

## A Place at the Table

In recent weeks, we have heard from other staff folks here at First Church. I am the non-theologian of the group. I am the community person. I am the member that joined this church in 1961. And what a lot of changes in that 50 years!

I want you all to know I do not like changes! In fact, I really detest change. I drive a 13 year old vehicle and the only reason I got it in the year 2000 was because the 11 year old previous vehicle was leaving big round burned black circles in parking lots all across this city.

Now we all fall somewhere on a scale for accepting change I like everything to remain the same. Well, guess what. Nothing does stay the same. We are in constant change and flux in this world today.

I have to go back in my history. I was never going to get married. So what did Darrel Seng do? He had to go to Michigan where I was directing a Girl Scout summer resident camp to convince me to change! I wasn't going to have children. Guess what. We had 3 marvelous children. I was not planning to be Mayor of Lincoln. Guess what. I did become Mayor of the City of Lincoln. I wasn't coming back here to work. I'd been here for 20 years before. Guess what. I did come back!

Now in spite of not liking change, I have had to learn to accept and even embrace change!

Have you thought of what humble Pope Francis has been going through? What changes in his life he must embrace? And what changes his security folks must learn to accept!

First United Methodist Church is no different.

I want you to think back to the visioning and foresight the founders of this church and Nebraska Wesleyan University must have gone through to locate here in University Place where the sunflowers were growing. They made the decision to build a building to start Wesleyan and then they built this fantastic structure. Think of visioning and planning that went into building such a structure knowing that change was in the future. Then in the 50s another group decided to build the education wing...what foresight to know that change would happen and the facility must be ready for the changes.

As I sat on the Facilities Task Force that Bill Noble chaired and several members of the congregation served on, I kept thinking about “change.” I have trouble with it, but also thought of that hymn we’ve been singing. “A Place at the Table.” We...First Church...have to provide a place at the table for our community; just as our fore bearers who built this facility did. They prepared “A Place at the Table.”

I want to talk about the use of this facility – this table. Who is at the table now?

We are here for worship. We are here for Bible Study. We are here for United Methodist Women. We are here for Men’s Group. We

are here for church school. We are here for Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. We are here for choir practice. We are here for hand bell rehearsals. We are here for book studies. We are here for Prayer Meditation. We are here for University Place Community Organization. We are here for the Brain Injury Group. We are here for Women, Infant and Children's assistance. We are here for Irish Dancers. We are here for music events. We are here for forums. We are here for covenant groups. We are here for Peacemaking events.

We are here for Tutoring. On Monday evenings during the school season, Angelo Stabler from Guidance to Success picks up at risk middle school age boys from around the city to play basketball at Capital City Christian Church. When they come here, it's for training, tutoring and socializing. Our own Brian Krienke and some 15-20 Nebraska Wesleyan University students work with these boys. You know we feed them! Let me tell you how this all got started. Angelo Stabler walked across the street from Wesleyan and asked Larry if this group could use our Davidson Hall. Of course, Larry thought they would practice basketball. No. Angelo wanted to establish a tutoring program. Larry asked me to work with this group. I knew boys needed food! I never knew I would need to feed anywhere from 20-60 boys! Talk about change! Thanks to many of you, food has been provided: sandwiches (even sloppy joes), fruit, some veggies, cookies,

drinks and, of course, chips. Do you know, only once has anyone said no when they were asked to provide food?

Back to the use of our facility –

Youth coming in to play basketball... Let me tell you how this all started. This is the real story!! You know our Sr. Pastor can talk and engage anyone in a conversation! So, we had 2 hot shot boys riding skate boards out front, up and down the steps, over and around everywhere. So, Pastor Larry invites them in with one request. All they needed to do was check in at the office when they arrive at the church. So, they did, and for more than a year these boys and a few others would be down in the gym shooting hoops.

Then Jay Stewart arrived and the group blossomed and flourished and now the youth even come to worship! I sat behind some of them on Ash Wednesday. I was wishing they'd be quieter and then, I got myself to "accept change." Just think: getting ashes on your forehead the first time you go to worship!

Now I want us to think how First Church provides a Place at the Bigger Table...outside the facility.

We provide a noon meal for Matt Talbot on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of each month. Liz Zeff and Suzie Miller Schoen get our team organized. Now, First Church is not alone doing this. There are over 100 teams of folks doing meals at Matt Talbot. Just think about this; every noon and every evening meal for every day of the week and every week of

the month, and every month of the year! Oh yes, we just provided over \$1,100 to Matt Talbot from our Souper Bowl efforts!

Then once a month a group of people operate a Food Share program at 4<sup>th</sup> Presbyterian Church. Know how this got started? A group of folks sitting in our Munden Parlor discussed this some 16+ years ago. The group knew a large semi-truck loaded with food could not operate in our parking lot. So being ecumenical, we asked 4<sup>th</sup> Presbyterian to host this effort. Sharon Doll has been the organizer of this effort with lots of First Church folks working one Saturday a month.

Think of the Food Bank. Every Friday a team of First Church folks go to Hunting School to fill Back Pack Bags for over 130 children to take home so they have food for over the weekend. And the Food Bank Barrel close to our office area is filled constantly and Sharon Johnson calls the Food Bank when it is time to be emptied. First Church keeps donating pounds and pounds of non-perishable food.

