

THE NEW CITY JOURNAL

A Publication of First Presbyterian Church Aurora



A SEASON OF TRANSITION

BY PASTOR DAVID GOETZ

As you already know, this is a season of transition for First Presbyterian Church of Aurora. After seventeen years, Pastor Jeff's ministry here has come to an end. I have spoken with many of you over these last few weeks and hope to speak with many more of you in the weeks to come to hear how you're processing Pastor Jeff's departure, to clarify our next steps, to remind you (and be reminded by you) of our firm and certain hope in Christ, and to pray with you. Some of us are hopeful and cheerful; some of us are anxious; most of us, to be honest, are feeling a mixture of anxiety and hope.

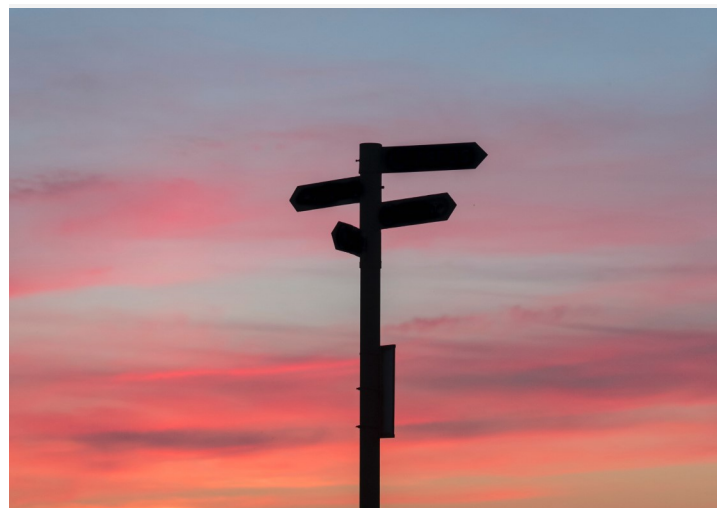
I'd like to describe my own experience to you—the way I've felt since I first heard the news that Pastor Jeff was going to leave. I share this with you not because I think it matters much how I feel but, instead, because I think my experience might serve to encourage your heart.

It was early autumn when I learned that Pastor Jeff was considering a call to Lebanon Presbyterian Church in Ohio. There was no certainty at that time about what would or wouldn't happen, but he wanted me to know so we could think together about what his departure might mean for First Pres. This might surprise you, but I felt more excitement than anything else at that first moment—excitement at a new challenge for Jeff, excitement over what it might mean for me, excitement over how it might push First Pres to grow. Have you felt any of this?

But then, over the following weeks, my excitement waned and almost disappeared as it was replaced by something like dread. Once his departure was almost certain, it was time for the Session of First Pres to learn the news. He told them on October 24. But that in-between time, those weeks between the moment when I was told and the moment when the Session was told, was difficult for me. It felt like a slow-motion crisis, to be honest. I didn't and couldn't know what would happen, and so I felt anxiety—
anxiety over how the Session and congregation would handle the news, anxiety over our ability to see the path forward, anxiety over whether we really had the wisdom and the courage to move forward in the obedience that comes from faith. Again I wonder: Have you felt the same way?

But when the Session learned the news on October 24, everything changed.

Why did everything change? One simple explanation is that I no longer felt alone. Others now knew what was happening, and we could talk about what needed to be done in response. It was no longer a slow-moving crisis: Pastor Jeff's departure was still coming, but the members of our Session (and, shortly afterward, the Staff) were free to ask hard questions, to consider our path forward, and to seek wise counsel from outside the congregation. Please hear me, dear friends, when I tell you that your Ruling Elders and the staff of your church have done excellent work these last two months! Your Session met for prayer and planning on November 7 and again every Tuesday night until Christmas, often until 9:00 or 10:00 p.m., which



isn't even to mention the extra work they've done outside those meetings. They have sought and heeded wise counsel from our presbytery and from Interim Pastor Ministries (IPM); they have been deliberate and prayerful in all their decisions; they have labored to keep the congregation informed; and they have been faithful to care and to pray for us as we all learned and processed the bittersweet news of our pastor's next steps.

