

HOW TO WELCOME A NEW PASTOR Romans 12:3-8

³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.
--Romans 12:3-8, New International Version

LET'S PRAY: God, thank you that we, who are many, are one body in Christ—and that you have gifted each of us to carry out a special role in the body of Christ. Speak to us now through this Scripture, and open our hearts to what you are doing in our midst. We pray this in Jesus' name, and let all who agree say, "Amen."

Well, I'm sad to say that my time at Main Street is coming to an end. Next Sunday will be my last Sunday to preach, and then your new Senior Pastor will start in July.

And so my sermon today is called, "How to Welcome a New Pastor." And let me hasten to say—I am not preaching this sermon because you guys don't know how to do this! In fact, when I came here 4 years ago, I was amazed at the extravagant welcome that Lorie and I received.

There are 3 reasons I wanted to do this sermon today:

- 1- Some of you are new to all this, and I thought you would appreciate an explanation.
- 2- Some of you have done this many times, but I thought you might appreciate a reminder.
- 3- Four years ago, my predecessor in this position did a wonderful job of paving the way for me to come in—so I just want to continue that tradition.

Your new pastor beginning in July is the Rev. Dr. Mike Gehring. He comes to us from Broad Street United Methodist Church in Statesville. His wife's name is Rhonda. They have three children: Laura, John, and Emily.

Now, I have tell you, I really like this guy: He's warm, he's friendly; he's enthusiastic; extremely intelligent, but he's also very down-to-earth, and humble.

Mike has a big heart for missions and evangelism--in fact, he wrote a book on evangelism! His wife Rhonda is a school nurse and she was named "Nurse of the Year" for the Iredell County school system

Lorie and I spent an afternoon with them, getting to know them, and I believe you are going to love them.

But some of you might still be wondering, "Why are we getting a new pastor, and who picked him out?"

Well, first of all, I felt led to step down from pastoral ministry to do some mission work. Nobody asked me to leave. This is my own prayerful discernment of God's will.

And after I made that decision, our Bishop, Bishop Paul Leeland, appointed Mike Gehring to Main Street. You see, in the United Methodist Church, pastors are not hired by the local church. In our denomination, pastors are **appointed** by the Bishop.

And this leads to all kinds of misconceptions, such as:

- "Oh, Methodists—y'all are the ones who move your pastors around all the time;"

Or,

- "Methodists—you're the ones who get stuck with whoever the Bishop sends!"

Well, let me clear some of this up.

First of all, the average tenure of pastors across all denominations is 3.6 years—so we United Methodists really don't change pastors any more than other denominations. Yes, there are plenty of exceptions to that statistic, and most independent churches keep their pastors for a long time—but on the whole, in the major denominations, pastoral tenures are no longer than they are for United Methodists.

Second, contrary to popular belief, it is not an automatic rotation—the Bishop doesn't say, "OK, you've been there four years, now you have to move." The truth is, we're appointed for one year at a time, and every year the church and the pastor get the chance to evaluate the appointment and say, "We want to keep our pastor," or, "We think it's time for a change."

And third, every church and every pastor gets to submit a profile that describes who we are, our strengths and weaknesses, what the church needs in a pastor, what the pastor would be looking for in a church. We submit one of those every year so that it's on file and up-to-date.

And then, if there *is* going to be a move, a committee from the church gets to meet, in person, with the District Superintendent—these are the "middle managers" who report to the Bishop. A committee from the church gets to meet with the District Superintendent to discuss the needs of the church and the kind of pastor they're looking for.

So, we *don't* move our pastors around willy-nilly, and you're *not* getting stuck with some random pastor that the Bishop sent for no reason.

AND—there's a reason we do it this way. Some people think it's because we don't want our churches to become pastor-centered, to build themselves around the pastor. And that's true, but that's not the reason.

Some people think it's so that the church can benefit from different pastors who are good at different things. So maybe one pastor comes in and he's good at organizing, and he gets things running like clockwork. And then another pastor comes in and she's excited about missions, and she gets all kinds of outreach ministries going. And then the next pastor comes in, and he or she is good at something else.

That's a benefit of our system, but that's not the reason.

Here's why United Methodist pastors are SENT by the Bishop: It goes back to the early, early days of the Methodist movement, when John Wesley would send his preachers out into the world—

- To the fields
- To the markets
- To the street corners
- To the mouths of coal mines

The early Methodist preachers went from place-to-place preaching the gospel. They were SENT in mission to the world.

Now, it's not quite like that today. I haven't preached in front of any coal mines lately. Today we have churches instead of preaching points. But we still maintain the idea of a SENT ministry—the idea that we United Methodists are in mission to the world *together*, and we send our pastors from place-to-place to do what needs to be done in that place at that time.

