

## Pastor's Report

Dear Friends who love Belmont,

The Discipline states that “The Pastor shall give a report on the state of the church and an account of pastoral ministry as it relates to providing support, guidance, and training to the lay membership in the church.” Belmont is blessed with amazing staff and congregational leaders both Lay and clergy. We are unique in the number of retired and active leaders from UMC Boards and Agency or the Publishing House. The church offers many amazing Sunday school classes and hosts many opportunities for discipleship training, service, and growth. I am deeply grateful for all our wonderful staff and lay leaders, who have made this first six months productive and fun.

“The Pastor shall give a report on the state of the church and an account of pastoral ministry as it relates ministering within the congregation and to the world.” Every Tuesday and Thursday the world walks into Belmont for ESL. Our Karen congregation makes a deep global connect. So many people go out from Belmont to serve in innovative ministries through the neighborhood and the world. Belmont is seeking to actively reach our LGBTQ neighbors with the love and grace of Jesus Christ. We partner with Edgehill, Luke 14:12, Community Care Fellowship, Noah, and many other agencies in seeking to make disciples by living as Christian people in the world. Six months into our common work, I believe we need to become better at reaching the many people moving into our village. We need to share our progressive understanding of the Gospel in this age when many people of goodwill are disillusioned by a loud, politicized pseudo-Christianity. Jesus went about proclaiming “The Time is now. Hear the Good News” ( Mark 1:15) As we follow Jesus, who feed hungry crowds, brought healthcare to the masses, welcomed those named religiously unclean, and taught us to love God-neighbor-stranger-enemy, we must proclaim the Good News of spiritual liberation, Justice, faith, hope and Love. Our strategic plan calls us to this.

“The Pastor shall give a report on the state of the church and an account of pastoral ministry as it relates to administering the temporal affairs of the congregation.” In June, the Tennessee Conference gifted us with “Clergy Onboarding” workshop led by Claire Bowen. The staff identified ten strategic issues for our work together. In follow-up meetings, our staff agreed upon working definitions and divided into teams to develop “white papers” for each opportunity. We have addressed or are working on the following issues; 1. Strategic Planning 2. Parking 3. Organizational structure 4. More efficient staff meetings 5. Calendaring and scheduling 6. Golden Triangle's relationship with Belmont 7. Leadership and Discipleship 9. Congregational and staff healing 10. Stewardship.

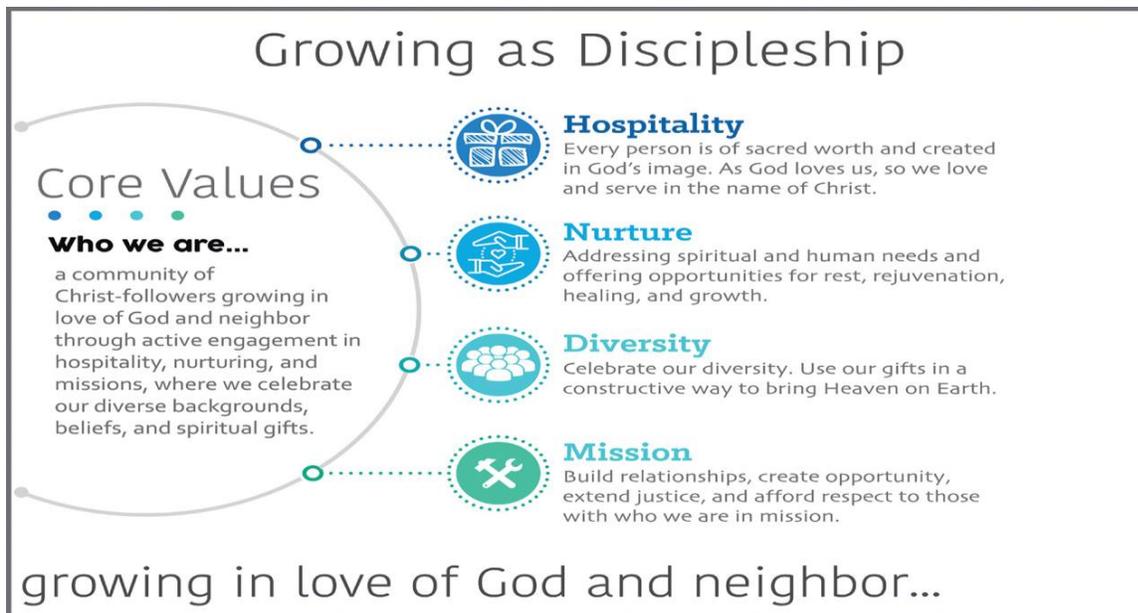
These issues mirror our 2013 strategic plan. Jefferson likes to remind us that we can be “a big tent church” that can get crowded and cluster off into ministry silos. Four of our top five issues center in planning, organization, efficiency and scheduling, we are seeking to address these as a staff.

