



Congregational Blessing

Given: November 18, 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters

...of the Olathe Congregation,

It has been nearly a month since we were in your midst as a team bringing you the verbal portion of the Blessing on your congregation. That time has flown, but, during that time, the Evangelist Team has been thinking about you.

We remember with gratitude your warm welcome and hospitality that greeted us each time we came into your congregation. It began to feel like home. The openness with which we were accepted into your midst will never be forgotten. You became an important part of our lives and taught us new ways of addressing the blessing preparation. We are also grateful for the meaningful gift subscription to Holstee that has already started to come. Beautiful!

We appreciate the sincerity and dedication with which you prepared for your blessing. Your openness to God's presence in your congregation gave depth and meaning to the blessing when it came. The creative way in which you prepared for the blessing taught us new ways to approach the blessing process itself.

Going forward, we would like to continue to be of assistance as questions about your blessing arise. We will continue to be available for further interpretations or simply to listen to the plans for moving on in the festival that is Christ's presence in your midst. Call upon us singly or as a team to mentor you in interpreting the blessing's message. We know there is a lot there.

Go forward in the unity you have discovered during your preparations for your blessing and know we view this unity as part of the blessing itself.

The Olathe Evangelist Team —

Tom, Greg, Bob, Kris and Mikal

The Order of Evangelists

NOVEMBER 18, 2018

Gracious Lord:

Before us sits the Olathe Community of Christ, which has chosen to participate and journey with you to discern your will in the sacrament of congregational evangelist blessing. This congregation has been an active, vital role model for other congregations in Community of Christ for many years. The members' dedication, commitment, and consecration of resources have brought them to this moment. They have opened their hearts and minds like flowers over the past seven months to receive the blessing of your Holy Spirit in their community.

They sit on a foundation of like-minded explorers of the faith. Their founders, parents, families, singles, young, old, rich, poor, permanent, and passing through have worked together to create this family of Christ. Now this family wants to combine its gifts in a new way to become one with your mission for its community, its neighbors, and the world. Members turn to you today for guidance in this great adventure.

They have been a creative and generous people, loving each other into the community that sits here today. Now, as they look to the present and future, the congregation is asking questions: What is next? How should we proceed? What should we be, as a new expression of your will, in your peaceable kingdom?

They wish to build on their great foundation of faith, trusting you for guidance, trusting each other to work together to bring about your purposes. They are grateful for their many gifts and blessings. They are opening themselves to the grace of your blessing this day.

God, their desire to find you, has been evident in their journey of preparation for these last months. We humbly come to you for an outpouring of your Spirit, and ask for the guidance needed to become who you are calling them to be.

You see before you, Lord, a people longing for you.

Lead them, we pray.

Olathe Community of Christ, the Lord sees your dedication to one another and to God's mission, sees the longing of your hearts for God's people, and is pleased with your

preparation for this day.

The road has seemed long and maybe even difficult for some, but it has been good, and your preparations have been blessed. There has been a gentle softening of spirit among you as you have journeyed together toward this blessing. You have allowed yourselves to be expectant and open. Your eyes continually are opening and widening to see the movement of God in your lives. Blessings are pouring forth in ways you may not understand at this point. Seeds of peacemaking, seeds of commitment to life, and seeds of honest relationships have been planted more deeply. You are invited to deepen your ability to listen—to God’s call in your life, to the whispered and unspoken needs among you, to the pressing issues facing your communities, even the places where you live and work.

You have been loved with an everlasting love. This love has been with you from the beginning of your congregation, and your journey has been led by the Spirit that led your congregational ancestors to invest their time, money, and faith in this place. It is not coincidence that this journey was initiated as you walked this path as disciples together, for the Spirit has been at work within you in many ways over many years. Through faith in one another and in God’s Spirit that longs to pour out loving words and actions, your decision has led you here. It is a good and right place to be, and you have prepared well.

It has been stated numerous times that these words of blessing are not the blessing in and of themselves. The blessing began when you discerned that preparation would lead you into closer relationship with God and one another. You are to be commended for your trust in leaders who have guided you, have created resources and worship experiences to nurture your faith and bring you to remembrance of how God has been present to you throughout your individual and corporate lives as a congregation. The journey you have been on has not been easy. But know that you have not made this journey alone. Every moment of grace as well as challenge during this period of preparation has offered you the opportunity to discern who you truly are, and what your true capacity is in relationship to mission and God’s purposes.

Your heritage as a congregation is a gift to you and to the mission center. Many lives have been impacted by the generosity of you as a people, as well as by the tremendous gifts

that have been given to you for divine purposes. Continue to be grateful for your history and for those whose lives and gifts have brought you to this time and place. But as always, beware of creating idols of brick and stone, persons and program, sacrifice and story. Only God, who has led you and your people into this place and time, is to be worshiped. Continue to place your eyes on the One who sacrificed all on your behalf and on behalf of the world. Your focus on the Spirit, which mysteriously weaves you into unity amid your differing ideas and needs, pleases God. For God delights in being known by you. God seeks to be known even more personally and fully.

