



PASTOR'S PONDER

As we continue to make our way out of the pandemic years, I've begun to think about what we might have learned from it, to assess what has been

lost, what has been gained... what has changed irreparably, and what to do

with what we have now. There are children old enough to be walking, who escaped the brunt of it—and others, just a bit older, who will be entering school for the first time this fall with indelible experiences of masks and isolation. How have you fared?

One thing I learned during Covid is that I enjoy designing and putting in a pretty garden. Over two years, I created four planting areas full of interesting, colorful, and diverse varieties of flowering plants. My goal was to create a place of beauty for passers-by to enjoy, to give them something to smile at in a world of fear and loss—to provide a visual diversion to remind us that goodness and beauty are always the best part of this gift of a life, and that it continues to be so even during times of trauma and sadness. I was fortunate that my son was able to come and do much of the heavy lifting—turning over earth using gardening tools inherited from my grandfather, dragging and spreading 24 cubic yards of mulch—while I had the joy of choosing plants, putting them into the freshly enriched soil, tending them, watching them develop. I treasured the moments when passing pedestrians smiled or gave me a thumbs up, or chatted from a safe distance, unmasked, outdoors.

Some of the lessons gleaned from gardening will stick with me: plants need water on a regular basis, some daily, some less often, but every growing thing needs moisture. That seems obvious, but I learned from daily observation which plants love water to thrive, which do well with a hit-and-miss approach, which prefer sand and sun over monsoons.

As you might imagine, it occurred to me that congregants are much the same: some crave constant attention, some just faithfully show up, some are there occasionally, and others simply reach out in times of crisis and celebration. I think that's why our congregational structure developed as it is. One minister cannot be all things to all people all of the time—and so we have Elders and Deacons and a Consistory to pitch in and work together to assess and meet the diversity of pastoral and practical needs around us, sensitive as a group to who needs what, and when.

Old Saratoga is blessed with a wonderful core of individuals who cooperate to meet everyone's needs—with the confidence that if something or someone is missed, that God's own Self is there and available, always, even when people are not. Together, we treasure each and all of you faithful souls! On another note, it is well known that pastoral wisdom for new ministers includes the mantra, "Make no major changes in your first year; learn, listen, look, pray." We have come to the end of my ninth month here as "the new pastor"—time enough, it occurs to me, to give birth to a new life! I continue to follow the wisdom of generations of people entering new congregations—and ask that you, too, continue to pray with and for me, and for this new era of ministry and mission at our lovely Old Saratoga Reformed Church. I am ever aware that together we hold this place in trust for the future that God has in store for it... and seek your inspiration on how we might most effectively and faithfully

meet God there, and now. I have a few ideas... what are yours? In the meantime, see you around this summer! -- In faith, *Pastor Susan*