

**Remarks at *Open Arms* Leadership Gathering
By Pastor Timothy Olson**

I want to thank each of you for being part of this ***Open Arms*** Leadership Gathering tonight. I've been asked by some folks what qualifies one to be considered a leader; to be "invited" to this event. Firstly, everyone was invited - just as God invites all to join in the great feast of the reign of God. Secondly, I think about a young man named Josh.

I was with a group of young people at confirmation camp. They were given a project to figure out and complete, and I was to observe only - offer no support. While several of the youth jockeyed to take the role of "boss" and others resisted; while many worked first to adopt a pecking order, Josh shrugged, and quietly, all by himself dumped out the bag of resources and read the instructions. Then he just started to do the task. Pretty soon the other young people had to ask Josh what they could do if they wanted to help. Some others sulked. Josh was a leader because he showed up and did the task; he made the effort.

What makes you a leader is not some office you hold or deed you have done; it is not a status you earned. No, being a leader in the church means being a follower. Being a leader here tonight means that you showed up. In the busyness of our suburban lifestyle where we give away our time to lots of people and things, you took a couple hours out of your busy life and showed up. That is a witness to your faith and makes you a leader. Disciples lead when they follow, when they do, when they act. Thanks for being a leader by following Jesus.

Tonight we are here to consider the work God has given us to do to make our *Open Arms* vision and campaign happen. I'd like to turn to one of my favorite passages from all of scripture to reflect just a bit about our work together. It is from Paul as he writes to the congregation at Philippi:

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. 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."
(*Philippians 1:2-6*)

It is a favorite for me because I can often look at the dedicated, faithful, disciples of this congregation and say right along with Paul, "I thank my God every time I remember you."

It is a favorite of mine because it reminds each of us who follow Jesus that we are "sharing in the gospel." The work is not Paul's, it is shared by all.

It is a favorite of mine because Paul expresses confidence that **the "work" of being the church, sharing God's love, is powered by God's grace and that what God calls for will come to pass:** "the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ."

So, what exactly is the "good work" that God seems to promise to complete among us through this ***Open Arms*** Campaign? Five years from now, after this three-year campaign is "in the books" we'll either have led by doing, giving, responding to the vision or we'll have stayed stuck in something else. **When I think five years out I hope, I pray, I am confident, like Paul that**

we'll be able to say "God, who began a good work in us did not fail to see it through to completion." What will that look like five years hence?

As we take to the work of **renewing our worship space and repairing our building**, I hope that five years from now people will see the work of God that has been completed:

- By shaping a worship space that, without any people or words in it, proclaims that this congregation encounters God in Word and sacrament as they look at a prominent font, table and a single place for the Word read and preached;
- By making worship space that has kept pace with the changes and renewal of the whole church and makes intentional space for musicians that is more than an afterthought;
- By providing bathrooms that our friends from Mosaic and those who use wheelchairs and such can actually use without an elevator; and where finding a spot in worship for the same folks is both welcoming and central;
- By providing the resources that make sure worship can use effectively all the changes in media and communications so that worship connects in the way that people actually see and listen in our age;
- By tending our building so that it no longer says to our neighbors "we are uncommitted" or "we are declining" and instead provides proof that we are willing to invest in being a vital part of the community.

As we take to the work of **providing space we don't have for mission and establish a presence in the spiritually neglected and growing part of our community**, I think that five years from now people will see the work of God that has been completed:

- In a people who both maintained and improved a space that appeals to and serves those who grew up loving the church, but also had the foresight and courage to make a place to gather those who will not step inside a conventional church because they have been hurt or misled;
- In a place that very visibly serves the needs of the hungry in a community that has so much;
- In the courage to not allow a lack of space and an inability to build to stifle the growth of mission and ministry.

As we take to the work of **sharing 10% of our campaign gifts and establishing a working Mission Trust Fund**, I believe that in five years people will see the work of God that has been completed from the tithe of our gifts to support:

- [MOSAIC](#) in their ministry to provide love, care and support to clients in ways they could not have done without our gifts;
- A new ELCA congregation in the prison at Anamosa where inmates find the gospel and the saving love of Christ inside those walls because Holy Trinity provided the financial support for a pastor;
- [The ELCA Fund for Leaders](#) so that a seminarian who comes right from Southeastern Iowa and graduates with less or no debt to proclaim the gospel and lead God's people because we helped;
- [The ELCA World Hunger Appeal](#) to fill stomachs, empower and stand with people facing hunger around the world because we helped do its good work;

- The HTLC Mission Trust Fund as we grant scholarships we can give to our own young people and grants to ministries that matter through our active, rather than dormant, Mission Trust Fund.

I have every confidence that God will open our arms to look like Jesus; that God will provide every blessing in abundance so that the work is completed through us; that this presents only a small sampling of the **abundant work God will complete in us through our support of this vision and campaign.**
Thanks be to God.