



September 17, 2019

Dear Friends in Christ,

I am writing to inform you that I will retire from the Call as Pastor of Peace Lutheran Church. The song from St. Luke's Gospel that Simeon sang when he saw Mary and Joseph presenting Jesus in the Temple, rings in my heart for this ministry: "...my own eyes have seen the salvation of the Lord which you have prepared in the sight of every people..." (Luke 2:30). We have shared an exciting venture of faith in the planting of a vibrant congregation, centered in the Word and Sacrament, with big servant hearts and hands. I am so thankful for the ways that we have seen the kingdom of God!

With this announcement, we will enter a "succession model" for the transition of pastors. The succession model of pastoral transition allows the ministry to continue with the present pastoral leadership as the Spirit calls a new shepherd to lead the congregation.

For I know well the plans I have in mind for you says the Lord, plans for your well-being, plans to give you a future full of hope.

- Jeremiah 29:11

- It will be an exciting time as we continue to worship, study, serve and grow in the Lord.
- We will continue to develop the Senior Center.
- I look forward to the Pilgrimage to Israel this winter. As the leaders and faithful of Peace pray and work to call a new shepherd, Elizabeth and I will be discerning our future, in life and ministry, most likely by our family in Des Moines, Iowa (Our third granddaughter is expected to be born any day!) I am excited to serve as the pastor of Peace until a new shepherd is called to be the pastor of Peace.

The enclosed "Question and Answer Sheet" provides information about the model and how it will work at Peace. The leaders and I believe that this model will embrace the vitality and love of Peace that will lead the congregation into the wonderful future that has already been opened by Christ.

The Leadership Council and I discussed this transition yesterday. The staff and I discussed it this morning. In the days ahead there will be opportunities to discuss the process that will be guided by the Holy Spirit, the Synodical staff and the faithful of the congregation. Some of the next steps in this process are:

- Deacon Connie Schmucker, Assistant to the Bishop for Leadership, will be meeting with the Leadership Council on Monday, September 23.

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- Pr. Rick Armstrong with Lutheran Counseling Services will preach and lead a forum about transitions in life and congregation Sunday, September 29 at 10 AM. The forum at 11:00 AM will be Livestreamed.

- Deacon Connie Schmucker will preach at the Eucharist Sunday, October 6 and lead a forum about the transition with the congregation following worship. The forum at 11 AM will be Livestreamed.

- Sr. Michelle Collins will lead the second workshop on “Vision, Values and Mission” on Thursday, October 24 from 10 AM-2 PM.

A forum regarding our history and what we have learned from the walk with God will be held in October at a date to be determined.

I will be leading a small group study of retirement utilizing the wisdom of our congregation that has great experience in this area!

Serving as the Pastor Developer and First Pastor of Peace has been an exciting venture of faith. I cherish the many blessed saints with whom I have shared the waters of baptism, the Word of preaching, the bread and cup of the Eucharist as “we await that day when all the peoples of the earth will come to the river to enjoy the tree of life.” Amen and amen!

I have always believed that the crucified and risen Lord goes before us shining light on the path into the future. Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” (John 8.12) For that light and each of you, I rejoice and give thanks!

In Christ,

Pr Walter+

Q and A Regarding a Succession Plan for New Pastor

Q: What is a “succession plan” for a new pastor?

In a succession model, the called pastor continues to lead the congregation forward in ministry and mission while the new shepherd is called by the congregation. Sometimes the pastors serve together for a time. There is a growing trend among larger congregations using succession planning for transitions in leadership. This model can provide greater stability of programs, stewardship and pastoral care in large congregations. Bp Pedro has endorsed this model for the pastoral transition of Peace. He looks forward to accompanying us on the path to a new pastor.

Q: What is the Biblical basis for a succession plan?

In a book about pastoral succession, Next: Pastoral Succession that Works, William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird write: “The most important news about succession is that God knows how to make leadership transfers go well. God seems to be very active in preparing leaders and churches for the inevitabilities of pastoral transition, even before the successors realize they are being prepared for transition.” (Vanderbloemen, 22) They continue:

“...Moses had a direct hand in (preparing Joshua to lead after he died). As his tenure was drawing to a close, Moses cried out to God, “May the Lord, the God who gives breath to all living things, appoint someone over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the Lord’s people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.” (Numbers 27:16-17)

Jesus equipped the disciples to spread the Gospel to the corners of the earth. Other examples from Scripture include Barnabas equipping Paul for ministry and the leadership Paul ultimately offered the Gospel.