As Belmont plans for congregational depth and growth, we will need to evaluate our programs in light of our mission. If we lovingly discern that some ministries are no longer supported through active lay involvement can these be released? Are there activities that we need to let go of, in order to focus our collective energy on more mission-centric work?

As to missional planning, our mission statement says a lot about who we are:

Belmont United Methodist Church is a community of Christ-followers growing in love of God and neighbor. This is what we at Belmont UMC believe Christian discipleship is, what we are to be, and what Jesus meant when he sent his followers to “make disciples.” We believe every person is of sacred worth and created in God’s image. We commit to Jesus’ example of inclusive love, care, and intentional hospitality with persons of every race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, faith story, physical or mental ability, economic status, or political perspective. We respect our diversity of opinion and expressions of faith. Therefore, as God loves us, so let us love and serve in the name of Christ.

We identified four core values.



Will we plan ministry around our mission? Will our four core values guide us? Will we focus our resources and energy around our mission? Will we engage in service so that we might dwell in "a community of love and forgiveness"? Will we imprint these values into our children? Will we

seek to share this Good News with our neighbors?

Will we invite others to come and hear the “good news” of God’s inclusive love? Belmont holds a long term desire to welcome all people, without judging them. Belmont trusts that God’s grace, manifested in the community of faith, can win people towards the love of God. Will we be intentional in helping our neighbors hear our hopeful-progressive message or will we leave evangelism (telling the Good News) solely to our evangelical cousins?

In 21 coffees, I discovered that Belmont is: welcoming of everyone, personally warm, outwardly focused, missionally-minded, justice oriented, advocating for all people, strongly musical, multi-cultural, grounded in traditional worship, vibrant children-youth choirs (5 children’s ensembles with over 100 youth and children in choir), strong youth program, educationally advanced, gifted with non-appointive UMC leaders, a family, a large church with a small church feel, blessed with a strong Week Day School, Reconciling Ministries Network (although the RMN process might have felt hard to some people, most people feel it was a very good decision), GTF, Malawi connection, a place bishops drop by from all over the world, a urban vibe, shaped by our location, connected to our sanctuary, filled with strong laity, great youth programs, and intellectually-spiritually deep.

Last year, as we struggled to set a budget we looked to the Trust Fund for a one-time 50,000 infusion to help us meet an outsized budget. In so doing, our lay leadership pledged to right size our 2018 budget. Although, we finished the year strong paying 100 percent of our apportionments, we need to address the five year, 120,000 dollar increase in our staff budget. We have a wonderful staff and our transition to less clergy will stretch us all. The state of our church will depend on how each of us answers God’s call to engage our hands in the work of ministry. Staff exists to preach/teach and “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, so that the Body of Christ might be built up”. (Ephesians 4:12) In professing our faith we pledge our loyalty to God’s church promising to “do all in our power strengthen her ministries” upholding the church with our prayers, presence, gifts service and witness. As we move into a challenging season, let us bring our many hands and many stories into the work of our wonderful Church.

In regards to strategic planning, the church board might consider a laity driven team to think about the ongoing issues with parking.

In 2017, we sought to be more intentional with our stewardship efforts. Our laity crafted a beautiful missional theme “Many Hands, Many Stories, One Church.” We produced brochures around our giving and service. We held six “family budget” meetings and talked about resetting our budget. Our financials are trending in a positive direction. In the New Year, a Wednesday night class shares stories arising from our many hands and many stories, as we seek to abide in

this "Many-One" theme of hospitality and diversity.

