

SENIOR PASTOR'S FINAL REPORT (EXIT INTERVIEW)

Prepared by Barbara Blaisdell for First Christian Church of Tacoma

April 18, 2021

Accomplishments of past nine years

All accomplishments are built upon the previous work of others. Everything we've been able to do is with God's help and thanks to an **inheritance** of the faithfulness pastors and people who have gone before. Having said that, I would identify the following things we have accomplished together.

1. **A worship and fellowship experience** that feels far more **friendly**. When I arrived, due to huge shift in the wider cultural, the congregation was divided about identity, about who it most essentially needed to be. That division over identity spilled over into division about what worship and fellowship should look like. The narthex was often the location for public arguments over music and liturgy. There was no coffee fellowship time for people to get to know each other or to host visitors.

In the last several years, Pre-Covid, I believe that together, we created both worship and fellowship events (coffee hour, Easter brunch, Mother's Day tea, etc.) that are much more like the "**banquets**" or parties Jesus used as a metaphor to describe what the kingdom of God should be like, where all are invited and all are beloved and joy in life abounds.

2. Speaking of COVID, more than a year of closure has been terribly painful and I don't think anyone knows the long-term impact on the church, but I am proud of the way leadership and staff stepped up to lovingly respond to provide worship and pastoral care in people's home with compassion and safety to the best of our ability.
3. Another huge accomplishment is the creation of a **unifying vision with the Gospel at center of our lives and decision-making**; a vision that God's love is for all and God's command is for justice for all. This isn't to say we're morally superior for this vision or that we've made no mistakes. We have and we will. But when the measure for our decisions is God's love for all rather than what I want vs. what you want, we are a little less likely to make bad choices.

4. We have successfully upgraded our **online presence** (website, on-line worship, social media)—examples of the gospel for all, including those who've not felt welcomed through our campus doors but can learn of God's love for them via our on-line presence.
5. I count as a huge accomplishment our **directly welcoming** and celebrating diversity by naming the diversity welcomed (people of color, LGBTQ+) **out loud**.
6. I'm proud of music that is indigenous to the diverse population of Tacoma, of high quality that attracts new people and provides "unique brand".
7. I am also grateful for our use of our unique gifts for mission to those in need of gospel through
 - a. Our love for Music--Center for Spirituality and Arts
 - b. Our inheritance of this beautiful corner--Tiny House Village

What I would have asked us to focus on in next five years had I been able to stay

1. That we continue to value worship and fellowship that recreates Jesus' metaphor of the banquet, the party, the celebration to which all are invited.
2. That we continue to build on our unifying vision because our human perspective is always, always narrower than God's and too narrow for the needs of all God's people so Christ's call requires us to be constantly expanding our vision.
3. That we continue upgrading our on-line presence as the post-Covid world will demand even more online "community." Specifically,
 - a. Find a new church website host
 - b. Upgrade worship broadcast capability
4. That we move beyond the mere welcome and celebration of diversity towards committing ourselves to the training required to truly love and understand each other across diverse racial and gender lines.
5. That we continue the commitment to high quality, indigenous, diverse music.
6. That we continue using the amazing gifts we inherited in this place:

- a. Our musical inheritance via the Center for Spirituality and the Arts to serve community
- b. Use of our land to provide much needed affordable and low-income housing for our neighborhood.

Clergy Ethics when any pastor leaves a congregation—essentially, the former pastor is to do nothing to get in the way of the new pastor bonding with the congregation.

Clergy ethics are probably among the hardest to explain to those outside the profession. We are all pretty clear about why doctors and lawyers have clear rules. But the rules for clergy beyond the obvious two -- don't steal from the church and don't take sexual advantage of anyone over whom one has power or influence -- can seem picky and trite. Clergy ethics for retiring ministers can seem especially picky and trite, until one begins to understand the real reason for them, which is this: essentially, a retiring pastor is to do nothing to get in the way of the new pastor bonding with the congregation. That sounds simple, doesn't it? Except, well, it isn't simple, particularly since we are not simply in a professional relationship like you and I have with our doctors or our lawyer. Yes, I am your pastor. But we're also family. We're friends. We care about each other way beyond what is "professional" and that is exactly why ethical boundaries for clergy who are retiring are so very hard and so hard to explain. After all, you might really, really like your surgeon, be really grateful for the work she did to save your life, but after her retirement, when you'd been seeing a new surgeon, you would never think to ask her to come out of retirement and do your next surgery because you were friends.

