

Message from the Moderator – AMC 2023

After several years of holding our breath, trying to remain upright in the face of adversity and wary of the consequence of releasing too much pressure, we at AMC are, between the occasional cough and wheeze, finally breathing out.

With the absence of covid related restrictions and with the benefit of a full-time pastor for the better part of the year, 2023 has seen the resumption of many aspects of church life. The church basement is regularly used for children's activities and the occasional potluck. The sanctuary is routinely seating 50-60 attendees or more, up from 30-40 in 2021 and parts of 2022. We have had a group of active deacons that are doing visits, arranging flowers, and collaborating with our pastor on how to meet the needs of our congregation. People are continuing to volunteer their time, energy, and resources to help discover what could be at AMC.

Breathing out is a natural part of life. We would not have been able to hold our breath forever and, in my view, we were able to breath out before succumbing entirely. But exhaling too deeply has its own risks. We have enjoyed leaning into having a full-time pastor, delegating to her many tasks and responsibilities carried by volunteers for the past several years. It is impossible to overstate the positive impact that Erika Enns Rodine has brought to our congregation. But the future of AMC does not lie in one person's hands and there is a risk that we exhale too deeply, relying on one person to support the congregation.

Thankfully, I believe we continue to navigate this challenge well. While our planned Pastor Support Committee did not materialize in the way it was envisioned at our congregational meeting in November 2022, a multitude of people are supporting Erika in various ways. Deacons, parents, committee members, staff, and individual congregants have all connected with Erika in various ways and continue to support her.

Learning to breath out well is also about learning when to breath in. We are still discovering what comes next for AMC and will need to breath in in order to take on new projects and initiatives. Like singing in a choir (although inverting my metaphor), the best outcome is where we take turns breathing in and out, cycling the responsibility of church life while maintaining a consistent presence. In this case, we will still need a steady stream of people ready to breath in, step forward, and carry part of the load.

We made a decision in our budget, and expect to make the same decision in our budget this year, to maintain a full-time pastor. While there are elements of pride and status associated with this decision, it is primarily, in my view, a question of capacity. We want the ability to do more. We want the ability to take on new initiatives and respond to new opportunities. We want to participate in and have a positive impact on our local community and the wider community.

The decision to have a full-time pastor was made with the knowledge that it is likely more pastor time than we need simply to meet the needs of our congregation. It is my understanding that it is common to allocate 55-60% of church recourses to staffing costs. In our case, however, we are allocating closer to 65%. Our new budget anticipates an increase to staffing costs of 17% (primarily as a result of Erika being

employed for 12 months instead of 10.5, but also inflation increases), pushing us further from the norm and placing additional pressure on committees to not spend their budget.

The 2023 budget was adopted as an investment. It is my sense that we have taken that as investment in ourselves as an opportunity to breath out. I think that has been worthwhile and I know I have benefited from that as well. The next step, in my view, is to invest in learning to breath well. Not breathing in or out too deeply, but also remembering to do both. In the words of St. Francis of Assisi, "it is in giving that we also receive". It is in the breathing in and out that we are sustained and that we make space for the spirit to move and guide the work of our congregation.

There are new risks that I am mindful of. There is the risk that we find success in meeting or exceeding our budget. There is a risk that we see success as increasing attendance and donations. There is a risk that we see works as our objective and succumb to the trappings of what a church "should" be. I am prone to this kind of analysis and am mindful that it is not a proper measure of success for church life.

But it is in the giving that we also receive. It is in breathing that we find life. We have demonstrated significant capacity and are deliberately investing in pastoral supports to increase this capacity. Let's use this capacity to unfurl the next chapter of AMC and do new things that gives life to our community and invites people in to participate in the life of AMC.

-- Loren Braul