

# *Steeple News*

**September 2024**

## **Keep Growing**

The first sermon I preached to a larger crowd was my senior sermon at St. Olaf College, the college from which I graduated. The sermon was entitled, "Keep Growing" and the emphasis was on the concept that we needed to continue to seek knowledge throughout life and continue to grow. The worst thing we can allow to happen in our lives is to "stagnate." Most other things can be bearable, but stagnation destroys beyond compare. Stagnation brings meaningful life to an end, makes happiness impossible, ravages thought and intelligence, and sabotages creativity.

Nature has issued the decree and placed a curse on inactivity. The pond where motion has ceased becomes a stagnant and salty marsh, devoid of life. The species which fails to adapt and develop with changing conditions is soon extinct.

The same law of progress is applied to human life; where motion ceases, desolation begins. Our mental, physical and spiritual well-being are dependent on this very principle. "All withers and wastes without growth." Thus, progress is not an extravagance but a necessity, for he who stands still is going backwards.

We have forgotten the very principle of our creation and birth if we have forgotten how to grow. We were born to grow, to reach, to develop continually.

But this is philosophy, and philosophy is less painful than reality. The reality is that we all choose to stagnate in some way. Sometimes a person can let security, compensation, and tenure trump fulfillment, happiness and achievement. It is possible to graduate from college and then cease formal learning from that time on. We then discover that it was not the reaching of a goal that gave us joy but in its pursuit.

Think about your life for a moment and think about happiness. Recall the place of happiness in your day-to-day activity - in business, in marriage, in the raising children, at school - and you will find that progress and development, challenge and struggle, have been synonymous with happiness.

There is a need to be in continual motion, ever learning, ever finding, ever expanding. We need to watch ourselves grow, minute by minute, day by day, year by year. We need to pursue our potential, catching the scent of what we may become, to experience the essence of a life well lived.

We can fail at what we strive for, but we must not fail to strive. When we reach the top of the mountain, we can look into the horizon for a more lofty height to conquer, until, as the eons turn to eternity, we have climbed every mountain we could.

Rev. Hans Lillejord