I am grateful, therefore, to have had the chance to think clearly about these things with smart colleagues in two different settings -- with Regional Minister Sandy Messick and retiring clergy in the Northern Lights Region last October and then also with United Church of Christ clergy leadership (as I am moving to a place where there are few Disciples but many, many U.C.C. siblings). Here is some of what I learned that I need you to know.

All ordained ministers must be responsible in establishing and maintaining healthy and appropriate boundaries in their ministries. Those professionally "retired" have particular responsibilities in their congregation of membership. Their role, responsibilities, and accountability may not be immediately clear to others, or even to themselves.

Therefore, "retired" ministers must exercise particular vigilance in establishing, maintaining, and communicating healthy boundaries in all cases.

Ministers retiring from a congregation must pay particular and careful attention to establishing appropriate and clear boundaries with their congregation and parishioners in order to facilitate the church's ability to build a positive relationship with the minister's successor and to continue to be faithful to the church's mission. Establishing such boundaries will also serve the retiring minister by providing a sense of release and clarity regarding the new status.

The following healthy boundary practices for ministers in retirement are strongly suggested:

1. The minister, upon departing from the last ministry setting, will leave with grace, expressing gratitude for the time of shared ministry and encouraging the congregation to bond with its next minister.
2. The retiring minister will state clearly that she is no longer available to the congregation or related persons for any ministerial services, including weddings, baptisms, funerals, church activities, pastoral care. The minister will keep this commitment, even when pressured to disregard it.
3. The retiring minister will say "goodbye " through an exit interview and through worship - and then practice saying "hello" to the new reality of retirement.
4. The retiring minister will transfer her local church membership (and ministerial standing, if appropriate) upon her departure from the congregation at the point of retirement to a congregation near her new home. This will facilitate both the retired minister and the congregation in building vital new relationships.
5. SOCIAL MEDIA BOUNDARIES (developed in recent years as we've learned how significant Facebook, etc. can be)

- a. "Unfriending"/unfollowing parishioners and others with whom they've had a pastoral relationship is the strongly preferred practice. Ministers must prioritize the needs of the congregation and incoming ministerial leadership over their own desires to maintain relationships (or the desires of parishioners to stay in contact). Ministers must be consistent. Ministers will communicate this policy to their congregation as part of their departure plan so that there is no confusion.
- b. Ministers will completely refrain from providing pastoral care through digital communication after the end date of their contract/call/covenant with their former congregation. Continuing to provide pastoral care through social media (Facebook), e-mail or snail mail interferes with the ministry of one's successor and is a violation of the Minister's Code of Ethics.
- c. Following a period of 1-3 years, ministers may discern whether they will begin to accept friend requests of former parishioners and/or change their privacy settings. Ministers will not initiate friend/ follow requests with former parishioners and will continue to refrain from providing pastoral care to former parishioners through digital communication, including on an "informal" basis.

Having quoted the above, let me be clear about my ethical obligations to you because I love you and don't want to harm you in any way:

- Beginning April 29, my professional email barbara@fctacoma.org will cease to function.
- If you have/discover my personal email and send something to me, I will answer with a copy to your new pastor so that he knows what is going on with you. (I hope you will refrain from doing this as it will make it even harder for me to let go of the pastoral role.)
- I will unfollow on Facebook anyone I have met through FCC of Tacoma and anyone for whom I've provided pastoral care until such time as you've bonded with Rev. Doug (exact timing to be determined by myself, Rev. Doug, and his PRC) but likely at least a year.
- I will not take phone calls from you, again, until such time as you've bonded with your new pastor.
- Any communication with me will be done through Rev. Doug. He will know how to reach me.

Perhaps, some of you, like me are already thinking, “this doesn’t apply to me because”

- I knew her before.
- I knew her better.
- We were more than pastor/parishioner. We were friends.
- One couple said to me last week, “But we’ll not be a part of the worshipping congregation so we can stay in touch.”

Please know that I have found myself making all these arguments in my mind and with God because I want to stay connected with you. You might recognize these arguments as the stage of grief known as bargaining. Let me reiterate, I don’t want to leave you. I’d rather stay in touch. But I love this place too much to get in the way of this next step in the journey God has planned for you, a step in which it is vital to bond with your new pastor and you cannot do that if your old pastor keeps hanging around, showing up on Facebook, taking your phone calls, etc. Please know this will not be easy for me but I am committed to doing so because I love you and because this is what is best for this community that we all love.