



**2017 Charge Conference Report
Rev. Troy Benton – Senior Pastor
October 2017**

Ministry at St. John's in 2017 has been both challenging and encouraging. We have had days where God's grace has been abounding, and other days that have been difficult. St. John's is under construction by the Holy Spirit, retooling by life and reassessment for the next phase of our journey by leaders, congregation, and clergy. More than ever, we have been called and claim our purpose and missional mandate: "to lead people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ."

We are actively finalizing our 2017-2019 Strategic Plan, while we equip new staff for the next areas of ministry we are being called to take on. St. John's, I cannot thank you enough for your willingness to engage in true risk-taking mission and ministry that matters! Each of you has paid sizeable costs to do this work in heart, head, and soul. I have taken this journey with you, and know it has not often been easy. In the midst of these days, we have seen some transition to new streams of faith journey. We wish them only God's best, as we welcome those who are new to our family and join us in the work of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. In the midst of these days, we have also seen baptisms, transfers of new persons, confirmations of young people, and new leaders emerge. God has continued to be good!

We have discovered our need to engage in the work of understanding each other in careful and holistic ways. The work we will take on through our partners, JUSTPEACE will be instrumental to the health of our church and our intra-relationships long-term. I look forward to what God will do to move us forward, and take the work seriously. As we work on ourselves as a church family and as leaders, we also will continue to answer the call of our district and conference with great joy to serve as leaders and invite others from around the conference and beyond to learn and live for Christ through trainings and other means of development.

St. John's continues to offer strong and diverse worship experiences. We will expand our offerings in January with BLUEPRINT. This service that will focus on young adults will reach into the SIUE community, and other neighborhoods around our church area. Masterpiece, our specialized ministry will continue to move forward. Possibilities for new ministries and new configurations of ministries will be shared beginning January 2018. CNLD will lean in even more to offer training and support to our program teams. Missions will continue to be our staple in living out our faith, and will expand their work to those areas of our world that have been unfortunately hit by natural disasters. Many new leaders have evolved, and those persons will take their place and put their stamp on all we do very soon. Please pray for these persons.

Prayer will be a major focus for us in 2018! Look for ways you can take your faith to another level, and ways you can be in prayer for many, including this servant leader.

Our Children's & Family, as well as our Youth Ministries have transformative possibilities before them. Recent days have brought both times of concern and call to recalibrate. In prayer, I have both understood our need to shore these areas up, but also take on the words of Isaiah where he hears God speak "I am preparing to do a new thing." (Isaiah 43). May we be open to the wind of the Holy Spirit, expecting God to do more than we can imagine.

Discipleship in the lives of St. John's has to grow as an often used measuring tool for us. How we live into being a learning community will determine our level of strength. I am thankful for our Discipleship ministry team that will offer classes, small groups, and other offerings to know God, and be known by God.

I have said this often since my arrival, and will say it again, and mean it every time: it is a holy honor to serve the people of St. John's UMC! I remain as last year with this solemn request: FOCUS on what God is asking, ignore what is not related to the work of John 3:16 and Mt. 28:19-20, and LOVE ONE ANOTHER! Our world awaits the witness of the church of God on ways we can love, not divide and hurt. In 2017, St. John's must take these days to live this faith, fuel God's fruit growing here, and put its stake in the ground of God's growing witness in Edwardsville and beyond.

Our sermon theme for 2018 is "Fresh Start". The text will show us ways of starting new in faith, family, finances, and following God. I pray you are ready to see things in new ways, walk in victory!

St. John's will continue to be fiscally sound in ways that support our purpose. The opportunities in this area are many, but we must consider two among all. First, we will strive to grow even more than we are now in being "joyful givers" (2 Cor. 8 & 9). We also must consider the legacy we must secure for the next generation and begin to care for this cost ourselves.

As I promised in 2016, I promise these again:

1. I'm going to love the people of St. John's, and there is nothing anyone can do about it.
2. I'm going to help us grow in being a praying congregation.
3. I will continue to make preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ here a priority.
4. I will encourage us to seek excellence as a standard.
5. God has granted this church an excellent staff that will grow and get better every day.
6. Our uniqueness must be capitalized on.
7. Salvation, redemption, biblical acumen, and full discipleship are elements central for our members.
8. We will keep our eyes on what is the "new thing" that will appear unexpected, while honoring, in healthy ways, the history we have as a church.

It is an honor to serve. I am having an amazing time in the ministry of Jesus Christ through this outpost of God's plan. Thanks to St. John's and to the Illinois Great Rivers Conference for this wonderful privilege.

Redeemed, Ready, & Reaching...

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rev. Troy Benton". The signature is stylized and includes a large, sweeping flourish that extends to the right.

Rev. Troy Benton, Senior Pastor