



First United Presbyterian Church of Edinboro

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My Colleagues in Jesus' ministry,

A change is coming – again – to the Presbyterian Church in Edinboro. We have seen changes across the years and across the decades, and I write now to tell you about the next chapter of your ministry – and the next chapter of mine.

Next month, I will be requesting that the pastor-congregation covenant we have shared will come to its close. I am convinced that the timing is right and a new opportunity which opened to me only recently truly is God's next calling for me. I also am certain that FUPC is ready to launch its next new chapter beyond my pastorate. I will be leaving Edinboro soon to move to the area around Bath/Corning, New York.

I have been invited to join the on-air staff of the Family Life Radio Network which serves much of western and central New York and western and northern Pennsylvania. When I began this April with them as a "very part-time" News Stringer, it was as a community outreach inspired by my former career. I had no imagination that I would ever return to broadcasting full time. Yet, this radio ministry now *is* my new "Next". After some attentive prayer and consultation with wise advisers and trusted friends, I feel confident a new direction and new challenges are right for me.

I have not made this decision lightly. I care deeply for the people and the mission of Edinboro Presbyterian. It is a healthy church, with wise leaders, faithful participants and some really strong spiritual focus. You and I have done some incredibly good work together. I have had the privilege of being with you through some delightful joys and some painful sorrows. We sought to navigate the challenges of two decades of social change and two years of pandemic-influenced strangeness. We have served Jesus day by day by day. This congregation welcomed me and supported me through some my own real personal struggles, and you inspired me to preach and teach and dream well. The blessings have abounded as we have "been church" to each other, and as we sought after new and renewed ways to serve Christ out around us.

Some will ask, what is next for FUPC? You and I know how the people of this congregation have rallied together, time and time again – in recent months, across the years, and throughout the decades. With God's blessings, and with your participation and dedication, much vitality awaits in the next chapter. I will miss being a daily part of this church moving beyond the Covid Era. There is a current prominence on connecting more fully with the significant number of young families with whom we are already connected. (Other churches *wish* they could have a Baby Boom like we have had lately!) Familiar events are coming back to the church calendar. Even so, this congregation is adapting to the new trends which find that relationships are often more valued than structured programs. Coming out of the pandemic, you will be more able to visit and serve people who are less active, or lonely, or stressed. We have plans are underway for a special financial stewardship emphasis this fall. The 2022 congregation-wide priority of prayer and seeking God's guidance will instruct and empower what our Lord will bring about through this church and its people.

I am fully committed to ensuring a smooth and healthy transition. The timetable is not fully up to me, but it will be finalized in a partnership between the elders of our Session, the congregation, and our presbytery. Here though, subject to revisions, is what I will be proposing:

- I will continue to serve as your pastor until the covenant is concluded. I will preach each of the next four Sundays.
- As this news spreads, we will begin our process of inquiring and grieving and appreciating and planning. The first of those events will be what I am calling a "family meeting" at 10:00 a.m. this Sunday, September 25. This is not an official business meeting, but rather just a time to be together, as we often do

when a change is in the air. There will also be a time at the end of the 11:00 worship service to talk a bit about the pending conclusion of this pastorate. (I know that after the worship service would seem more ideal for such a conversation, but we will not have much time for that this weekend, due to the CROP Walk in Erie and because I must leave soon after noon to head off to see family in West Virginia.)

- Such conversations – large, small, individual, family – will continue throughout the next four weeks too.
- My previously scheduled continuing education leaves will be adapted. My participation in the Stewardship Kaleidoscope was to be online, but I will instead be attending my Aunt Velma’s funeral in West Virginia September 26. I do plan to go to the Wee Kirk Retreat at Mt. Pleasant starting October 10, but instead of being away on a Sunday that week, I will hold that Sunday-off until after my departure. Unused vacation accrued during the past couple of years will also slide later, so that I can be here consistently the next four weekends. (My brother in South Dakota retires October 20, and I will be there that weekend to celebrate.)
- There will be a congregational business meeting, asked to concur with my request. That date will be announced when it is formally scheduled. It might be October 9.
- The Presbytery of Lake Erie, through its Committee on Ministry, is where the authority is held to begin and end pastorates. Their next meeting will be October 11, and the COM will have contacts with our elders to assist with immediate plans for temporary pastoral coverage and worship leadership. When the time is right, the Session and their acting moderator will begin the process for determining when and how to start the moves toward intermediate and longer-term plans.
- It looks to me, “if the way be clear” (as the formal Presbyterian wording sometimes goes), that Sunday, October 16, would be my final day at Sunday worship. That (as is true of this full timeline) is subject to change as we work out this process.

You should know: I do not leave with any animosity or wistfulness; in fact, within my spirit these days is a blend of gratitude and sadness and pride and curiosity and appreciation and hope – for you and for me. This decision is my own, not at all nudged or encouraged by our elders or the presbytery or any other individuals. In this season when I am now an empty-nester, both sons are launched into productive young adult lives, and I have new freedom and flexibility to explore my vocation. I feel called into Christian radio at this point is an incredible and sudden opportunity in my life and in my faith. Family Life is a powerful ministry. It reaches people which congregational activities do not reach. That said, Christian media cannot at all connect and relate to individuals and households the way churches do. Neither is better than the other. After I left a 13-year radio career, I knew my time in at KWBE radio was used by our Lord to prepare me for church leadership and ordination as a Minister of Word and Sacrament. I now am equally convinced that my 27 years of full-time pastoring has prepared me to be a Christian broadcaster. (This transition does not change my ordination status, and I look forward to guest preaching and serving the church and the churches in my upcoming life too.)

A church is more than its pastor. Since our birth in 1827 there have been some 40 of us to whom God gave the privilege of being a First United Presbyterian pastor. Our recent history has been one where most pastorates have lasted at least five to seven years, if not longer. (That is around the denominational average.) Yet, congregations outlast us all – every one of us. All of us are essentially interim pastors, even someone who stays a decade or two. My tenure began as what we all thought would be a brief year-or-so interim stay. Instead, you folks – and God – have blessed me with 4+ meaningful years. I thank you.

I will say more in person, in public gatherings, and in next week’s church newsletter. For now, be assured that FUPC will be fine moving forward. You are in good hands. Sure, I’ve had my hand on the steering wheel in this most recent chapter, but this church is in *God’s* hands! Always has been. Always will be. The people and the ministry and the mission to come will be intriguing, exciting, and important.

Wishing you Jesus’ Peace and Hope and Joy,