And all of that moved me from a place of anxiety to a place of hope. I sincerely believe that we are moving forward in faith, with both wisdom and courage. My first sermon in our Rooted & Grounded series, on Psalm 33, reminded me—as I hope it reminded you—that our unchanging God calls us to a posture of praise, patient expectation, and prayer. We praise our God and Father, who has faithfully shepherded this church for 165+ years; we praise the Lord Jesus Christ, who is himself the cornerstone on which our church is built; we praise the Spirit of the eternal God, who continues to conform us to the image of Jesus and who remains the guarantee of our inheritance until we take possession of it. We wait with patient expectation for our God to make good provision for our church out of his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. And we pray, remembering the encouraging words of that old pastor John Calvin: “So true it is that we dig up by prayer the treasures that were pointed out by the Lord's gospel, and which our faith has gazed upon.”

Be hopeful, dear friends: our God is faithful.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT TRANSITIONAL MINISTRY



Q. Why are we looking for a transitional pastor?

A. We want a transitional pastor because we need someone trained in giving objective assessment, caring for people during transition, discerning and leading good change in healthy ways, and preparing a congregation to identify and call its next pastor.

Q. I've heard about "interim pastors" and "transitional pastors." What's the difference?

A. Well, in a lot of cases there's not much difference! We have chosen to use the term "transitional pastor" because it isn't merely a matter of time until our next pastor is identified and called; instead, it's a matter of process—of answering questions like "Who are we?" "Where are we going?" "How will we get there?" "Who is best equipped to get us there as our pastor?" The transitional pastor we're looking for will be trained in specific transitional ministry systems and processes to help bring the church forward.

Q. What organization are we using to provide this transitional pastor?

A. We are working with Interim Pastor Ministries (IPM) to find the transitional pastor who is right for us. IPM has been training and placing transitional pastors since 1990, and we are confident they will send us the right person and give him the support he needs while he's here. Two other churches in our presbytery have IPM transitional pastors in place right now and are happy both with the person and with the process.

Q. How long will it take to find someone?

A. We can't make any promises, but when we submitted our paperwork to IPM in mid-December, we were told it's typically eight or nine weeks from that point until we can expect a transitional pastor to be in place in our church.

Q. Once the transitional pastor is in place, how long will the transitional process take?

A. The process usually takes 12-18 months, with a Pastor Search Committee commonly being formed at the halfway point of that process. We won't want to drag the transitional process out, but we do want to engage the process as humbly and as hopefully as we can.

Q. Who should I talk to if I have questions?

A. Any of your Ruling Elders (Heidi Brooker, Paul Jarot, Katie Landers, James Kinnard, Anne Miller, Dale Roberts, Kathy Russell, Mary Faye Vasen, John Young) will be happy to answer your questions. You can identify us by the lanyards around our necks on Sunday mornings! We will continue to give regular updates on the process for as long as necessary, but we also want to hear your questions. Pastor David will also be happy to answer any of your questions.

A VIEW ON WESTERHOFF'S FAITH STYLES

Do you remember the day that you surrendered your life to Christ? I don't mean "asking Jesus into your heart." I mean the day you decided for yourself that this whole Christianity thing is real, that God is alive and wants a relationship with you, and that you want to follow him.

Maybe you haven't experienced that kind of certainty and dedication yet. And that's ok. For me, it was when I was a teenager. I was home alone overnight, and when I became scared, I turned to the Psalms. I felt for the first time that God was speaking directly to me through his word, and I dedicated my life to him.

This is called "owned faith," according to John H. Westerhoff III's model of faith formation. In his book, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, he describes 4 styles of faith that we all grow into and through:

- **Experienced Faith** - Faith experienced through your surroundings and the actions of others. I.e., Feeling safe and loved by your parents or teachers helps you feel safe and loved by God.
- **Affiliative Faith** - Faith that belongs in a community, where you believe and act based on the beliefs and actions of the greater body. I.e., Children most often believe and act like their parents.

- **Searching Faith** - Faith that asks questions, that doubts, that wrestles intellectually with big questions and seeming contradictions. We most often associate this style with teens and young adults, who want to experiment and see for themselves if Christianity is true. This is a necessary step in order to progress to owned faith, and should be encouraged and guided, rather than squashed!
- **Owned Faith** - Faith that's all in. A person with owned faith has found their own identity in Christ, and will speak and act based upon that identity, even against opposition. There may be a sudden "conversion," as I experienced, or you may grow into this gradually over time.

