

From the Pastor...

From the Pastor... Here it is—my valedictory “From the Pastor” newsletter article to you, my beloved family in the faith. As I have been packing up twenty years of memories from my office (and wondering where on earth I’ll put everything!), someone suggested that perhaps I might want to publish some of these articles one day in the form of a devotional. To be honest, that thought had never occurred to me—and it may never happen. But it did make me realize something: I had better keep copies of these little “pastoral missives” ... just in case. So, beginning with my very first introductory article in 2006 and ending with this one, I found myself taking a journey through two decades of church archives. I made copies of everything—from what was once titled “From PJ’s PC” to what eventually became simply “From the Pastor.”

My colleagues have teased me more than once about the length of my articles. Many pastors write only a few paragraphs at most. But by the time I was finished, I had assembled a notebook containing 543 pages of both wheat and chaff! And yet, the best part of this project wasn’t the stack of pages. The best part was the joy of rereading the old Christ the King “King’s Pages,” the Prince of Peace “Heralds” (apparently, many of the St. John newsletters got recycled in the merger), and remembering our incredible journey together as we became the community of faith we are today. I smiled as I read names of those who began this journey with us, who are now part of the Church Triumphant. I felt tears rise as I remembered the baptisms, confirmations, and weddings—holy moments when heaven seemed very near. I lingered over the stories, the photographs, the announcements, and the evidence of God’s faithfulness written across every season. And as I said in my retirement announcement letter to you, I will say it again: these past two decades have been the greatest blessing of my life. We have shared so much together—laughter and tears, celebrations and heartaches, times of growth and seasons of challenge. Serving as your pastor has not only been a calling... it has been a privilege and a joy.

You are among the finest people on the planet. Your love and your presence in Heather’s life and mine made us richer than all the billionaires on earth put together. Thank you for allowing me to be part of some of the most intimate and painful moments of your lives—moments when we hugged, prayed, and sometimes cried together. Thank you for the joys and celebrations we shared. Thank you for the love and support you have shown us. Thank you for your faithfulness in giving— especially during the difficult and uncertain days of COVID-19. Thank you for taking risks by stepping into new ministries. Thank you for the music, the praise, the worship, the choirs, and for remembering that everything we do, we do—as Johann Sebastian Bach so beautifully wrote— “Soli Deo Gloria,” To God Alone the Glory. One of the greatest honors I have ever received is when you introduced me to others by saying, with such conviction and joy, “This is my pastor.” You came to worship faithfully, expecting to hear from God through the proclamation of the Word. You have been outstanding among congregations. There have been times I wish I could have served you more effectively. I ask your forgiveness if, in the busyness of ministry, I was occasionally unable to minister as fully as I would have liked.

At the end of worship on June 14th, the Assistant to the Bishop, Reverend Jen Kiefer, will ask the congregation to officially release me from my service as your pastor. In turn, I will recognize and accept that release. Then it will be officially announced that my service as pastor of Celebration Lutheran Church has now concluded. The Apostle Paul said it best when he wrote to the church in Philippi: “And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight, to help you to determine what really matters, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.” (Philippians 1:9–11)

With the coming of your new pastor, I am confident that God will continue to guide Celebration as you grow, prosper, and live out God’s will in everything you do. The same Lord who brought us this far will continue to lead

you forward. God is not finished with this congregation—far from it. The best chapters are still being written. So, May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.

And, for the last time...

See you in church!

Pastor Fogle