One of the delights of serving Belmont is working with our Advocacy Committee. Next week I plan to meet again with Rabbi Flip Rice from Congregation Micah and Pastor Myriam Cortez from Ebenezer UMC in hopes of creating a multi-congregational and inter-faith experience to share community, to hear Ebenezer's recent Hispanic immigration experiences, and to explore common advocacy opportunities.

In regards to diversity, hospitality and nurture Belmont's May 2017 vote to join as Reconciling Ministries Network offers a unique and vital witness within Tennessee Methodist expression. Our commitment to reach out to all of the people who God loves stands as a faithful response to God's call and our mission. So many of our LGBTQ friends have been defined, classified, and wounded by so many churches, let us offer the love, grace, and spiritual space that we all need to grow into God's deepest calling upon our lives.

A final planning opportunity was identified as early our 2013 Strategic Ministry Assessment: "one critical need in considering our strategies related to hospitality with the Golden Triangle is to discern God's call for the optimal way to be in ministry together". This was repeated in the 2014 Ministry Architects work. "When a plan is absent things just happen... there is not a shared vision for this relationship... this tension has led to many leaders and congregants being frustrated, dissatisfied, hurt and insulted by one another... it is beyond time to discern God's desire for the continued ministry with GTF community and create an intentional plan to move forward" ". Twelve years into this beautiful and difficult work the GTF is evolving. Our Karen members stopped needing van rides a few months ago. Alexcia Dee, grew up in Belmont and now translates every sermon into Karen. A quarter of a recent group of confirmands came from our GTF children. Our GT young people enjoyed summer missional experiences with our youth and regularly take part in Wednesday night programming! As we access the best ways to ministry together, let us resist past patterns of hurting one another, for without love we achieve nothing. (1 Corinthians 13)

Friends, we may not always agree about how to do ministry, from immigration, to GTF, to RMN, to flowers on the altar flowers, but let us take John Wesley's words in "Catholic Spirit" to heart: "Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite..."

As I conclude my understanding of the state of our church, I turn to Doctor King for guidance. In a Letter from a Birmingham Jail he writes: "I have watched white churchmen stand on the sideline and mouth pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities. In the midst of a mighty struggle to rid our nation of racial and economic injustice, I have heard many ministers say: "Those are social issues, with which the gospel has no real concern." And I have watched many churches commit themselves to a completely other worldly religion which makes a strange, non-Biblical distinction between body and soul, between the sacred and the secular.... On sweltering summer days and crisp autumn mornings I have looked at the South's beautiful

churches with their lofty spires pointing heavenward. I have beheld the impressive outlines of her massive religious-education buildings. Over and over I have found myself asking: "What kind of people worship here? Who is their God?"

What kind of church will we be? Will we do the risky work of Jesus? Will we offer the love of God to everyone- trusting that the Holy Spirit convicts people of sin and Jesus is the only worthy judge? (Will we welcome everyone, trusting that the Holy Spirit can guide us into truth? Will we stand with the stranger? Will we raise our children to read the Scriptures, guided by a warm heart and a strong mind? Will we seek to reach the college students and young adults moving just outside our doors? Will each of you who are called to lead engage in the ministries God calls us into? May we engage in God's diverse missional calling on our lives offering hospitality and nurture to one another and all our neighbors? Many we be Many Hands, Many Stories- One Church.

It is my deep honor to serve as your Senior Pastor.

Grace and Love  
Paul

## **Worship Ministries – Susan Groseclose**

In the area of worship, I share my gift of writing and creating prayers/liturgy for worship expressing our common call to live as faithful, fruitful disciples of Jesus Christ. I also work with the Worship Planning Team to provide inspiring, passionate worship and include a diversity of children, youth, and adults in leadership.