These styles build on each other, like the rings of a tree. We never lose our need to experience the love of Christ through other Christians, or to belong to a faith community. Even in owned faith, it's common to question or doubt. All four styles are faith; none of them is incomplete or lacking and we need all four. They each have different ways of approaching and experiencing God. That said, one of our goals as a ministry is to help Christians expand through each style into owned faith. We'll explore this in a future newsletter!

~ Britta Wallbaum

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

I'm excited for this season ahead for our church, our relationships, our vision as a community! We are on a threshold and I believe that Jesus is uniquely present today us in this time and place...for those who have ears to hear, eyes to see, and hands to receive.

This is a season for "doubling down" on all that we do to grow in Jesus, to become like Christ! What are your spiritual practices for experiencing the transforming presence of our Lord and Savior Christ Jesus? How can you lean into them in ever deeper ways?

At the center of our practices, entering into the word of God is essential. As we open ourselves up to listen, to see, to receive from the Holy Spirit in the scriptures, God consistently will meet us in new and fresh ways! That passage you love and know by heart? New and fresh! That's the beauty of God's word.

I invite us into the Psalms. They are a gift to us in giving us the emotional language to pray and come to God authentically. I seek to be in the Psalms everyday in addition to wherever else I may be reading. This has been a practice of Christians for centuries and for good reason!

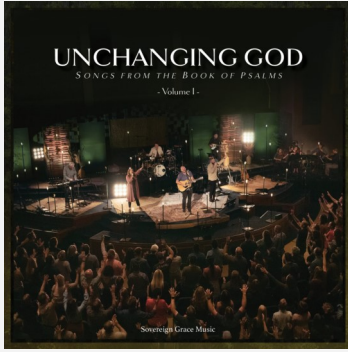
Prayer, in all its forms, is also essential at all times. Perhaps no more so than now! Let us, as a community, devote ourselves to prayer. Having listened to God in His word, let us respond from our deepest being. Let us lift up the leadership of our church. Let us lift up the community of our church. Let us lift up the vision that God may be calling to us.

And let us with eager anticipation for all that God will do for, in, and through us! Thanks be to God!

~ Keith Scherer

MEDIA OF THE MONTH

Just this last Sunday, Pastor David preached a sermon on Psalm 33 entitled “Rooted in the Unchanging God”. Sovereign Grace Music fairly recently released *Unchanging God: Songs from the Book of Psalms Volumes 1*



and 2. Psalms included read like a “greatest hits” selection: 13, 23, 46, 62, 90, 93, 103, 107, 113, 114, 119, 121, 145, and 148! These are wonderful live albums that are perfect for both personal and corporate worship. Great music! More importantly, great lyrics!

Given my recommendations in my other article in this newsletter, music based on the Psalms is yet another way to emotionally bring yourself into experiencing God’s word for us in the Psalms. Let these words wash over you for both comfort and praise! Maybe even use them to start digging a little deeper into this awesome collection of Psalms.

The Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!

~ Keith Scherer

STEWARDSHIP REPORT

Average Weekly Need: \$ 14,239.00

Received November 5, 2023 \$ 16,433.00

Total Attendance 213

Received November 12, 2023 \$ 18,323.00

Total Attendance 169

Received November 19, 2023 \$ 8,152.00

Total Attendance 223

Received November 26, 2023 \$ 9,386.00

Total Attendance 222

**Total includes online. Average online worship: 52*

Financial Report - November 2023

Actual income/expenses for year to date, including surplus funds of \$28,276, and “Faith Giving above Pledges” of \$152,280.

Income \$ 266,518.07

Expenses \$ 298,694.60

Net Deficit \$ 32,176.53

BOOK OF THE MONTH

Immerse: The Bible Reading Experience

I’ve had the *Kingdoms* Book in this series for a number of years and just picked it up recently. This series goes through the Bible taking out the verse numbers and chapter numbers allowing you to read through the Bible as one larger narrative. There is a helpful reading plan that goes along with each group of books that lasts 8 or 16 weeks (if you read 5 out of 7 days in the week). So it helps to read large sections of the Bible in a shorter period of time. I’ve greatly enjoyed adding this into my day. Its easy to read and if you follow the plan, you could read it twice in one year!



