

CONNECTIONS – Final Goodbye from Pastor Jim

Transitions are a way of life; how we engage them can be gifts of God. Depending upon the date you receive this article, it will have been about 362 days since Pastor Jeff retired and I came to live and work among you. We knew that redefining church without Jeff would be challenging to say the least. Thirty years of interconnection is not something you resolve quickly nor easily. It takes time. It takes effort. It takes intention. It takes courage, honesty, faith and togetherness. Frankly, it takes hard work. For whatever various reasons, some people chose not to participate in this personal/communal process, while the majority of you packed your bag lunches and started down the rough road of transition and change with us, not knowing where it would all lead. The only thing we really knew (or believed) was who was leading us. And we trusted that same Spirit of God to once again see us through a dark and uncertain time .

We knew the challenge of transition and change would be great. We just didn't know how far reaching it would extend and how significant its impact would be. Quarantine, pandemic, PPE and positivity rates became the new vernacular. Anonymous masks, social distancing, financial shutdowns and working from home became the new normal. And we began to feel more distant and disconnected. We knew that we were in a time of greater transition than we had ever bargained for. And we worried where it would all lead and the impact it would have on our church community. But that's when God had yet one more surprise for us.

Perhaps the greatest surprise is in learning that we are more capable and flexible than we had imagined. We grew to understand that there was more than one way to do church, more than one way to connect, to pray, to serve, support and worship. Zoom, Google Meet, virtual meetings such as Bible Studies, committee meetings, Men's Breakfasts and Council deliberations became the new means of communication and connection and we discovered that we could manage change. Whether it was a retiring pastor, a strange new Interim or a new settled minister, we discovered that not only could we negotiate the changing landscape but that we could actually grow and learn new things about ourselves and our faith.

Surely, one day, we will gather again. We won't be wearing masks that hide our faces. We won't be standing six feet apart. Why, we won't even shy away from a handshake or a hug. And on that day, on that wonderful and glorious day, we will

look around and say how good it is to see everyone and that we should join together in singing our songs of thanksgiving. But then there will come a moment, a solitary pause. And everyone's head will bow. And we will realize that we as a church, a people of God, have not only negotiated the days of transition and change, but that we have been surprised by the Spirit of God who has led us through the difficult days to a place of new growth and vision.

Thank you for allowing me to be a part of that privilege with you.

Blessed be the Lord,
-Jim