The Worship Planning Team and Worship Committee continue to create worship series using thematic preaching; use of creative elements in worship; and deepening the connections between the life of our faith community and worship. I have worked with the team to expand our use of liturgical arts through altar arrangements, creative floral arrangements, scripture tableau, storytelling, and reader's theater. We have also offered a variety of worship experiences including Feast of Lights, Holy Week services, combined services with Golden Triangle Fellowship, and Blessing of the Animals.

Worship doesn't happen without a large number of dedicated volunteers including musicians of all ages, ushers, greeters, altar guild, communion stewards, acolytes and crucifer along with their coordinators, liturgists, and countless others who work behind the scenes to prepare for our worship.

## **Children's Ministries**

Our mission with children and families is to invite, love, nurture, and prepare children, youth, and families to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. We have created a Children's Ministry Team to

carry out the mission and work of this area of ministry. We have expanded and are intentionally working to implement Faith Steps, which is a comprehensive children's discipleship-focused ministry as children intentionally grow in their relationship with God and others. This year, the Children's Ministry Team along with one of the UMW circles, and Knit One, Give One knitting ministry re-created our outreach to families with newborns which includes a meal, knitted cap, book on faith formation in the family, provided rocking chairs in the sanctuary, and conversations with parents about infant Baptism. The Children's Ministry Team also trained a group of persons and implemented for our preschoolers Godly Play, a spiritual formation approach to learning using wonder, manipulatives, storytelling, and discovery. Our children's choirs participated in a joint Music and Worship Arts Camp in partnership with Belmont and West End UMC concluding with the musical, Moses and the Freedom Fanatics. We have integrated preschool childcare for both the English-speaking and Karen-speaking congregations hiring two adults from Golden Triangle Fellowship and trained volunteers to be an integral part of the church's childcare staff. We are also intentionally making connections between faith development and nurture at church with the home. We are exploring a summer intergenerational ministry and embarking on creating a 5th and 6th-grade fellowship that will be a bridge from children to youth ministries.

Our ministry with children thrives because we have phenomenal Sunday school teachers, an incredible choir ministry and countless volunteers who model love and grace. We are thankful to be in ministry in a community that takes so seriously the vows we make to our children when they are baptized.

### **Music Ministry 2016-17 highlights—Gayle Sullivan & Amy Cooper**

Belmont's music ministry continues to involve approximately 175 volunteer musicians in 11 musical ensembles plus soloists and instrumentalists. These musicians provide music for worship 52 Sundays and for special services throughout the entire church year.

The Sanctuary Choir is the lead choir for the program and its members attend weekly rehearsal and worship singing for the entire church year. The group's annual Christmas charity project raised funds for Room in the Inn, Golden Triangle Fellowship and the Benevolence Fund. The Choir is beginning their fall with a very strong start that includes several new members. In October, they had the privilege of being the clinic choir with guest composer and conductor Philip Stopford in a workshop hosted by the Nashville American Guild of Organists.

Our youth choir program continues to thrive both in numbers and level of commitment. A group of 36 youth and 7 adults had a rich and exciting 5-day long tour to New Orleans singing at 5 venues that included 4 churches and a retirement community. As usual, the group shared activities, meals and worship experiences together and grew closer with one another and in their relationship to God because of it. These tour opportunities are also a unique and joyful

way to make connections with other churches throughout our region. This season is off to quite an enthusiastic start.

Our 4 hand bell choirs as well as a host of additional volunteer instrumentalists are holding strong in their consistent offering of their time and talents in music ministry.

