

Friends in Christ,

Over the past several years, along with steady worship and service, First Presbyterian Church of Davenport has been navigating a challenging and sometimes painful transition. Many of the diverse difficulties relate to conflict between the Presbytery of East Iowa and FPC, especially around the departure of the last installed pastor. Since 2018 there have been several prompts to resolve points of conflict and address hurt experienced by members and leaders at FPC. Most recently the Synod of Lakes and Prairies directed the presbytery and congregation to engage in a process of reconciliation. Through the fall I have been meeting with individuals and groups in both FPC and PEIA to learn what the current needs for healing are, in order to move forward in a more hopeful and functioning relationship. Members of FPC and PEIA have shared together in a half dozen zoom devotional and prayer times. In this we place our great hopes in the God who is with us and for whose salvation we watch in this season of Advent.

In addition to a continued call to prayer for one another and the world, three useful steps have emerged.

One important area has been the affirmation of FPC's gifts and future by forming a PNC, being elected soon. Several FPC and PEIA leaders are beginning work to ensure that the PNC receives constructive presbytery support in finding and calling a pastor who is a good match for the future that God is preparing. Another needed task that has emerged is clarifying how information sharing and general communication happens best between committees, congregation, session and presbytery. Again, several members of the session and the presbytery are rolling up sleeves to articulate best practices and avoid some of the problems of the past. This should provide a foundation for a working relationship and restoring trust.

A third piece of the reconciliation process is ensuring opportunity for each person who would like their experience, hopes and needs to be heard. To that end several "restoration circle" conversations have been scheduled. In these circles of FPC and PEIA members, each person has opportunity share briefly how they have been impacted, and name what they need in the relationship of the future. No more than 20 people are involved in each circle so that each person who would like to share has opportunity in an hour and half. These circles are not investigative or part of a judicial or disciplinary process. My intention is for these circles to be safe spaces where all who participate feel confident they will not be attacked or put on the spot. This is an invitation to trust that you will be received and not called to particular account on the spot. I hope you will come to a circle to express impact and hopes without judgement or rancor. I want you to be able to hear each other and know you have been heard.

My hope is for the circles to offer members of both portions of the body of Christ to recognize wounds, claim hope, and exercise faith in the reconciling power of the risen Christ. These circles are a step in the relationship, not an end for the ongoing work of God's Spirit and conversation.

If you would like to participate in a restoration circle conversation, you may sign up by calling the church office. Church staff will send you the zoom link for your circle if you will be attending online. If all the seats in particular circles fill up, church staff will start waiting lists; we can add additional circles if necessary. In preparation, you will be provided some background material, devotional prompts, and instructions for participation.

The dates and times for gathering are:

December 5 1:00 Hybrid Zoom

December 7 7:00 Hybrid Zoom

December 12 6:00 Hybrid Zoom

December 19 7:30 Zoom only

In the time that I have journeyed with you, I have experienced compassion in regard to pain and conflict, but also joy and hope in recognizing the tremendous gifts and promise for FPC's ministry, as well as that of the Presbytery. You are the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the body of Christ given that others might know life. You have important gifts to steward and calls to answer. God bless you as you continue to keep the faith and follow Christ.

Yours in Christ,

Beth

Beth McCaw

Reconciliation Facilitator

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