

The Path Before Us in 2019

Rev. Kevin Omi

“You lead us down the right path, the path that unwinds in the pattern of your name.”¹

Wow, we are already into the second month of the year! I thought it would be helpful to share my perspective, as your interim senior minister, for what the year ahead looks like. I've shared this with our Co-Moderators, Jackie Seymour and Anne Evans.



Worship, Pastoral Care, and Spiritual Formation: Worship and pastoral care are central to our identity as a church. We gather together to witness the presence of the holy in our lives, praise God, and gather strength for the journey of life. The church calendar has a well-defined structure that offers opportunities for reflection (Lent and Advent), joy (Easter and Christmas), as well as all the seasons of our emotional and spiritual lives. You'll continue to see gradual changes in our worship practices.

Pastoral care has always been important at Skyland, and it is becoming more so, as our congregation ages. The new Board of Deacons will be discussing how the church as whole can best care for its members, particularly those that are homebound.

I've been delighted to see the response to our newly formed Bible Study group on Thursday mornings at 9:45 a.m. Through Bible Study we build our faith and find ways ancient stories can weave their way into our lives and inspire who we are and what we do. I haven't forgotten that there are a number of people who are also interested in contemplative practices as well. I've met with a few folks as they explore their own spiritual paths and look forward to meeting with more of you, both through retreats and individual discussions.

reVision: We are off to a good start with reVision, with strong and discerning leaders in place. We have trimmed the church's board and committee structure a bit to make room. This, combined with trying to scale back other meetings, is allowing us to devote the time needed for the critical first 90 days of reVision. Folks are reaching out to members of the wider community to understand their gifts and passions. If we do enough of this important outreach, common themes and ideas will emerge, which we will discuss at the Convergence Summit on April 7. During the Convergence Summit we will consider three questions:

- What gifts are present in this congregation and your neighborhood?
- What passions are present in this congregation and your neighborhood?
- Hearing all of this, what are you inspired to do?

Many ideas will be shared and then we will identify the two or three ideas which the largest number of people find the most inspiring and wish to pursue. Proposal Teams, formed of members of the entire congregation that care passionately about the selected ideas will then spend 30-45 days refining these ideas and address questions about scope, resources required, planned activities, and what it will take to *sustain* this ministry. The Proposal Teams will present their proposals at the Action Summit in June. New ministries that the congregation views as feasible will be launched, as they are ready, later this year. Some ideas may require thoughtfully scaling back other activities or shifting our people and financial resources. The Spirit will guide us!

¹ From Psalm 23 in *Opening To You: Zen inspired translation of the Psalms* by Norman Fischer

Being Church Together: An important part of our time together this year will be helping us communicate with greater kindness and care. I'll continue to touch on this topic in sermons and I hope we will adopt a version of the Safe Space Guidelines for all that we do as a congregation, building on good experiences in our reVision small groups. Transparency, or the sharing of information, builds trust. I'll be encouraging the Board of Trustees to increase transparency on major projects and to consider the idea of tracking and periodically reporting ideas members generate, so we can learn from some of our challenges with earlier projects and ideas. Increased transparency will also apply for our stewardship and financial reporting. Church Council will start a series of conversations soon to carefully consider how we approach the Harvest Festival, learning lessons from the past. We'll begin to create some high-level policies to help guide topics like how we share our facilities with the wider community and how we commemorate significant contributions, as well as revisit the question of holding weddings and other events here.

I hope to see more events like the Spaghetti Dinner, which not only are *fun*, they are a great way to invite the wider community to be with us. A growth area for the church is communications, exemplified by the improved website, active Facebook presence, and weekly emails. You'll also see more consistent reporting of Church Council activities. The Women's Fellowship and other ministry teams within the church will be exploring other ways in which we can build an even stronger sense of community, learn together, *and* welcome the wider community.

Interim Tasks: So far we have completed an Asset Mapping exercise, created a membership list, and put a lot of behind the scenes work into reaching out to people whose connections to us are tenuous. We are seeing a few previously active members return, which is wonderful. A major theme, not only for reVision but how we think of ourselves, is to revive and create new connections with members of our wider community. We have a first draft of a list of activities that involved the church and community working together. This will become part of the Heritage interim task, along with Leadership, Mission, Connections, and Future (more on these in a few months).

The new ministries that emerge from reVision, combined with a streamlined structure for our existing ministries, will define our future needs for lay and pastoral leadership. The resulting structure will suggest changes to the Church Bylaws and inform the creation of the congregational profile and ministerial profile that the Search Committee will write late this year, after it is formed. Once these and other materials are ready and have been reviewed with the Conference, the church will be positioned very well to begin receiving profiles from ministers that are seeking a position. The Search Committee will conduct its work in confidence over several months, extending into 2020. Ultimately, at some point next year, Skyland will have a new settled minister and I will move onto the next ministry to which God has called me.

Please contact me, our Co-Moderators, Jackie Seymour and Anne Evans, or the members of the Transition Team if you would like to discuss any of these topics further.

The Spirit is alive and moving us out into the community!

Rev. Kevin Omi