

The Pastor's Report

To the members and friends of our church, a joyous greeting to you on this the first day of Spring! That is what the calendar tells me, anyway, in spite of all the snow I see outside the window.

The passage of time and the turning of the seasons are funny things; they surely happen but rarely in the way we expect. In a sermon this past January, after a lot of prayer and pondering, I shared with the congregation that I felt it was time we started talking about what comes next. I am in my 19th year as pastor. My family and I feel we are incredibly blessed by this church and love our life here. I have no real desire to be anywhere but here in Canton (i.e., I do not feel "the call" to another church). Nonetheless, at some point we will move on from each other. The questions will be how and when?

All too often I have seen pastors stay too long at a church (and the church suffers) or leave in the abrupt way our denominational habits dictate (and the church suffers). Since one of the basic tenets of our time together all these years is to speak with one another, always, with gentleness, concern and truth, I decided why not speak to all of you in the same way about what comes next?

Now, don't get all nervous (or, alternatively, elated) just yet. The timeframe I have in my mind is 3 to 6 years. This would put our youngest son either out of high school (2 years) or college (6 years). I would be 55 or 58 years old, with time left for one last professional hurrah. This would put the church with a 22 or 25 year pastorate; a good long time but, hopefully, not too long.

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer & supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." - Philippians 4:6-7

However, as I said at the start, the passage of time and the turning of the season are funny things; they surely happen but rarely in the way we expect. I have no idea what the next few years will hold for me, our family and our church. What I do know, is that I am excited to take this next step with all of you.

There is a great deal that we can, should, and must be working on over the next few years. In order to discern what these may be, both for the church and for my family, in March I participated in a week-long training at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in "The Art of Transitional Ministry." The purpose of this training is to prepare people to serve as what has traditionally been understood as "Interim Pastors."

However, what I quickly discovered upon my arrival in Pittsburgh, is that every church is in some way, shape or form, in a period of transition. Whereas Interim Ministry is often understood as more of a place-holder, Transitional Ministry recognizes the inherent opportunities available to a church when it moves from one called/installed pastor to the next.

What I would like to do is to begin to transition *together*, in whatever way God directs and guides. I have some ideas, which I will be sharing in the coming months. For now, though, let's keep walking the walk together and enjoy all that God has given, and is *giving* us.

Stay tuned, - Rev. Mike