The series has 6 books: *Beginnings, Kingdoms, Prophets, Poets, Messiah, and Chronicles*. You can find this through Tyndale Publishers or directly off the immersebible.com website. They come in print, e-reader, large print, and audio versions.

~ Melissa Beneke

DATES TO REMEMBER

Friendship Bible Club	Jan	21
Communion Sunday	Jan	21
Family Get Together	Jan	27
WOW Resumes	Feb	6
Ash Wednesday	Feb	14

SESSION MINUTES—HIGHLIGHTS FROM DECEMBER 2023

FOR DECEMBER OF 2023 FOR REPORTING TO THE CONGREGATION IN THE NEWSLETTER

Below is a brief timeline and summary of issues discussed. We met the first three Tuesdays of December.

TUESDAY DECEMBER 5TH:

- We discussed planning for the celebration of Pastor Jeff's Ministry on December 31st.
- We had a Zoom Meeting with Pastor Kent Lynn from IPM to understand their Transitional Pastor process and ask questions. After that meeting, we discussed it amongst ourselves. A motion was made to choose IPM as the organization the Session would work with to provide a Transitional Pastor. It was seconded and voted on with unanimous approval. Dale Roberts will convey our intentions to IPM.

TUESDAY DECEMBER 12TH:

- The Session was informed that Anne Miller is willing to serve as our new Clerk of Session. Ron Hodge has offered to assist with training.
- We discussed planning for the celebration of Pastor Jeff's Ministry on December 31st.
- We discussed planning for the January worship services and January sermon series.
- Pastor David requested that the Session consider adding a future agenda item to update the Membership List.

TUESDAY DECEMBER 19TH:

- Minutes from the prior 5th and 12th of December meetings were approved.
- Rivers and Lakes Presbytery is meeting Friday January 26th and Saturday January 27th at Grays Lake.
- The congregations giving and budget are on track.
- We discussed planning for the celebration of Pastor Jeff's Ministry on December 31st.
- We were all aligned to support the 2024 plans to continue the Wednesday evening Soup suppers. The breakfasts were discussed but tabled for a later date.
- The session approves the funds for Britta Wallbaum to attend a trip in April to an EPC event if her schedule allows her to go.
- The session approves the funds to continue the after-worship treats in Murray Commons.
- Dale Roberts reported that IPM acknowledges receipt of the paperwork submission we made to them for starting the transitional pastor process.
- Various prayer concerns for people in the congregation were discussed and prayed for.

~ Ron Hodge, Clerk of Session

SPECIAL NEWS

In Memoriam:

- Mary Alice Gin, 10/23/1938–11/23/2023.

THANK YOU FROM BRENDA BUSTAMANTE & CASA DE ORACION IN MEXICO



From Pastor Salvador & Maria Lona

Dear First Pres

We want to express our deep appreciation for providing toys and food to our families in our community! Thank you for helping them experience the Love of God with the joy of Christmas. Your generosity will always be remembered!

God Blessings to you all!!!

Through your generous donations, we raised more than my parents asked for to help families in Mexico! We were also able to bless many families in our area and several families joined us at our Christmas Eve Family Service to receive their gifts!

~ Brenda L. Bustamante

LAST WORD FROM PASTOR DAVID

I've started this new year by working through some of the historical books of the Old Testament and am currently in 2 Kings; these last few days have found me considering the life and ministry of Elisha, the disciple of Elijah. One of the best-known moments of his ministry is recorded in 2 Kings 6:8-23, when the king of Syria sends "horses and chariots and a great army" to capture one not-so-measly man—Elisha himself!

Why was he after Elisha? Well, he kept making careful military plans to fight and defeat Israel, but Elisha somehow kept warning Israel's king where the Syrian army would be. The king of Syria assumes he has a traitor in his court, but his servants swear it's not them: "Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom." Syria's king decides to throw the kitchen sink at him, so "they came by night and surrounded [Elisha's] city."

