

From the Pastor

Dear Friends,

Westminster By-The-Sea was one of six congregations cited for our church growth in Central Florida Presbytery in 2011. Our Executive Presbyter, Dr. Paige McRight (who retires in July) asked for my thoughts about why I think we have grown. This is what I sent her.

Thank you for acknowledging our church growth. It has been my joy to have had the congregation grow in 24 out of the 26 years I have been here. To what do I attribute it?

1) There is joy here. That hasn't always been the case, but it is true now. People do not like to be part of conflict or subterfuge. We work on lifting others up and if something happens that is hurtful, trying to address it with regret and correction.

2) There is tradition here, not just with traditional services, but with predictability. When programs work, we keep them; when they don't, we change them. In our constantly changing world, it is nice to have some traditions.

3) There is loyalty here. Staff members have been here as long as 10, 20, or 26 years.

4) There is trust here: trust in planning, and with finances. Everyone wants to be able to trust how their money is being used.

5) We remember and carry out the tasks of being a church. The late John Leith, in his book *THE REFORMED IMPERATIVE*, reminds churches to do what churches have been called to do: Preaching the Gospel, teaching the Bible and the tradition, offering thoughtful pastoral care; and doing Christian mission locally and globally. We seek to do all of those as primary goals.

6) Many people come to our congregation because church members invite them. That is a crucial reason for our growth.

7) Our staff is cohesive. Among them: Richard Hills is a unique person in our midst; being here in this area longer than I've been, he loves to check visitor rolls and call people, many of whom he might even know! He has good gifts in this area. Cara Gee has built good relationships with the congregation, but particularly with the youth and their families. Our Education ministry, led by Mary Ann Sumner, I think is second to none. And our music ministry, led by Judson Rogers and Kendra Cochenour, is outstanding. The work of our staff richly blesses us.

Thank you for asking! Of course the major reason for any growth is because God wills it, and the Holy Spirit enables it! May God continue to be glorified in the worship and mission of Westminster By-The-Sea.

Sincerely,
Jeff Sumner, Pastor