

Pastor Heather Riggs  
A Year Later, Part 1  
June 25, 2017  
Oak Grove UMC

**PHIL 1: 3-11**

<sup>3</sup> I thank my God every time I remember you, <sup>4</sup> constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, <sup>5</sup> because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. <sup>6</sup> I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup> It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. <sup>8</sup> For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. <sup>9</sup> And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight<sup>10</sup> to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, <sup>11</sup> having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

**(Slide 1: A Year Later part 1)**

A year ago I was new, so everybody, including me, wanted to know what church would be like for us together.

**(Slide 2: )**

**Would I be here in the community with you? Yes.**

We bought a house up behind Hartnell farms, I've enjoyed concerts and parties with you and I too am mourning the loss of Tebos!

**(Slide 3: )**

**Would I be real with you? Yes... but.**

The yes part is: I'm a terrible liar, so it's just easier for me to be myself full-time.

But... I also know that it's important for me to have good boundaries that protect my own personal space and my family's personal space. So I am

authentic with you, but I won't always share everything about my family or myself.

I'm also committed to protect your boundaries. Sometimes I can't say something because I am committed to keeping your confidences. I know that can be frustrating when you just want to know what's going on and all you want do is help, but the flip side of that is you know that I will treat your confidences with the same respect.

**(Slide 4: )**

You also wanted to know: **What change was I going to bring to the church?**

A year ago, the only answer I could really give was -- I don't know yet, we'll figure this out together. I needed time to listen to you, to listen to our community, to experiment a little and get a better feel for our situation. A year later, I feel like I can answer that question a little better.

But, I have a question: do you want to hear the good news or the bad news first?

**(Slide 5: We have 10 years)**

The Bad News: We have 10 years. If we continue to do church the same way we have always done it with the same people who have always done it -- 10 years from now Oak Grove's name will be read at Annual Conference and voted on for closure.

But, please understand, as Bishop Elaine pointed out at Conference - it's not your fault! You have served faithfully, doing church the best you knew how with love and forgiveness. The problem is that the world changed and changed and changed around you and things that used to work really well when you were raising your kids in this church just don't work as well for your children and grandchildren and great grandchildren, or for the newer residents of this area.

And we're getting older. I look around at meetings and see all the vibrant, faithful, dedicated leaders of our church getting older and I wonder: 10 years from now, will you still be able to serve? And this makes me sad, because I know you and love you and wish I could keep you around forever, but that's not how life works, and that's not your fault either!

So take a moment to turn to your neighbor and say: “It’s not your fault!”

The Good News: We have 10 years! It’s what our DS sees, it’s what our church consultant sees, it’s what I see. We have 10 whole years in which to move faithfully and adaptively towards what God is calling us to become!

If we make it our goal NOW that 10 years from now we want to be a vital, growing, disciple-making church here in Oak Grove we have time:

- to discern God’s calling,
- time to dream about what this church could act like 10 years from now,
- to experiment,
- to fail-forward,
- time to choose a course and to make course corrections along the way.

Because you have served God so faithfully, Oak Grove UMC is in a lot better shape than many of the other churches in the OR-ID Annual Conference, and most of the other churches in our Portland area District! My clergy colleges are envious that I get to do ministry with You! They drool over our Nurture Team that organizes people to visit with our home-bound folks so that I’m not the only one who does visitation. When I tell them about the events I don’t plan, that I just show up and support -- there are audible sighs of, “ohhh, that would be nice.” And when they see pictures of me surrounded with kids doing the children’s message -- well, a lot of churches in our district don’t have any children in their congregations at all. We have children and youth, we have great volunteers and staff, and we have a solid financial footing. Thanks to your faithfulness.

So take a moment to turn to your neighbor and say: “Well done, good and faithful servant!” (Mt 25:23)

10 years!

It’s not your fault that the ways of doing church that used to work don’t work so well anymore.

And

You are good and faithful servants who have done, and continue to do a lot of things right!

So...

What do we need to change within our church to move towards a faithful and vibrant future 10 years from now?

**(slide 6: )**

1. We need to **Create New Spaces for New People**. The big clue that tells me this is that I hear people complaining, "I just don't know everybody anymore." Social scientists tell us we can only know the names of about 150 people at any given time. So this is actually good news! It means that we have been growing. But it also means that we need to be intentional about including new people and also be intentional about including some people who have been here a while, but are just feeling stuck on the margins. This means that I will be asking many of you to participate in some small groups with people you don't know... yet. Essentially I'm asking, are you willing to be a part of creating a future for this church by making a new friend or two for the sake of the gospel?

**(slide 7: )**

2. We need to **develop new leadership**. I am hearing from people who want to be able to retire or just take a sabbath from their current ministries. And that's healthy! Volunteering should not be a life-sentence! Can I get an Amen? I'm also hearing from other people who might be willing to serve, but they don't know how to get involved, or what really needs to be done, and they wonder if maybe it would be OK if they did things a little differently? We need to be intentional about inviting new people into leadership -- intentional about sharing our current methods, and intentional about being open to new ways of doing things. That last one can be a little hard to hear, so let me restate it: we need to be intentional about valuing the gifts and insights that new people bring. Even if it results in us doing some things differently.

**(slide 8: )**

3. We need to do some **updating and reorganizing.** Technology has changed, communication styles have changed, and our culture's relationship with church has changed. Systems that used to work perfectly 20, 30, 50 years ago just don't work anymore. So we need to update and then keep updating our systems to keep up with the constant pace of change. -- We're already working on that and I know it's a little uncomfortable and confusing sometimes. It will probably get a little bit worse before it gets a lot better. But it will get better.

I'm excited! I'm excited because you are already faithfully working on the changes God is calling us into for this next season in the ministry of Oak Grove United Methodist Church.

I want to acknowledge that the Death and Resurrection pattern of our faith is not easy or comfortable to live into in these seasons when God calls us to die to our familiar, old ways of being;

But we will rise!

**(slide 9: )**

**I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.(Phil 1:6)**

Next week I'll offer part 2 of A Year Later. I'll revisit the topics of Sabbath, disappointment and how community outreach could be a part of our 10 year

Children's Message:

(props: handheld mic)

Usually during children's message you are learning from me. Today, I want to learn from you.

What's your favorite part of church? What do you like best about how we do church?

If you grew up to be the Pastor, what's one thing you would do differently?