Q: What will happen during a “succession model” of pastoral transition?

Pr Walter will continue to serve as the lead shepherd of the congregation. The great ministry of Peace in worship and music, small groups, parish nurse and servant ministries will continue. The ministry initiatives that have begun with the Senior Center will continue. There will be opportunities for the Spirit to work in our midst to celebrate the road that Peace has journeyed as well as dream of serving with Christ into the future.

During this time there will be workshops that are often done in congregations during a pastoral transition. We will continue to work with Sr Michelle Collins on values, mission and vision clarification. There will be forums regarding our history as well as transition and change.

The succession plan provides for a smooth transition from one shepherd to the next shepherd. The model addresses many of the issue during pastoral vacancies when the ministry and mission of the congregation can decline. The leaders of Peace have endorsed the “succession plan” that our ministry and mission would continue to grow during the time of pastoral succession.

Q: What other churches utilize the succession model?

In the Florida Bahamas Synod, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Vero Beach, following the 39-year ministry

of Pr Jack Diehl, utilized the succession model. Two years after the Call of a new pastor the congregation feels very good about the process and the ministry is growing. Faith Presbyterian Church, Cape Coral, with the retirement of their senior pastor of twenty-two years recently utilized the model to call a new Senior Pastor. Many large non-denominational churches have adopted the succession model for pastoral, staff and key volunteer transitions.

Q: Isn't it healthy to mourn the transition of the existing pastor so that we're ready for the new pastor?

As the congregation moves forward in the time of calling a new pastor, there will be opportunities to reminisce, express appreciation for Pr Walter's ministry and dream about the future. We are blessed with resource people to lead events on pastoral transition. Congregations that have successfully used the succession model have discovered that the hand-off of one shepherd to another is a "holy time" which deepens their commitment to Jesus and his Church.

Q: Who will oversee the calling of a new pastor?

Bishop Pedro will work with Deacon Connie Schmucker and Pr Gary LaCroix, Dean of the Caloosa Conference, to oversee the calling of a new pastor.

Q: What is the process for calling a new pastor?

The Bishop, his staff and the Dean of the Caloosa Conference will lead and oversee the Call process of congregation. Pr Walter will not be involved with the Call Committee. This allows the Holy Spirit to work with the leaders as new visions for ministry and mission are opened through the congregational study and conversation with pastors who will be interviewed by the Call Committee.

The process of calling a pastor includes:

- Bishop's staff meets with the Pr Walter and Leadership Council to discuss the process. Process is also discussed with the congregation.
- Call Committee is selected and develops a Ministry Site Profile.
- Pastor-Candidates are identified and interviewed by Call Committee. Ultimately one candidate is recommended to the Council who will also interview the candidate and discuss the compensation package. When the Council approves of a pastor candidate, he/she is recommended to the congregation. The congregation meets the candidate and a congregational meeting is held. A call is extended when the congregation votes with a 2/3rd affirmative majority to call the pastor. The Bishop certifies the call and the candidate has 3-4 weeks to accept or decline the call.

The New Pastor is welcomed, and an installation is scheduled with the Bishop. In our situation there can be a "hand-off" of the ministry and mission of Peace from Pr Walter to the new pastor.

Q: Who do I speak with about a pastor who I believe would be interested in serving as the new pastor?

Please give the names to Jim Krueger, Council Chair, who will forward the information to the Bishop's Assistant for Leadership. The contacting of pastors about a Call is always handled through the Bishop's office.

Q: When will Pr Walter retire?

Pr Walter will retire with the beginning of a new pastor's ministry at Peace.

Pr Walter was appointed by the ELCA to serve as Pastor Developer of Peace and began August 1, 1999.

He was called as the First Pastor of Peace in February 2003. He has served twenty years at Peace.

Q: What can I do as a member of Peace to assist in this process?

Pray that God will guide Pr Walter in his planning for retirement, for the continuing development of the ministry and mission of Peace, and for the Council, Call Committee and the pastor who will lead the congregation in the name of Christ.

A prayer for your devotions:

Almighty God, through your Son Jesus Christ you gave the holy apostles many gifts and commanded them to feed your flock. Inspire all pastors to proclaim your word diligently and your people to receive it willingly. Bless Bishop Pedro, Deacon Connie, the faithful of Peace Church, Pr. Walter, the staff and leaders and the pastor you will send into our community, that we may always serve to your glory, through Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.