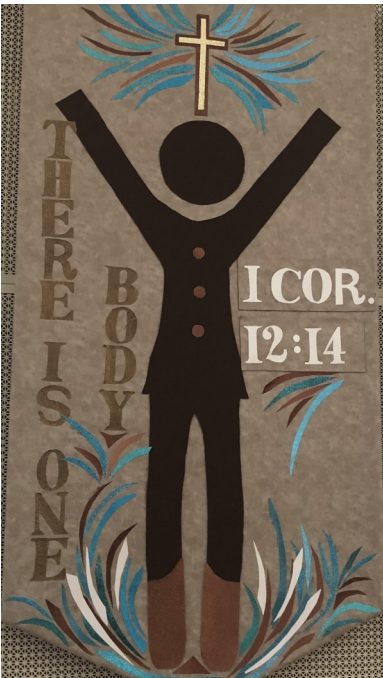
When Elisha's servant sees the great army surrounding the city, he cries out: "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" The prophet assures his servant that the warriors of the Lord are greater than the warriors of Syria, and the Lord opens the servant's eyes to see "horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."

2024 will undoubtedly have its troubles. I doubt any of you will experience a hostile army at your doorstep, but I don't doubt you will experience troubles that feel unmanageable. The troubles will be real, but I want to encourage you in this new year to keep your eyes open to the provision and care of our Lord all around you—and even within you. Elisha told his servant, "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Similarly, the Apostle John says to us, "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 Jn. 4:4). Do you believe that? If you have believed in the only Son of God, then you have received the Spirit of God! Let us therefore walk in step with that Spirit, trusting that by his divine power we have "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3). Happy New Year, indeed!

BECOMING A CONGREGATION OF BELONGING—DISABILITY MINISTRY

As 2024 begins I am compelled by the words of Joni Eareckson Tada : “A new year has begun. A year with new opportunities to be the hands and feet of Jesus. A year that is packed full of opportunities to witness for Him, to share His gospel of peace. To look ahead and dream. Plan and prepare. Be courageous, be bold.”

So, what do these words mean for the disability ministry of FPC? How can we be bold, be courageous, look ahead and dream? How can we prepare and plan? (I’m glad you asked). I’m dreaming that our disability ministry expands to include a wider range of ages and abilities. As a congregation we are so blessed to have many adults with disabilities as an integral part of our church family. But part of the Body of Christ is still missing. I know that within Aurora and surrounding communities there are many children, teens, young adults, and their families affected by disability that do not yet have a church home. I’m dreaming they will find a welcoming church home at FPC! It is a big dream.



Over recent months a Core team from FPC and Redeemer Church in Aurora have been meeting to pray and plan about how our 2 churches could collaborate to minister to and with teens with disabilities in Aurora. We are still at the planning stages but are excited about how this initiative will impact the youth of our two churches and the impact on teens and families affected by disabilities in our

community. Our vision for this new ministry is that the Core team will provide support and structure but that the ministry will happen as relationships and friendships between youth of varied abilities begin to develop. Join us in praying for this bold dream.



Another dream is for FPC to welcome more children with disabilities to become a part of the children and family ministries of FPC. One step towards that is to reimagine how to prepare and provide support such as a sensory area and buddies as needed so that children of varied abilities can engage in both worship and Sunday classes and all the wonderful experiences families experience as part of FPC. When we welcome a child with disabilities, we have the opportunity to minister to the whole family.

Our dream for our Friendship Bible Class and Friendship Bible Club is that they will continue to be places of belonging where adults with disabilities in our church and community grow in their love for the Lord and in their love for one another. Each Sunday morning the Friendship Bible class meets for a time of enjoying community, growing in their walk with Christ through Bible study and lessons taught by an awesome team and praying together.

Our bold dream for the adult disability ministries is that more individuals who take part in the Friendship Bible Club (2nd Sunday of each month from 2:30-5:00 pm) who do not yet have a church home, would join us on Sunday mornings for worship and the Friendship Bible Class.

These are bold, Kingdom-sized dreams. But to quote Joni again, “The future is an open door ready for us to walk through.” As you consider how the Lord is leading you to serve in 2024 through the ministries of FPC, let me know if you have questions about the dreams and plans for the disability ministries of FPC. I would love to have a conversation!

~ Pastor Karen Roberts