Outside the building this church continues to cooperate; leading the way and helping University Place Community Organization, University Place Business Association, Huntington School and Nebraska Wesleyan University. Many, many first Church folks have served on the UPCO Board in the past 41 years, and several have served as president.

Oh, yes. Two of NWU fraternities use this facility for special ceremonies as does Nebraska Wesleyan University.

And then one of our more constant ways to provide a Place at the Table is to continue to answer the needs of those who call the church for help. Our Human Needs Fund has been received by both members of this congregation and folks living in Northeast Lincoln. The need may be food, help on utility bills, rent assistance, clothing needs and occasionally vehicle gas money. It is not uncommon for me to go to a local grocery store with a \$400 check written by our Treasurer, Tom James, and purchase 20 grocery cards at \$20 each.

Let's don't forget Fabulous Finds that provides a place for us to recycle our clothes, and a place for someone needing clothing can find a "Place at the Table." Did you know that Fabulous Finds donates back into the church budget quite often? In fact, over the past sixteen to seventeen years, they have given thousands of dollars to First Church on top of maintaining the old parsonage.

I am constantly amazed at what this Church and congregation do for others. This must be what those founders knew was going to be needed here in University Place as they "Set the Table" for Nebraska Wesleyan University, First Church and University Place. You do know that the table is a symbol of community. This is a table that responds to the needs. As I have listened to Judy Lane talk about the quilts at the International Quilt Center over at 33<sup>rd</sup> and Holdrege (and First

Church does have a quilt there from WWI era made by a children's Sunday school class). I'm wondering if Quilt making is one avenue for the visioning for the future. We must look to the future and we must learn to accept changes!

I do know that as we journey forward, we will also be experiencing an inward journey as we consider the use of this facility that was built over 100 years ago. I am sure we will struggle, we won't like the change and I suppose we will grow in that struggle, and then someday we will celebrate.

What is our role in this community in the future? What do we need to be doing? As we look at the facility needs, do we look at the needs of the community? Is our role to facilitate other groups or do we need to be doing the work ourselves? Do we need a better equipped kitchen in the gym? Do we need showers in our bathrooms? Do we need to run a soup kitchen? What is this community calling us to do? What are the changing needs of this community? It is not the same community of just 10 years ago.

You may notice that I have not talked about Brent Shaw and his talents, and his leadership in helping us understand the role of music at the worship table, and why we must address the needs of our dear, old organ. I really want to share a great story that involves Brent. So, get ready.

A few months ago I went into a certain imaging center to get my yearly mammogram. Now, for you males, you probably don't know, but women are given a certain little shawl/cap to wear over the top part of their body during the mammogram. It is common practice to ask women to wait a little bit afterwards to see if the pictures are all okay. As I was escorted into a small waiting room to wait, another woman was already there reading and waiting. She immediately said, "I know who you are and I know you are back at First UMC, and I am so-and-so from First Plymouth UCC. I know how great Brent Shaw is because we have Tom Trenney. So, here we were...two older women with our little cloth cap/coverings on, waiting for our mammogram picture, discussing Brent Shaw and Tom Trenney and how fortunate both First UMC and First Plymouth UCC are to have these two musicians. So, when you are near 70<sup>th</sup> and Pioneers, share a little laugh when you think of these two older women talking about the virtues of Brent and Tom! Folks, we are so fortunate to have Brent Shaw here. He has been a real blessing to us! Recently on a Sunday evening, I sat in the sanctuary with Brent on the organ, Tom on the piano and Jaimie Pruden singing. It can't get much better than that!

You all need to know that this staff is really great! Larry Moffet is so special. He brings out the best in so many folks and he never stops working for First Church. Many of you do not know the work he does with folks thinking of becoming clergy and entering the ministry. He

came to see me when I was in the Mayor's office. He and Jamie were just newly appointed here. Larry asked me with whom he should visit. I gave him several names, but the first name was our dear Lois Bowmaster. She cut across so many areas in this church community. She was in bells, in UMW, in UPCO, in the Art Center, at Whitehall, with Meals on Wheels, into Madonna Day Service, into the Business Community and was a NWU alum. She was the Communion organizer and she had even worked in the church office.

By fall of that year, Larry knew this church was in trouble. No one was in the building on Wednesday evenings. Well, a few folks; maybe ten. That soon changed with Larry and Brent working together. Brent got the Children's Sunday school going full steam. And, of course, now with the Youth programming going great with Jay and the Monday evening tutoring group, we now have 100-200 folks in this building several nights a week! What a change!

We also have great support staff: Carol Ann Clark and Laura Sheldon in the office, and Tom Stanley, Bill Haupt and Tim Van Meveren keeping our facility going! Tom and I are the old-timers on the staff in number of years serving here, and we never let these newcomers forget it!

Do you know Tom sleeps here on a Saturday night if a big snow is forecast for Sunday morning? And the printed material coming out of our office has never looked better.

So now we need to be visioning about the future and what facility updates and changes are needed to help providing a “Place at the Table” for this community

To close, I want to use Howard Thurman’s words. I always keep this in my Christmas box.

“When the song of the angels is stilled,  
When the star in the sky is gone,  
When the kings and the princes are home  
When the shepherds are back with their flocks,  
Then the work of Christmas begins:  
To find the lost,  
To heal those broken in spirit,  
To feed the hungry,  
To release the oppressed,  
To rebuild the nations,  
To bring peace among all peoples,  
To make music in the heart...”