

Woodside World

CHURCH NEWS of CONGREGATION and COMMUNITY

Woodside Church is a progressive Christian community committed to nurturing freedom, honesty and diversity, where members and friends live Jesus' way of social justice.

Rev. Dr. Deborah DeMars Conrad, Pastor

Anne Oper, Office Manager

from the pastor...

Man, there's a lot going on.
A pipeline under protest in North Dakota.
Water still poisoning us in flint.
A new president-elect is starting to realize how big is the job he wanted so badly.
And here at Woodside, we've just put our building on the market.

It's going to be a time.

A few days before election day, I got an email from my former state representative in Louisville:

"Dear Pastor,

Thank you for serving our Lord and feeding His sheep! Because of the nation's leadership crisis, I'm coming to you in the name of Jesus to make a request. Would you ask your flock this Sunday to consider fasting and praying for virtuous leadership in the home, the church and the government during the 12 hours of voting on Election day? ...Can our country survive as a free nation in a culture that celebrates sin and defies God? I believe the answer is "Yes" if there's still a remnant left that will repent of sin and return to the Lord Jesus with all their hearts ...The stakes are titanic; let us not forget that we have a duty to our Lord to impact our culture for the glory of God."

Of course, the letter went on for several paragraphs, and the underlining and bold type is his, not mine. He signed it "blessings, Tom Riner." I don't imagine he would mind my telling you his name. It is worth noting that he sent this from a state email address on state letterhead.

There's a lot going on. Spikes in hate crimes; land grabs against our Native American brothers and sisters; credible threats to enforce a registration for our Muslim siblings, endorsed by a soon-to-be White House advisor who isn't at all bothered by the parallels folks are drawing to the Japanese internment camps during WWII; plans to deport millions of tax-paying Hispanic and Latino workers; talk of dedicating federal dollars to conversion therapy for LGBT folks, and a return to stop-and-frisk, which will mostly target black Americans. Plus poisoned water and climate change and poverty and lost economic opportunities, a wealthy class that keeps getting wealthier, and a war that never seems to end. And a whole lot of it perpetuated in the name of God.

Riner added a postscript to his letter, including links to articles showing "how my son and I have tried to honor God in the public square." I'm sure he thinks that is exactly what he is doing with this letter to me – and who knows how many other ministers. Honoring God, calling people to repent on the taxpayers' dime.

There's a lot going on in our community, in our world, in our congregation. Theocracy isn't the answer.

America has a complicated and unattractive relationship with religion, and theocracy cannot begin to honor the diverse people that we are. But it *is* important for church to be church, to reflect God's vision as we see it, to proclaim an alternative to oppressive and exploitative empire.

This is stewardship season at Woodside, time to ponder our resources and revisit our priorities, like shedding our wonderful building to go with something a bit less grand, for the sake of the work we are called to do. Mission Over Mansion. It is also the time when we ask faithful worshippers and supporters to make financial pledges to this congregation's future, which is still emerging, still coming into focus.

This Sunday, we'll bring back our pledges, offer them in worship. We'll ask God's blessings on our intentions, and dedicate ourselves to a vision. Our vision, despite Mr. Riner's appeal, is not of theocracy, not of a world that targets vulnerable people, not of a world that embraces or endorses exclusion and hatred. It is instead a vision of community, a place for all, people willing to stand together, to step up for each other, to recognize that my life isn't whole if your life isn't also whole. Lions and lambs together, swords turned into plowshares, the common good at front and center.

There are a lot of folks who don't see Jesus the same way we do. We at Woodside are ok with that. We embrace religious freedom here. But we will not, cannot, embrace religion-based bigotry, state-sponsored discrimination based on religious edicts of how some people are to be perpetually under-valued. It is important that we counter Mr Riner and others; and since we (rightly) don't have a state-funded email server, we depend on one another and gather together our own gifts to fund the work of building a peaceable kingdom.

If this vision inspires you, you are invited. I hope you will consider your support. Please bring your pledges to worship this Sunday at 11, and let's dedicate ourselves anew to divine imagination.

There's a lot going on. Pipeline, water, climate, bias. We are here together, in the midst of it all, doing what it necessary, speaking truth, living love, walking faithfully toward something we cannot yet see. It is a gift and a pleasure to be here with you. Thank you for your willingness, for your faith, for your courage.

