread out to cover others with the warmth of God’s love and protection of salvation. A new ‘swatch’ is now being added. Our friends from St. Martin’s will be with us by the time this goes to print. How God will be at work in this space sharing arrangement is about to unfold. Our histories will be knit together and I am convinced the result will be something beautiful. I trust that He will make His presence known in this sharing in ways that

delight, surprise, and challenge both communities. Their commitment to what is essential is a witness to us in a time when our denomination is in uneasy theological flux, and the global Church is struggling. With the removal of Amendment B from our Book of Order and the passing of our new Form of Government, change is here, and more change is coming. How will we respond? In the year of Our Lord, 2012, it is my hope that God will guide us in that discernment and that we will respond first and foremost as people of faith; as those committed to supporting one another, building God’s Kingdom, and preserving what is essential; the Lordship of Christ alone.

Happy New Year! In Christ,

Pastor Nancy