

1967 Sundays and Counting
September 20, 2015
2 Corinthians 13:11, 14 (The Message)

This morning's Scripture reading comes at the end of the book of 2 Corinthians. These are Paul's final words to the church at Corinth.

Verse 11:

And that's about it, friends. Be cheerful. Keep things in good repair. Keep your spirits up. Think in harmony. Be agreeable. Do all that, and the God of love and peace will be with you for sure.

Verse 14:

The amazing grace of the Master, Jesus Christ, the extravagant love of God, the intimate friendship of the Holy Spirit, be with all of you.

May God bless the reading and hearing of these practical and hope filled words, and let us pray. O God of love and peace, help us to know in our heads and in our hearts that you are with us and will certainly be with us as we journey into the future. Take and use my words to empower our imaginations, awaken us to new possibilities, and embolden us in our actions. Amen.

What in the name of God is going on here?

What in the name of God is going on with Fort Myers Congregational United Church of Christ?

Nine months ago I started my first sermon as your Transitional Pastor with that same question.

After journeying with you for some time, I can begin to answer the question. FMC UCC is doing a lot, and all we are doing we do in God's name.

While it would be impossible to share all that has happened and to name all of the people that contributed, it is both possible and important to celebrate what we have done together in God's name.

We have

- learned about our congregation's history
- welcomed new members and new leaders
- launched new ministries and imagined new ways of being church
- strengthened our connection to the United Church of Christ
- discerned and begun living into our purpose

We know who we are and who God is calling us to become. Each person has a role to play in shaping FMC UCC into a growing and inclusive congregation alive with inspirational worship and life-changing outreach.

It is an exciting time to be a part of this community of faith!

While it has been my pleasure to serve as your Transitional Pastor, we all know that relationship will soon end. Before it does, I want to share with you a little more about what has happened that has led me to decide to move in a new direction.

Let me back up a bit – all the way to the year 2000. Since that time – for the last fifteen years – I have served in a variety of parish based ministry positions in Mainline Protestant congregations ranging in size from a few hundred to a few thousand. My job titles have included

- Director of Ministries with Children and Families
- Youth Director (and Youth Minister)
- Associate Pastor
- Interim Senior Pastor
- Transitional Pastor
- Director of Education (and Director of Adult Education).

The job title I have held the greatest number of times is Director of Education. Education, however, has always been an important part of my ministry regardless of my job title. My interest in education led me to write my doctoral dissertation in the field of education after completing coursework in ministry and psychology. My passion for education and desire to devote more of my limited time and energy to it led me to shift from full-time ministry to part-time ministry for the four years prior to coming to FMC UCC in order to work full-time in higher education administration.

Education continues to call me. This time I answered by accepting what will soon be a very full-time position as Education Manager at

Evolution Health. In this new role I will be responsible for creating and maintaining the overall company-wide training plan. My office will be in Dallas, Texas, at the Evolution Health's corporate headquarters.

And so, a move to the Dallas area is in my near term future. Many here realize that for me this is a move back home. I spent the first 30 years of my life in that area, and it is home to many in my family including my parents. It is also where my wife, Susan, has resided since accepting her dream job as the Head of Library Research Support Services at the University of North Texas.

Susan and I have purchased a home there in the city of Corinth. It is a suburb that is North of Dallas where I will work and South of Denton where she now works. It is also a city with a familiar name – a name that is biblical and is where the church was located to which Paul was writing in this morning's Bible reading.

As I prepare for this transition, I want to thank you for welcoming me into your midst and for accepting and supporting me as your Transitional Pastor. I also want to thank you for welcoming Susan during the months she was here during season and my parents for the months they were here during the summer.

When I go, I must move on and so must the congregation. To help ensure this happens, I will follow the wisdom of what has long been a best practice in our tradition and in the wider church by not physically returning to this sacred space and by not acting in a pastoral manner toward anyone in this congregation.

When people ask me to tell the story of my time at FMC UCC, I will do so with great thankfulness. I will share something of the 40+ Sundays I served as your guest preacher and then as your Transitional Pastor. I will also relate some memories of the incredible mission and ministry that happened on and between those Sundays.

And as I do, I will be sure to tell them something I also want to tell you: God is just getting started with the Fort Myers Congregational United Church of Christ.

Today is the one thousand nine hundred sixth seventh Sunday this community of faith has gathered for worship. With God's help and in God's name the future of this vibrant, growing, and inclusive congregation is bright.

Amen.