



A PLACE TO WORSHIP IN COMMUNITY



Pastor Steve's Retirement Announcement

Dear Idlewild Family,

"To everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven."

There is certainly a wisdom the old preacher Koheleth shared in his book of Ecclesiastes, and after much thought, prayer, and discernment from a small group of friends, clergy, and advisors, I shared with the Session last night that the season for my retirement is coming. After 19 years as the pastor of this amazing church, I plan to retire in the Spring of 2019.

One might think such a decision would come easily. After all, I will be 67 years old next spring, well past the time most people retire at 65. However, this decision has been hard ... very hard! Patti and I, along with A.J. and Sumita, could not have asked for more support, love, and care from a congregation. I continue to find energy and strength from an incredible staff, and there is always more work to be done as we move toward the beloved community that God calls us to be. So this decision was not made lightly nor easily, yet Patti and I made the decision that the time was ripe.

Nineteen years is a good, healthy ministry, and the staff is keenly aware of the transitions that we are facing in the next few years. The session recently hired a consultant to help guide us in moving toward more integrated program, particularly as we move into a newly renovated Jones Building. Our new pre-school baby room is rapidly filling up and will be opened on January 7, 2019, and that is just the beginning. CAFE (Children and Family Enrichment) is one of the most exciting ... and needed ... programs anywhere in the city, and already CAFE has begun offering new programs, both for Idlewild members but also for the greater community, including the Center for Good Grief housed in the Evergreen house.

That's just the tip of the iceberg, of course. This next year we will need to find ways to support the growing number of young adults that have been led here. Stewardship will have to be a top priority for our entire congregation and not just a committee as we continue to respond to our calling to be stewards of what a gracious God has given us. Christian nurture has taken a higher priority in our church over the past few years, and with the new building we will be re-visioning new possibilities for our recreation program. In addition, there are new opportunities for outreach into our greater community, starting with our support of MICAH—Memphis Interfaith Coalition for Action and Hope.

In short, there is much work to be done, and much joy to be had. I am not the only one who has noticed that "God is doing a new thing" here at Idlewild, as there is a great spirit of what God has in store for us.

So what are the next steps? It used to be that a Pastor Nominating Committee could not even be formed before the pastor was "out the door." Increasingly, especially with healthy churches, such a committee can be formed and its work begun while the pastor is still employed by the church. Thus, one possibility will be for the Nominations Committee to begin the process of selecting a PNC so that they can begin the arduous-but-joyful task of working with presbytery, coming up with a Ministry Information Form and discerning who might lead this congregation into the future. The process often takes at least a year, and though this might change, I am tentatively suggesting that my final Sunday will be April 28, 2019, the Sunday after Easter. The Personnel Committee, the Session, and I will keep you informed.

In the meantime, this Sunday we meet in the garth and process with our palms, and then see how quickly the "Hosannas!" move to "Crucify him!" I hope to see all of you this Sunday, and then in our Holy Week services, so that we can indeed proclaim "He is Risen!" on Easter. God did a new thing on that morning, and God will continue to surprise and amaze us.

I hope that you will join me in worship, in prayer, and in ministry throughout the coming year as we experience God's abundant grace, justice, and love.

In God's peace,
Steve

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