### **Highlights of Music Ministry:**

1. All children's choirs remain steady in their growth, while the oldest age group (3rd-6th grade) is one of the largest it has been in the past ten years. The Music Makers (ages 1st and 2nd grade), as well as the Children's Chimes (hand bell ringing for 5th and 6th graders) were large groups as well.
2. Choir teacher turnover remains at a very low rate.
3. This summer (2017), West End UMC and Belmont UMC combined teachers and children to form the WEB (West End Belmont) Music Camp, which was held at West End UMC. Approximately 45 children from both churches attended, and were exposed to new teachers, ministers from both churches, various ways of learning and continuing friendships from last summer. At the end of the week, the musical, "Moses and the Freedom Fanatics" was expertly presented to a packed audience in West End UMC's theater!
4. Taking note of a growing infant and preschool population in the church, a Parent and Child Music Group was formed, and continues to meet once a week during the school year. Parents, grandparents, and care givers attend with their young children to sing songs of faith, dance, read books, and have snacks and fellowship. The participants attending this "front porch ministry" is constantly changing, and friends of church members have felt comfortable coming to join, as well.
5. From the Parent and Child Music Group, the idea was developed for various Belmont members to record a CD for our youngest members, to instill our hymns of faith at an early age. "Jesus Loves Me" Beloved Songs of Faith was recorded in our sanctuary by Belmont musicians, and to this date, over 200 copies have been given out! After we listened to the recording, we realized that people of all ages would appreciate listening. When a child is born to a Belmont family, he or she will be given a copy of the CD.

### **Youth Ministry – Darren Wright**

Youth ministry at Belmont UMC is going strong. Our Wednesday and Sunday numbers continue to grow but, more importantly, more youth are inviting their friends and youth who weren't attending regularly are attending more because they value the community here at Belmont. At one of our recent events, No Doze, we had 61 youth present with 7 of the 61 being first-time visitors. We have a large and dynamic class of seniors that we are sadly beginning to realize will be leaving us, but we also have growing numbers of younger leaders who are ready to step up

and continue imagining and listening to where God is calling us. In terms of programming, we have 4 Sunday school classes, a Sunday evening gathering, a Midweek gathering, 3 youth basketball teams, summer missions, monthly service projects, fall and winter retreats, and, under the amazing leadership of Gayle Sullivan and Bill Cooper, an truly fantastic youth choir and youth bells ensemble.

Four additional developments within our ministry over the past year are important to mention and celebrate:

- 1) We have a youth council of 8 youth who are helping lead and make all decisions related to our youth ministry. Seeing their growth in leadership and in ownership of the youth ministry has been beautiful.
- 2) With the help of Jin Kim, Alexcia Dee, and others we have grown much more connected to our youth from the Golden Triangle community. With 10-15 youth from the Golden Triangle community joining us on Wednesday evenings we now offer a fuller picture of the kingdom of God which is transformational for all youth, partners in ministry, and the larger Belmont UMC community.
- 3) We have grown our numbers of Partners in Ministry allowing for meaningful small groups on Sunday evenings with more adults sharing in God's love with our youth. Our youth ministry would be a shell of itself without the dedication, love, and compassion of the many adults who give of their time and energy on a weekly basis.
- 4) We have shifted our Confirmation program from the 6<sup>th</sup> grade year to a 2-year program beginning in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and ending with a Confirmation service at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade year. This shift better aligns with age-stage developmental realities and allows for more intentional community and faith formation to take place.

## **Mission & Outreach, and Golden Triangle Fellowship—Jin Kim**

### **1. GTF**

The GTF's own child care during worship began in June, 2017. The team with total 8 volunteers works in pairs alternately each week. They are taking care of more than 15 children of ages 3 to 5. This childcare helps the GTF service maintain quieter and the congregation to be able to focus more on the worship. The childcare is given at both the indoor gym and outdoor playground.

We started ESL in August, 2017 for those among the GTF adults who need English. Antioch UMC provides a class room. About 10 members attend the ESL program every Saturday from 10am to noon. With a grant from the former Nashville District, we could hire an experienced instructor (Daniel Naes) and a coordinator (Gloria Dee). The program will end in June, 2018.

There has been a big change in the GTF youth ministry in 2017. To overcome the limitations of the former GTF's own youth meeting on Saturday, we joined Midweek starting in August, 2017. More than 10 youth steadily participate in Belmont youth program and diverse activities.

## **2. Outreach**

Each year, Belmont participates in Habitat for Humanity as one of sponsoring churches. In one Saturday of October, ten Belmonsters joined together to help a home building project.

From November to March, every Friday, 12 homeless brothers come to our community center to get food and stay a night. Many Sunday school classes and individual volunteers actively participate in this ministry.

2017 CMO has been decided to help Open Table Nashville's micro home building project for the homeless. We attained \$20,000 goal as of December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017.

