

## A Prayer upon Our Centennial – September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2010

*Gracious God,  
You guide the work of angels and humans alike.  
We give you thanks for the ways in which your Holy Spirit  
has brought us to this day:  
for the fire of your love,  
for the wind of your sacred purpose,  
for the water of your redeeming grace.  
Help us to remember who we have been  
and rejoice in who we are.  
Grant us the courage to step out in faith  
to continue to be a sign of your Reign in this world.  
We ask this in the name of the Risen Lord,  
who has promised to be God-with-us to the end of the ages.  
Amen.*

In December, I received Gloria's email reminder to write my annual reports for 2017. I was driving home later that day thinking, "What happened in 2017?" I know that I have alluded to and vaguely made mention on occasion that 2017 was a very hard year for me. My sermons have sometimes come from deep waters of grief, and there have been moments that have completely overwhelmed me.

In July, my wife Carrie moved out; and a few months later, we began the process toward divorce, which has now been filed. I have been navigating the unfamiliar terrain of single parenthood, and I think that as much as one can, I'm finding my footing. I am grateful every day for the support and love that surrounds us and am trying to stay present to the wonder that is watching my son grow up. The other night he was going to bed and said, "I have your home, and Mommy's home, and church!" Usually his god-family's house is also listed, but they were out of goldfish on his last stay!

The other thing that happened in July was a lawsuit which was filed against St. Michael's and stemmed from allegations of sexual abuse around the year 1961. My last public communication to you about this was in July when I said that the Diocese would be taking the lead on it and we would be in full compliance with them. I told you that we would be praying for everyone involved, but that we really did not have anything to worry about.

I have been holding a different truth now for almost six months. It is time for me to share what is going on. What is important to know is that this case is proceeding in the Multnomah County courts. The plaintiff was not associated with this church, he was never a member and his family was

not active here. No current member of our congregation has any involvement or any recollection of this person, and there have been no other accusations made.

What is challenging to us is that we cannot find insurance. There is no record of liability insurance from 1961. The blessing is that we have an incredible and talented lawyer in our congregation who has taken this case on pro bono – Mick Seidl. And to be honest, Mick and I have been shouldering this burden in isolation for too long. Because of complications associated with the case, the Diocese is unable to help us at this time. So Mick and I enlisted a support team, our Litigation Committee. Bob Spiers, Tim Shields, Jen Street, Bonnie Stewart and Peter Sergienko are part of this team and have been digging through archives and searching out different angles in this case.

The biggest hurdle for me has been my anger and resentment around having to deal with this case. I was also approaching it from a place of fear and scarcity rather than leaning into the abundance that exists in this community. We are a congregation of light, love, resilience and hope. What may have happened in the late 50's/early 60's does not define who we are – but how we respond does, and I need us to respond with strength and love.

There are two things that I am asking for from you as a community: Pray and participate in our vision process. I have handed out a half-sheet with prayers and verses of Scripture that I have found helpful and would feel upheld by knowing you were praying them, too. In addition, the opportunity we have right now with the work of the Dream Weavers – getting out the message, the good news of God's redeeming work, God's mercy, God's love. This is what moves us and inspires us to be light in this world. Please participate in the final stages of articulating God's wildest dream for us.

And oh my goodness, in the midst of all of this, wonderful things were happening here in 2017. CHURCH CAMP! That was a highlight for me for sure, and it is happening again in 2018! You have a save-the-date flyer! The Easter Vigil was remarkable and gave me so much inspiration and gratitude for being in this place. I was able to finally hire Padre Beto! We have Brian Fairbanks! We are finalizing our Green Faith Certification and talking about solar panels. We are staying ahead of a fearfully changing immigration system by walking with people as best we can. We are housing an Iranian refugee as a village of support. We are examining our buildings and facilities inside and out and developing a comprehensive plan to be good stewards of our property. We began to wonder what God's wildest dream is for us through art; articulation of our spirituality and temperament; identifying our strengths, aspirations, and opportunities; and having conversations about sources of transformation. This place has been a place of joy and light and love and solace and resilience and strength and hope.

As I turn to 2018, there are three areas in which I am intentionally focusing my energy. The first one is our Dream Weaver project: *What is God's wildest dream for St. Michael's?* Our plan is to finalize this vision process by Pentecost of this year. My second focus is on a segment of our congregation that I have begun to consider how to best serve and offer opportunities for listening – our empty-nester group. I noticed in my own parents that once their children were living their own adult lives,

their participation and regular attendance in our home parish decreased. I am interested to learn how to continue to deepen our faith development and keep people engaged. And finally, this is a mission-trip year, and I will be working on getting our youth ready for our trip to San Francisco in August. These are just some of my hopes and dreams for this year.

Speaking of hope! Where are my heroes of hope?! If you are new to St. Michael's, a few years ago I preached about the benefits of posing like a superhero for two minutes a day. So my friends, stand up! Let us find our posture! And remain standing as I announce to you this year's Unsung Heroes of Hope recipients – Amy Valentine and Lynda Garner! These two work behind the scenes and set the scene in remarkable and beautiful ways. Our festive receptions, Broadway Night, various liturgical seasons in this sacred space – you have seen it and experienced their work. But what you may not know is what Amy did this past year. She installed a shower over at St. Michael's House to provide hospitality to someone who may need sanctuary. We are incredibly gifted and grateful to our Unsung Heroes of Hope.

(The award was then presented to Amy Valentine and Lynda Garner. Following this, Chris thanked each staff member for their service during 2017.)