



September 2014

Dear Friends in Christ,

16 years has flown by. Thank you for your prayers and partnership over these 16 years. Thank you for your friendship and support. I have so many good memories from my time with you at Peace.

1. **Adult Bible Class.** Thanks for the great discussions which admonished and edified me with the wisdom of God's Word. We read and discussed 95 percent of the New Testament and over half of the Old Testament. I will always treasure this time around God's Word with people who honored the authority of God's Word but were not afraid to ask tough questions of the Bible.

2. **Drama.** Thank you for encouraging and helping me to use drama in worship with monologs, mimes, and Sunday School Christmas programs. I will always treasure having Ervin tell me that "Pastor Phil is a pretty good actor also."

3. **Music.** Sometimes it's hard for preachers to worship from the heart because they are always thinking about what comes next. But the music we shared together in worship helped me to forget about myself and focus on God. I remember Matt asking me, "How do you get the old folks to sing along on contemporary songs?" I am grateful for Julia and Heidi and their leadership with the organ and for Marla and Brad and their leadership in the praise band.

4. **Mission trips.** One of the most wonderful moments in my life was representing you at the dedication of community wells in Naigoma and Kirongo. I will never forget the joy of those well dedications along with the heartbreak of looking into the eyes of orphans who have nothing in this world.

5. **Vacation Bible School.** I am grateful to Connie, Cindy, Carol, and Chandra for their service as VBS leaders. I had a blast leading music and drama, and especially meeting young Christians in the catacombs (otherwise known as the furnace room).

6. **LCMC.** The transition to LCMC was hard, but it has been well worth it. There is a freedom, a spirit of humility and honesty, a passion for mission, and a love for Jesus in LCMC that refreshes and encourages me. I am grateful that Peace Lutheran Church was open to considering a call to move to LCMC.

7. **Compassion.** I have officiated at 150 funerals at Peace. We went through the tornado recovery of 2003 together. And in those moments of loss and sadness, I have been encouraged by your compassion and kindness to those in need. Real community is getting harder and harder to find and maintain in our fragmented and polarized world. But you have been family to me and to many over the past years.

8. **Ordinations.** What a joy to celebrate and ordain Tim Koester and Connie Raess in the ministry of God's Word! A congregation in mission is always excited to send out members to serve the wider church and God's mission in the world. So we also celebrated Lindsey Mueller answering the call to serve orphans in Uganda and Stacey Duensing answering the call to go to seminary.

9. **Outreach concerts.** We enjoyed the music of Peder Eide, Mark Schultz, Ken Medema, Watoto Children's Choir, The Blackwood Brothers and others and the drama of Jonathan Swenson and Michael Reardon. I am grateful for those who worked hard to bring these special guests to our community to share the Word of God in creative ways.

10. **People.** I thank God for leaders like Bill (5 years as president) and Paul (3 years as president). Together that is half of my 16 years. Their dedication to the mission of Peace helped make my job a joy. I thank God for Marla (over 13 years as our office administrator) who tried to make me look good by remembering things I forgot or hadn't thought of. I thank God for volunteers like Linda who always said "of course" with a smile when I needed someone to organize a benefit or fellowship event. And I can name hundreds of you who have been good friends, who have blessed me with kind words and smiles, who have prayed and served and helped give public praise to the name of Jesus. It is often the humble and small things that have the deepest and longest impact. Thank you for seeking, celebrating, and sharing the peace of Christ with me.

Yours in Christ, *Phil Nielsen*