

Happy Anniversary!

WOW – 1 year already! This isn't just my anniversary, but our anniversary.

A lot of things have happened in the past year, and I wanted to take a moment for us to see how far we have come.

A year ago we moved to this location. For those of you who haven't been with us for a year as of yet, our last location was beautiful, but didn't really have enough room for 60 people to worship, let alone room for 60 people to park.

We were able to purchase some decent sound equipment to help us during our worship service.

Then we had a trailer that we got fixed and hitched it up to an SUV and towed it over here a few times. And then it got stolen and we had all of our sound equipment taken.

But – we were able to recover the trailer and we bought new sound equipment.

We've went out and put advertising on people's doors, we've had ads in the Sunflower and Continental Ranch newsletters. We've placed full page ads in the Northwest Monument and we've sent letters directly to new home owners.

We've had a pastor-led Bible study and several other Bible studies.

We've seen our average attendance increase in large percentages.

We've had mission projects for Roadrunner Elementary School, Eloy's Food Bank, and Tucson Metropolitan Ministries.

We've added audio visual to our worship services and we hired Angeline who has graced us with her voice and music skills.

We've also had members of our congregation share their gifts during the worship service from playing musical instruments, to singing, to helping with our kids, to reading the scriptures, and even preaching.

Then others have come in early to help set up everything you see, or to be greeters, or set up the coffee and snacks, or help with potlucks.

Many others have helped with different committees, which we call ministries, which help us accomplish our mission.

And many of you help with financial offerings.

By looking at percentages, we have one of the fastest growing Methodist churches in all of Arizona.

So I get asked a lot why we are growing. I get asked how a church without their own building, without a room for a nursery or a place for a Sunday School, can grow so quickly.

I've asked many of you that have joined us in the past year why you chose Sanctuary. Almost all of you have given me the exact same answer. I have heard, "The people there are so welcoming, they are so loving, they genuinely care about me. They don't judge me – they accept me for who I am."

When I hear these things, and then I see how we have come together as a community, it reminds me how blessed I am to be a member of this community along with you.

The church isn't a physical building and it isn't just the pastor. It is all of us. We are the church.

And we are being blessed by God.

How do I know that? Because I see something here called the Fruit of The Spirit.

The Fruit of The Spirit are the results that happen when we focus on God.

Let me read for you what the Fruit of the Spirit is: Galatians 5:22-23

At different times, I see that Fruit here, among us.

It is that love and kindness and gentleness that helps us.

But one of the things I think we sometimes forget is that the Fruit of the Spirit is just part of the blessings we receive from God.

This church has done pretty well this past year. One can even say we are thriving.

And I know God has been there helping us.

But, as a church, I don't think we have gone to God as much as we could.

We pray occasionally for our church here in worship.

But did you know our Bishop prays for our church every single day?

How many of us can say we have prayed for our own church that much? Maybe some of you do. I know that there are a few here who pray occasionally for the church.

Sometimes we get so wrapped up worrying about how we are going to grow, that we forget to ask God how **he** wants us to grow.

You know, I have read book after book about church growth. I have pulled from my business and marketing experience to help promote this church. I have attended conferences and met with other new church start pastors, all for getting new ideas to help grow this church.

Here are some of the marketing books I have studied this past year.

But this one in particular – Unbinding the Gospel – This is the one that reminded me to focus on God to grow the church.

The author did a study of successful new church starts throughout the country. And do you know what each one had in common? They all prayed for their church. Not just occasionally, but continually. In their homes, in their meetings and in their worship services, they prayed, with their hearts, asking God to be with them and bless them.

As a church, we need to keep our eyes and our heart focused on God. Yes, we need to continue to invite our friends, offer programs and market our church, but we need to start praying for our church.

Today, we launch a new campaign. Not a fundraising campaign, not a new building fund, but a prayer campaign.

Over the next six months, I am asking all of us to remember our church in prayer.

For those of you who pray over meals, take an extra moment to remember our church.

For those of you who pray when you do your morning devotions, take an extra moment to remember our church.

For those of you who pray before bedtime, take an extra moment to remember our church.

For those of you who don't pray – I encourage you to take a moment and say a word to God, give thanks, and pray for our church.

But what should we pray for specifically? Just saying “praying for our church” is a little vague, so let's look at some of the things we should pray for:

The first is Faith. We all need to pray for strength in our faith – through the good times and the bad times. And we need to pray for the increase in our own faith, as well as those around us.

The second is Growth. We need to grow as a church. To be able to offer more programs, offer a nursery, offer a youth program; we need to grow as a church and pray for that growth.

The third is Guidance. We need to ask God to help guide us as we choose what programs to offer, and how we should move forward, together.

Fourth is Discipleship. We need to ask God to help make us all better followers of His. To try to live our lives a little closer to how He wants us to live. To seek Him out in our daily lives.

These are the four things I would like us all to pray for. Now, you may have your own to add to this list, and I hope you do. But these four are what I ask all of us to pray about for the next six months.

Our New Testament reading today reflects that we need to be praying for our church and one another.

As Paul said in his letter to the Colossians, “We have not ceased to pray for you.” Let us not cease to pray for our own church.

For the past year God has been there, helping us grow to the numbers we have now. Let's start our second year together focused on God. If we are all focused together and asking for blessings to fall upon this church, only God knows where we will be this time next year.

So over the next few months we will have on our bulletins, in our newsletters and other places the phrase,
"Have you prayed for your church today?"

Let's join together now in a word of prayer and pray for our church.

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