## **3. Mission**

The financial support for Malawi UMC has been discontinued for its inner issues, but with the supervision of UMC Germany in Malawi, we could resume the support in January, 2018.

A Malawi short-term mission trip is scheduled in the coming summer, 2018. The exact date has not yet been determined.

## **Discipleship—Jefferson Furtado**

So we may continue to effectively equip Belmonsters to grow in love of God and neighbor, we have gathered a team of Belmonsters to work on developing an intentional discipleship system to support the discipleship efforts of our congregation. Through the past year, we have faithfully engaged in this task, considering how to support and strengthen the discipleship efforts already taking place in our midst and how to enhance our environment so that every person can find their purpose and place.

This work has focused both on the personal and corporate aspects of disciple formation. That is, actively equipping and empowering individuals to pursue their own spiritual development and creating an environment so that every person can find their purpose and place, through opportunities to connect, grow, serve, and care.

This process has already helped us to name and celebrate the beautiful ways our congregation helps guests and members grow in love of God and neighbor. It has also given us the opportunity to consider what more can be done, so we may reach those who stand at the margins and whose face barriers as they enter into our community.

We will continue to move forward with this process and integrate its work into the everyday life of our community. It is our prayer that these enhancements will enable Belmont to continue to grow as we make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

## **Senior Adults and Congregational Care—Heather Harriss**

It was another amazing year for our Senior Adult ministry led by Jim and Starr Strickland. The Senior Adult Council planned an event for each month of the year, with a focus on fellowship, service and education. Senior Adults and Inviting Ministries worked together to create and implement a Spiritual Life Assessment. The highlight of the year was our trip to Savannah and Saint Simon's Island following in the footsteps of John and Charles Wesley. We even were able to experience some of the same illnesses that John and Charles endured. We celebrate Jim and Starr and their faithful lives of ministry. They are truly irreplaceable! For this year, we have a visioning team and a planning team, if you would like to participate, let me know!

United Methodist Women led by Sue Mather (I believe Sue does a report?)

Our Congregational Care ministry, led by Sharon Helton continues to seek to meet the pastoral needs that arise in each of our lives. This year our Hospital Visitation Team formed and is being led by Bart Perkey. Our Homebound committee is led by Arnell Willis, Carrie Poss and Judy Stubbs, with their coordinating over 30 volunteers visit, call and deliver gifts to our members who can no longer attend the services of the church. We are blessed by our transportation ministry, these faithful volunteers who pick up members who can no longer drive so they can attend worship. Our Funeral Guild, led by Arnell, coordinates volunteers to serves as ushers and greeters; to provide kindness and hospitality when it is most needed. This year an intercessory prayer team formed, led by Henrietta Hagler they meet each Wednesday afternoon to pray for the needs of our church, our members, and our staff and for our community and world. Faith Companions continue their faithful ministry meeting each month to discuss readings on aging, grief, the changes and transitions that come with aging, and end of life issues. Then, extending the love and care of the church to others through visitation. The Alzheimer's/Dementia Caregivers Support Group continues to meet and had speakers from Odyssey Hospice and two incredible programs led by our own, Donna Whitehouse.

This year during Advent we used Jan L. Richardson's book, "Night Visions" as our guide through Epiphany. Small groups formed to participate in the Companions in Christ series The Way of Discernment and the Way of Prayer. A Women's Centering Prayer group meets each Thursday morning at 8:00.

Here's to another great year of growing in love of God and neighbor!

## **Belmont Weekday School – Jean Voorhees**

The Weekday School has been serving children and families for 70 years and is one of the oldest preschools in Nashville. We are licensed by the State of Tennessee Department of Human Services and participate in the Tennessee 3-Star Quality Program which recognizes child care providers who meet a higher standard of quality. The Weekday School serves over 100 families per year in eight classrooms, and has 24 teachers and staff members. The enrichment program includes a music teacher and a French teacher. We currently offer scholarships to 10 families who without this assistance would be unable to attend our quality preschool. We have six church member children enrolled, as well as three foreign families. Please stop in for a tour!