When you gather together, your love of family touches the heart of God. Your children of all ages bring joy to you and to God, whose love for them exceeds what you can imagine. God yearns for your children of all ages to look into the loving eyes of Jesus and to learn of their belovedness and eternal worth. Continue to share the good news of Jesus Christ and the gospel of love with them throughout their years, and include them in all aspects of your life as a congregation. As parents and grandparents, instill within them the story of the church from its beginnings, and encourage them to develop relationships with the worldwide church. Their gifts are needed to bring blessing to others outside your congregation, and there will be opportunities outside this congregation to be offered to them for their own blessing. Being Community of Christ means inviting all to broaden their circle to include so many others. They have similar longings for the peaceable kingdom, but their lives look very different from that of your children and loved ones. Empower them to grow deeper roots in the future of this movement and belong to the Community of Christ that gathers all around the world.

You are commended for guiding your children and youth in the path of Christ. Know that they are acceptable, yet in many places in this world, children and youth struggle to find a place and a way to belong. Here in this congregation they not only belong but are a critical part of the body of Christ. Continue to support them with unconditional love and acceptance. This is foundational to all ministries offered by the congregation. These groups are at the heart of important future programming and opportunities for ministry within this community.

Remember, culture and times change. Evaluation of classes, activities, programs, and worship through the eyes of children, youth, and young adults may reveal new and

different hopes and dreams for your congregation. Remind yourself often that these children and youth are more intelligent and tuned into their culture more than ever before. Mentor children and youth into full participating ministry, especially within worship experiences. This will challenge some people's ideas and traditions. However, viewing children and youth as ministers may open new possibilities and invitational ministries. Help them to understand their ministry is accepted, not as ministers in the future, but as ministers now.

The goal of this mentoring process is to deepen their relationship with God. It will take prayerful, intentional thought, but the ministry of children and youth will bring new energy, purpose, and expressions of God's kingdom. The church's seal is a symbol of how important the ministry of children and youth are to the community. Allow children and youth to help lead the journey into the heart of God. Remember, the "Latter Day Saint" movement, which is your heritage, started when a youth, age 14, risked and ventured into the woods. There he experienced the heart of God.

You have been good at "developing disciples to serve" over the years. Families have been nurtured in a way that has developed wholeness in their homes. Young people have experienced the Holy Spirit at transformative times and have been forever changed. However, what was once a deep disciple relationship with God may be only scratching the surface in today's culture. Because of God's Continuing Revelation to us, our understanding of God's purposes takes on new meanings and strategies for kingdom-building in Olathe. The journey into the heart of God requires a deeper, stronger, and more committed discipleship, including your relationships with God and each other. This kind of community may involve personal and collective sacrifices of traditions and expectations that have served you well over the years. The concept of sacramental living in your daily lives and within the congregation is a way to explore this deeper relationship with God. Through spiritual practices, scripture literacy, and experiences with sacraments, you can gain insights, direction, and spiritual maturity to go deeper into the heart of God. Zion may be closer than you think if the congregation begins to understand what it means to live sacramentally. Sometimes sacrificing the me for the we will open your eyes to new mission possibilities. Therefore, Olathe can be a place where people experience the mission

of Christ and find their place in the heart of God.

You are called to become a beacon to your community. A beacon of joy, hope, love, and peace to people who have never known any of these things. These people are in pain, and may seem difficult, but they have been taught to distrust those around them. Your peculiar giftedness, patience, and sensitivity can teach them to trust. There are those in this community who have such gifts, which will be awakened in them soon.

Remember that each person who enters this place is loved and cherished by God, and just as you tend to the needs of your families, please tend to the needs of all those who come into your midst. Extend your love of family to all, beyond bloodlines and households. There are those whose lives and ways of being are challenges to you. Consider these individuals also as gifts to the body, for in welcoming those who are foreign in any sense, you welcome the Christ among you. Open your ears to their stories, your hearts to their brokenness, and your arms to embrace them as brothers and sisters in Christ. The health of your community depends upon inclusivity, diversity, and grace extended to all.

The Lord calls on you to make an accounting of your gifts. You have many more than you realize. The gifts in your community, when combined, will take you to places far beyond what you now can see. Some people here today discount their gifts, yet those gifts will be the linchpins of new life in this community, transforming the world. Each of you is vitally important to the future of this community and the amazing, transformative plans God has for you. Emphasize the importance of even the seemingly smallest gift, because there is no such thing as a small gift in the kingdom of God!

As you look for ways to use your skills to help others, don't berate yourself because you can't help all people in all ways. That's why other gifts have been given to other people. It is through joint ministry, forgiveness, and worship that we can be blessings to creation and other souls longing to feel divine Presence. Trust in God.

Relax. Relax. Learn to offer what you have and what you can do without pressure for perfection. Model grace with yourselves and with others when it is called for. Risk inadequacy and vulnerability with one another and with God. It is only as you call upon God's strength and wisdom that you truly allow yourself to be used as vessels of the divine Spirit that longs to break forth from you and through you to bring blessing to all of

creation.