With you on the unfolding journey,

- pastor deb,

THIS WEEK AT WOODSIDE 11/20 - 11/26

SUN: 11/13 9:30 am Adult classes
 11 am Worship
then, coffee & Conversation

MON: 11/14 Office Closed

WED: 11/16 7 pm Choir Rehearsal

HAVE YOU NOTICED THE CHOIR HAS, LIKE, DOUBLED?

They say they're having a heckuva a good time -- and you're welcome to join them, 7-8 pm Wednesdays. It's time to start learning Advent and Christmas music! So, come and make a joyful noise! Note: we WILL have rehearsal on Nov 23.

"CLEAN THE OFFICE" PARTY! Thank you to Linda Worstenholm, Jim Abbott, Karen Eaton and Mindy and Jessica Scroggins who helped clean the church office on Friday. It looks great; hopefully, we can keep it that way. (No promises. That's why they call it "work space.")

MISSION OVER MANSION, our 2017 stewardship campaign is happening. A pledge invitation has been mailed to each worshipper, and is certainly available to everyone else! We'll dedicate these in worship Sunday, so please bring it along. Didn't get one? Lost it? We'll have more available Sunday!

CHRISTMAS FOR SOMEBODY ELSE.

Woodside has again committed to providing Christmas for 100 children from several dozen families. Some gift information sheets are still available, including gift ideas, sizes and such (suggested \$20-30 for each). Wrapped gifts are due at Woodside by Sun, Dec 4.

We are hoping again to provide a \$50 grocery gift card for each family as well. Contributions for these can be made by check payable to Woodside with the memo "minister's discretionary fund".

A LOOK AHEAD

ADVENT BEGINS SUN, NOV 27. We try not to rush the seasons, so we're going to take our time with Advent. Prophecies, advent music, blue candles, a subdued but hopeful time. These 4 weeks are good for our spirits, so please plan to worship.

WHAT ABOUT CHRISTMAS? Next week, we'll have more details about Christmas stuff, right here in Woodside World. Spoiler Alert: you're going to love it.

FOR THE MOMENT, JUST MARKS THESE DATES:

Dec 21, 7 pm: The Longest Night, worship when Christmas joy is hard to find.

Dec 24, 8 pm: Christmas Candlelight Worship

AMONG THE THINGS WE CARE ABOUT:**CAPPS - the Citizens Alliance on Prisons & Public Spending**

One of the issues we've had with our criminal justice system in Michigan is the way we do parole. Folks agitating for reform are finally getting some traction, and there's a bill working its way through the Michigan legislature: House Bill 4138 "The Case for Smart and Safe Parole Reform."

What will it do?

This bill is intended to transform prisoners from tax burdens to taxpayers. It will save money, and give deserving folks a shot at a new life.

Michigan spends nearly \$2 billion a year on corrections. Our parole board keeps many people behind bars beyond the time they are first eligible for parole, whether or not they are a risk to public safety. As a result, we spend tens of millions of dollars that could be invested in economic revitalization and public safety priorities.

HB4138 will *safely* reduce the need for **3,200** prison beds in just 5 years.

How can it do all that?

Current law requires the parole board to release people to parole supervision who score low risk on the MI Dept of Corrections parole guidelines, unless there are "substantial and compelling reasons" to deny parole. However, "substantial and compelling" is not defined in the statutes, and some parole board members rely on subjective rationales for denying parole, thus keeping people in prison longer than they should be.

HB4138 defines "substantial and compelling reasons" and provides consistent, objective criteria to guide parole board decision-making.

Why isn't this dangerous?

This is a modest reform with limited eligibility. It only applies to low-risk prisoners who have served the sentence imposed by the court. The bill also only applies to those who are sentenced *after* the bill is enacted.

The Pew Center for the States found that Michigan had the longest average prison length of stay of the 35 states it studied in 2009. Inconsistent parole decisions have helped drive up the population, thus driving up corrections spending. But national and state research shows that simply keeping people incarcerated longer does not increase public safety. Plus, under HB4138, the board still retains its authority to deny parole whenever the evidence shows it is in the interest of public safety.

Bottom line: "Safe and Smart" parole reform = \$75 million annual savings.

What happens next?

HB 4138 passed the House of Representatives by a bipartisan 95-12 majority in June and is now pending in the Senate Government Operations Committee.

How can I help?

If you can get behind this cost-saving, life-redeeming reform, contact your senator to support HB 4138.

The Committee chair is Senator Arlan Meekof, (517) 373-6920. If you need more info, or for more about CAPPS' other initiatives, go to <http://2015capps.capps-mi.org> or talk to Jay Cummings.