



CUCC

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Highlight

Increasing Our Love for God & Neighbor
THE CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Today and Tomorrow

by Rev. John Rodgers

In April I turned 65. I know – he doesn't look a day over 30, or was that 300? Either way, when most of us turn 65, if not before, thoughts of retirement enter our heads. They have mine. But they are not my only thoughts. My other musings center on our wonderful congregation, all that we do as disciples of Jesus, and all we have yet to do.

For the past 40 years - I really can't believe that - I have been a parish minister. Since discovering the uniqueness of parish ministry in seminary, I have always been challenged and enjoyed the many varied tasks involved. Where else can you in one day marry, bury, counsel, visit, plant a flower, teach a class, and enjoy dinner and a play with friends who are members of our church?

The past 17 years have included many challenges, its share of sorrows and countless joys, laughter and tears. But it is time for a change. It is time for me not to worry about what can I possibly say again next Sunday – really there is only so much about which you can preach on Christmas Eve or Memorial Weekend. It is time for me not to agonize over budget shortfalls or worry about what I can do to see that our tremendous staff is appropriately compensated and appreciated. It is time for me to finish leading funerals for far too many members who each – and their families – have become dear friends. I find I lose a bit of myself with each funeral I do.

It is time for other things. Susan & I hope to live in Chicago for a year. We hope to be able to escape more of the Chicago area winter. We plan on being able to volunteer our time and passion for any number of service opportunities both near and far. It is time for new – many yet unknown – pursuits.

In January of this year I asked a group of our past Church Council Presidents to join me in thinking about the future and the inevitable Senior Minister transition. We met three times - talking and listening, discussing articles on leadership transitions and options, and asking a local senior minister to meet with us to discuss his experience. From these meetings this group endorsed and sent to our current Council the recommendation that we explore a "Shared Ministry" approach to my retirement. The specifics of this model can be found in the other article on this page. But basically it would mean that for a short period of time, probably in late 2015 or early 2016, there would be two senior ministers in our church. It will be a time for me to help a new person move into the position of Senior Minister.

My feeling is that if I can help the transition of leadership be a smooth process without the loss of momentum, members, and staff, then I promise to do all I can to make this work. We have a marvelous congregation. I intend to do all I can to keep it so.

I know there are many questions that this note raises. In order to help answer those questions and to begin the process of congregational involvement there will be a Council sponsored discussion of our future after worship (about 10:45) on Sunday, June 15. Susan & I and a Council member or two will try and respond to any questions you may have. I hope you will join us so that together we can continue to "increase our love for God and Neighbor."

Future Leadership

by Lisa Sidor

What happens when Rev. John Rodgers retires? Historically, the UCC has followed an "Interim Ministry" approach for replacing a Senior Minister, in which an ordained minister serves on an interim basis (12-24 months) while a Pastoral Search Committee is formed, identifies and interviews potential candidates, and presents a single candidate for vote by the Congregation. Our church followed this model with the appointments of Rev. Bill Nagy and Rev. John Rodgers.

The Interim Ministry model serves to bring one pastorate to a close, and prepare for a new one. The retiring minister has an enforced period of absence, therefore not influencing the selection of the Senior Minister by the search committee and congregation. Once a Senior Pastor is found, the interim minister goes away, and the new leader can start with a clean slate. This model emphasizes a hard break between pastorates.

While the Interim Ministry model has its advantages, it isn't necessarily the best approach for every congregation. In our case, we want to build on the strong foundation that we have, not start from scratch. We have a dynamic and growing congregation, with strong lay leadership, and want to continue that momentum.

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As Rev. John notes in his article, he met several times with a group of Council Presidents, past and current, to discuss how best to pursue this critical transition. Coming out of these deliberations, this group recommended to Church Council that we consider another, more contemporary, transitional leadership strategy called "Shared Ministry." Council carefully studied the two established alternatives, and agreed that the Shared Ministry model is the right approach for our church at this time.

The Shared Ministry model eliminates the "exile" period of the outgoing minister. The process for choosing a new Senior Minister would be essentially the same, with a Pastoral Search Committee ultimately presenting a candidate to the congregation for a vote, but the Senior Minister (rather than an interim minister) is allowed to continue as leader while the search is conducted.

Once a new Senior Minister is selected, there would be a transitional period of shared leadership, with the Senior Minister and Senior Minister Elect spending 3-6 months working together. The Shared Ministry model utilizes the wisdom of our retiring pastor, who can support and share insights with our newly elected minister.

The Shared Ministry approach is increasingly more common among large, healthy churches, as it can offer many benefits. Momentum of programs and missions is not interrupted by waiting for a new leader. The pastoral continuity and knowledge-sharing make for a smoother, shorter transitional period, with greater stability and less risk. Rev. John has served this congregation for 17 years; with an overlap period, the incoming Senior Minister would gain from John's breadth and depth of experience.

What are the next steps? Below is a rough timeline of key events:

- **Summer 2014** – Small group meetings to educate the Congregation about the Shared Ministry model and plans. *Please join us for one or more of the below sessions:*
 - **Sun., June 15 at 10:45 AM** - Discussion after worship with the Rodgers and Council reps
 - **Wed., July 16 at 7 PM** – Small group informational meeting/discussion at church
 - **Sun, Sept. 14 at 10:45** - Congregational discussion after worship
- **Sept. 21, 2014** – Congregation votes on Shared Ministry model. *If approved, continue with the below.*
- **Fall 2014** – Council appoints Senior Pastor Search Committee
- **Late Spring 2015** – Congregational vote on Senior Pastor elect
- **Fall 2015** – Shared Ministry period with retiring & new ministers
- **Winter 2015** – John officially retires with new Senior Pastor in place

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. **Q:** Is there someone in mind for the new Senior Minister?
A: No.
2. **Q:** Would Rev. John select the new Senior Minister?
A: No, a Pastoral Search Committee will be formed, to identify, interview, and recruit potential candidates. When they have made a decision, a single candidate will be presented to the Congregation for a vote. However, under the Shared Ministry model, Rev. John will provide input, and may offer names of potential candidates to consider, given his network of contacts.
3. **Q:** What if the Congregation does not approve the Shared Ministry model?
A: Then the alternative is the Interim Ministry approach. Rev. John gives the Council his retirement date, and the Pastoral Search Committee would be tasked with finding an interim minister to fill in while a senior minister is sought. The Rodgers would be required to stay away from our church for a 2 year period of time.
4. **Q:** Will it be hard to find someone who is willing to accept the Shared Ministry model, vs. coming in and putting his or her own stamp on things?
A: It does take a certain kind of individual, both retiring and incoming, to make this approach work. However, we believe that this position will be very attractive, and that having the retiring minister guide and support the incoming minister could make it even more so. It's very difficult to come into a large congregation cold; and after an interim period, there may have been a loss of vision, leaders, members, or staff. We believe that Rev. John has the character to make this arrangement work: he is a strong leader, yet recognizes and enforces boundaries, allowing others to make decisions or take actions when appropriate. His goal is to facilitate the transition, not overshadow the incoming Senior Minister or unduly influence the selection.
5. **Q:** What are the costs of the Shared Ministry model vs. the Interim Ministry model?
A: There are certain costs associated with replacing a Senior Minister, including travel expenses, a moving cost allowance, salary, etc.
The Interim Ministry assumes two searches (Interim and new Senior), with direct costs for each, and also the significant indirect costs of disruption to the life of the church.
Under the Shared Ministry model, there would be a period of overlap in salary and benefits during the transitional leadership period. We believe that this is a lower-risk model for us than the Interim Ministry model.