You all are precious in God's sight. You all are loved and are brought together for a purpose. God invites you into a life of sacrament, where each moment offers you the opportunity for divine grace. Sacramental living requires a renewal of whole-life stewardship. Remember, all that we have first was given to us by God. God's Grace and Generosity give us a stewardship of creation. Zion is an expression of God's generosity in Olathe. You have been "Blest to Be a Blessing." Your response to this call of blessing with your time, treasure, talent, and testimony is at the heart of your discernment and understanding of God's will for your congregation. Seeking the heart of God is the first step along the path toward the peaceable kingdom. As you discern and discover God's purposes for you, the building of Zion in Olathe will unfold. "Blest to Be a Blessing."

Don't be afraid. It will happen slowly, evolving into a powerful force for good as you grow through the years like a child growing into adulthood. Be patient. Persevere. Keep your light shining, and you will pierce the darkness that gathers around you.

BE BUILDERS OF FELLOWSHIP.

Provide opportunities to just be with each other, aware that the hectic pace of life often tends to separate us. Appreciate how God's Spirit is felt as you break bread at a meal with each other, as you labor shoulder-to-shoulder at workdays, or as you simply join in recreation. The Lord delights in such activity. See your participation as part of your stewardship. Be aware of the critical entry point such occasions can be for those new or unfamiliar with your faith.

Gaze at the faces in this congregational community. Revel in the joy, exuberance, enthusiasm, and wonder of youth. Find the energy, giftedness, and hope of young adults. Discover the leadership, passion, and love of your middle-aged members. And relish in the wisdom, understanding, and peace, of your older adults.

BE BUILDERS OF HEALING AND RECONCILIATION.

Recognize with greater sensitivity those in your midst who are hurting or struggling with life issues. Become a congregation that offers true sanctuary to grieving spirits through worship, prayer, and warm hospitality. Let differences that have divided you now be mended. Acknowledge that your future will include missteps, mistakes, and self-inflicted

pain. When such challenges arise, always remember that God is with you. Rely on God and make yourself vulnerable to God's promise of grace. Claim the strength of Christ to forgive. And then forgive. Hold fast to divine strength, wisdom, grace, and love. Let God heal.

Know that when ministry is given—and received—without reservation that it carries a profound healing power, borne by the Spirit. Understand that love and grace are the strongest forces in the world. Offer them freely. But also receive them freely. To do otherwise would be to shun God's gifts and elevate yourself above God's desire to bless you.

BE BUILDERS OF COMMUNITY.

Take note of passions that fuel your spirit and ask how they might serve the greater good. Whether you offer them to the congregation or the community at-large, trust that each unique gift has a place and role in God's kingdom. Reflect on the scripture that says, "All are called." As a body, consider the corporate possibilities that are yours to be leaven and salt in this place. Be bold in proclaiming the love and peace of Christ to others who are yet to know such blessing.

In relationships, remember that all people in this congregation are vibrant members of many communities: the places where they live, work, play, study, worship, and more. Among these communities is this congregation, a place of great giftedness, great resources, and great love. Rely on this community when seeking spiritual guidance, when seeking support, and when seeking God's love.

BE BUILDERS OF THE SPIRIT.

Lean on the Holy Spirit to be your Counselor, Inspiration, and Friend. This requires time spent in prayer, study, and personal reflection. Those called to the priesthood are to be leaders in this endeavor. Renew your commitment to serve without reservation. Each of you is invited to commune with the Holy Spirit daily. Know that as a people who walk in the direction of the Shepherd's voice, you will not only be blessed, but you will radiate blessings to others.

Open your hearts, your minds, your souls to see God's blessings. You'll find them drifting on the breeze, resting in the quiet places, shouting with the jubilant, and residing in the

faces of people you meet. Find these blessings in everyday sacraments—the taste of bread, the cleansing of water, the soothing of another’s touch. Grow in gratitude.

God already has granted you fullness, and you are blessed. Remember to trust where God leads, even in challenging situations. Be open to the grace God extends to you and others. Then extend that same grace to new faces and old faces, alike.

BE BUILDERS.

Build the youth of Olathe, cherishing their worth and contributions. Be mentors of encouragement to them all.

Build the senior Saints of Olathe, acknowledging their dedication and example of many years. Continue to listen to their wisdom.

Build the outreach of Olathe. Let the flame of missionary zeal be lit with enthusiasm and vigor.

Be assured that the hand of God, which has directed this congregation, continues to call you forward into promising tomorrows. You are Community of Christ! You are builders with a vision. You are builders of a future. You are builders of Christ’s peaceable kingdom. May you forever be blessed as you build.

And always—always—give thanks. Never miss the sea of blessings that washes over and around your congregation daily in everyday life.

Lord we thank you for your eternal and all-encompassing Presence and given thanks for the powerful blessing you have given to your people as they seek to discern their future together.

We give gratitude and thanks for the Olathe congregation and this journey of a blessing. May your Spirit guide and direct them as they continue to dwell in the words of this blessing that is meant for each one here. As they look for understanding and ways to implement new possibilities, may each person see their importance in this kingdom-building task. Thank you for your grace, presence, and love.

In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Offered with love,

Evangelists Tom Arnold, Greg Clark, Bob Gardner, Kris Judd and Mikal Shedd