



## FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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*Rev. Patricia Cleary*

### Pastor's Page –January 2016

#### By Another Road

*“Then the magi returned to their country **by another road**, since God warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod.” Matthew 2:12 TEV*

The Bible has two distinctly different messages about the way to respond to the infant Jesus.

One is in Luke's gospel. The angels told the shepherds to go and see the new born Christ. The expectation was that the shepherds would spread the Good News to everyone they met. Shepherds were notorious gossips. The other is in Matthew's gospel. There the magi were told not to tell Herod what they found. The reason, of course, was that informing Herod of Jesus' whereabouts would endanger his young life.

Each new year is a fresh start for First UMC to fulfill our task of “making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” If God's angels visited us with instructions for what we should do this year, I wonder what they'd say. I suspect they would have elements of both the message to the shepherds and the message to the magi.

One message is that we must take as our organizing principle the task of introducing Jesus Christ to those who do not know him. It is a challenge and a privilege to know that God expects us to gear our church – our building, our worship, our programs, our activities, etc.- to appeal to those who are NOT part of us. Too easily we slip into the mode of arranging all those things to appeal to US. But we are not called to reach and serve ourselves. We are called to reach and serve others.

The other message is that we must avoid unwittingly cooperating with the world. I don't believe that there is a conspiracy behind the rise of secularism in the United States and other first-world nations. I believe the rise of secularism is the direct result of the church caving to the world's agenda. Jesus said we cannot serve two masters: the things of this world and God. Yet that is what we have been trying to do, as we let other priorities compromise our faith. It's time to take stock of how we allot our personal time, energy and money. Does God get a tenth or more? What do we do with the rest of it? Serve ourselves or serve others in Christ's name?

Let's make this a year of listening to and acting on both of God's Christmas messages.

– *Glad to be serving Christ with you,*

*Pastor Pat*