Not only is that part of our history, but we believe it's biblical. Think of Jesus sending out the Apostles--and the early church sending Paul and Silas—and Paul sending Timothy and Titus.

And here's the beautiful thing about our system: There is no pastor without a church, and there's no church without a pastor. You see, if we were a different kind of church, I would announce that I'm leaving, and then y'all would be on your own. You'd have to find your own pastor. In some churches that can a process that takes years.

But what happens here is I will leave next Sunday, and then a few weeks later, you'll have a new Senior Pastor.

But here's the thing:

How well the new pastor does will depend, in part, on how well you receive him.

So let's talk about HOW TO WELCOME A NEW PASTOR. I going to suggest four things you can do:

#1 – PRAY

I'll never forget my first Sunday at one of my churches. Everybody was greeting me, shaking my hand—and then this one gentleman said, “Claude, you're covered in prayer.” He said, “A group of us have been getting together and praying for you ever since your name was announced.”

And I felt so empowered by that!

So please, my brothers and sisters, PRAY:

- Pray for your new pastor and his family
- Pray for a smooth transition
- Pray for God to give Mike a vision and a passion for Main Street
- Ask God to give Mike the message that God wants you to hear

Like the Apostle Paul said,

Pray that I will be given the message to speak and that I may fearlessly explain the mystery about the good news.

--Ephesians 6:19, Contemporary English Version

#2 – PUT YOURSELF IN HIS SHOES

--which is basically the idea behind The Golden Rule:

"Do for others what you want them to do for you..."

--Matthew 7:12, Good News Translation

Try to imagine how **you** would feel if you're walking into a brand new church in a brand new town with a brand new group of people whose names you don't know. What would you want people to do for you?

- One thing is, you'd probably want people to wear their name tags.
- And you'd probably love it if people gave you gift cards to their favorite local places, because that would help you get to know the community.
- You'd probably love having some food dropped off--maybe some of the women's casseroles--or some of the men's chicken pies.
- You'd probably appreciate being invited—but not pressured—to attend some social events, or go out to lunch.

And here's something else:

- You'd probably be really grateful if people would wear their name tags—and keep doing that—every Sunday—for the rest of your life—until Jesus comes back—forever and ever, Amen.

****Put yourself in his shoes***, and think about the practical things that you would want people to do for you.

And here's one more example: Wear your name tags (did I mention that)? And if you need a new one, all you have to do is contact Charity in the church office and she'll take care of it.

#3 – Let Mike use his Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:3-8)

And that brings me to the Scripture I read earlier. In Romans 12, Paul mentions seven Spiritual Gifts:

- Prophecy
- Serving
- Teaching
- Encouraging
- Giving
- Leadership
- Mercy

And if you read the other letters of Paul, you will see plenty of other Spiritual Gifts mentioned. There are as many as 28 different Spiritual Gifts. These are special abilities, given by the Holy Spirit, to accomplish the mission of the church. Every Christian has at least one of these. But nobody has all of these

Let me say that again:

No one person has all the gifts!

God made us incomplete on purpose so that we would need each other.

But some misguided people expect pastors to have all the gifts. They feel like every pastor should be ...

- An inspiring preacher
- An insightful teacher
- A visionary leader
- An organized administrator
- A compassionate caregiver
- A wise counselor

- An evangelist who's always out in the community
- And a chaplain who's always in the homes of church members.

I'm going to tell you what some of my colleagues are afraid to admit: There's not a single one of us who does all those things well.

As Paul says in today's Scripture:

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us (Romans 12:6).

Main Street, I am so grateful to you for letting me use my Spiritual Gifts. You allowed me to focus on preaching and teaching, and you allowed me to delegate to others the areas that are not my strong suit. And I believe you are a stronger church because you allow your leaders to *play to their strengths*. According to the New Testament, that is God's way to run the church!

So please, keep doing that.

#4—Be open to what God wants to do through Mike.

God can do amazing things with people who are open to what God wants to do.

If you head towards our main office, and you look at the wall on your left, you'll see the names of all the Senior Pastors Main Street has had since 1837. And you'll photographs going way back to the early part of the last century.

I believe that God did something through every one of those pastors. Even the ones who maybe didn't do the best job. Even the ones you personally didn't like. God still did something through every single one of those pastors to accomplish his purposes.

So decide today that you're going to be open to what God wants to do through your new Senior Pastor.

God can do amazing things with people who are open to what God wants to do.

LET'S BOW OUR HEADS.

- And right now, in silence, I invite you to go ahead and do one of the things I asked you to do, and that's to pray for your new Senior Pastor, Mike Gehring.