

Dear Members and Friends of First Pres,

August 8, 2017

Wow! Wow! Wow! What a celebration! You all certainly know how to throw a party!!

People have asked me if Sunday's celebration of the 25th anniversary of my service to God and to you as your pastor was a surprise. Well, honestly I had an inkling that something was up, but I had no idea about the magnitude of the plans! You all worked hard to keep it a secret for a very long time! (You can relax now – no more sneaking behind my back or having to tell little “white” lies to me!!) However, it sounds like you all had a lot of fun planning and that the large number of people involved worked very well together!

I was and continue to be overwhelmed by your generosity and thoughtfulness. What a tastefully lavish celebration and how thoughtfully each detail was considered! How can I thank you enough?

I am reminded of Paul's words to the Corinthians: “I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Jesus Christ.” (I Cor. 1:4). This congregation is full of God's grace. I have and will continue to thank God for you, for you are a wonderful congregation, brimming with love for God and people, and full of joy in serving Jesus as Christ followers. That love and joy gushed forth on Sunday! Thank you for showering me with love and joy!

I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your prayers, as well as for all the kind words both spoken and written, the generous and thoughtful gifts, the delicious food so lovingly prepared, the gorgeous flowers, and the lovely decorations. (Purple! My favorite color!!) I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the beautiful, meaningful music, the photographs that were being taken throughout the morning and afternoon, and the thousands of things you did behind the scenes over many months to make it all come together in such an awesome event.

Thank you for coming to the celebration itself, for the event wouldn't have been the same had you not been there. Thank you to the many people who sent cards and letters from near and far – I will enjoy reading them for years to come. Thank you for the many gifts to the pastor's discretionary fund. What a wonderful way to pass forward or love, faith and joy. Thank you for letting me sit in the pew and not preach on Sunday – that is a great gift, too!

I thank you for giving me the privilege and honor of serving you and God as your pastor for these 25 years. That in and of itself is such a gift to me! I thank you and God for the grace you show each other and me in offering forgiveness for mistakes and failures (I am human, too, just like you!), for we all stand on the same ground at the same level at the foot of the cross of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I thank you for serving God and Jesus through our church, not just at last Sunday's celebration, but each and every day. There is no substitute for the particular God-given gifts and graces that each of you can and will offer in service to the Lord through the church. What's more, what you do is important and makes an eternal difference.

So onward into the next many years!! There's more for us to do! Let's roll up our sleeves and get back to work pouring forth the same love, joy and faith not just on each other but also on our neighbors near and far!

*With love and gratitude for you,
Betsey*