

Introduction- written and presented by Sharon Core

Begin with prayers for Susan's mom—silence and then spoken prayer.

Brothers and Sisters, when I left on sabbatical last June, I had no idea what I would find when I got back. I knew there were a number of things in the works—Shannon Kiser was our New Church Development Coach, a vision team had been formed, Beth Friend had been hired as the Stated Supply, elders were taking charge of worship.

What would the summer hold for both of us? How would we each experience the presence of God during this time apart? Were there ways God was keeping us in touch with one another even though we weren't together?

When I returned, I discovered that God had been active and present in your midst. The vision team, engaged in the commitments of scripture study, prayer, regular worship and community engagement, was sensing a vision from God for the life of this congregation. They shared the beginnings of that with you in August and everyone came away from that gathering with a sense of excitement and the conviction that it was now time to do something.

We are here tonight, because we are now moving into that “doing something” phase. We have spent several years in discernment mode, and now it is time to claim this vision that has been given to us.

The vision team has written their final report and submitted it to session. Session has received the report and has approved their recommendations. A copy of that report was sent out via e-mail and by postal mail to those without e-mail addresses. The report captures 8 months worth of faithful engagement and for all who have been present for the weekly sharings in worship, reading the weekly e-mail blasts, and engaging with the team in conversation, you see in a clear presentation many, many hours of prayer, Bible Study and listening.

Now comes the time to wrestle with and dive into this vision more deeply. The three parts of the vision—discipleship, crossroads, and affordable housing—will be presented tonight by members of the vision team. After each presentation there will be time for conversation. As you listen and engage, I invite you to consider this:

Is this a compelling enough vision that you would be willing to sacrifice time, and energy? Is this a vision you would be willing to sink your heart and soul into? Is this a vision you would be willing to work on—there is still a lot that needs to be done, many next steps and each part of this vision has opportunities for engagement and action. At the end of this evening, you will have the opportunity to bless this work that has been done and the work that will need to continue. Is this vision one you can bless—with your encouragement, with your time, with your energy?

Now, is this a done deal? No, it's not and at the end of the evening, we can say "no". And it is okay if that is the answer, but then we are people without a vision. And then we have a whole other set of decisions to make. The reality is that our current course is unsustainable. Session is not going to form another vision team. So, then what do we do?

When we started down this road, we committed this time to pursue Mission Redefinition—to see if we could develop a consensus around a new mission for APC in South Arlington. What the vision team brings to us is a vibrant vision for ministry along Columbia Pike. This is the vision of those who have worked to discern it and are willing to pursue it.

So, now we gather and talk and pray and listen—in fact, this very conversation tonight is part of the vision—is this a captivating enough vision for those of us here? Are we ready to move forward? Are we ready to “do something”? Are we ready to put our energy and time into God's hand and lead us to what comes next?

Discipleship, crossroad, affordable housing. We begin with discipleship.