

**Acts 16: During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.**

You likely know I've decided to retire October 1st. The confusion seems to be: why? I understand. When I told Council, they were shocked. Maybe even unsure that I had said this. I doubt they heard much after I said "retire." The part I hoped they (and the congregation when I announced it Sunday) heard was YOU need me to retire. That probably even more begs the question: WHY? I planned to work (God willing) to 70. Yet, my first priority must be the church. What is needed here so the mission of the church may be known and BEAR FRUIT?

For over two (2) years, I've felt uncertain on Faith's future. I've prayed: God, what is needed? A perspective for you: I turned down my first call. I didn't believe that was where God wanted me. I didn't seek nor ask to leave my 'first call church' to come to Faith. The West PA Bishop asked me to look at another congregation and that led ultimately to my calling Denver home. I was asked to look at a Michigan congregation while here at Faith. That wasn't where I was to be. The question has always been whether it is God's will that I come, stay, or go. You may not have listened, but you have been answering that question for me.

Secondly, what is the healthy choice for the future of Faith United. The Council has discussed this. We have met periodically with other Lutheran congregations about our collective future. Should we merge or seek a different vision? That has been fruitless. The primary observation from Council and its officers: the pastors are a factor... (and my apologies) and an impediment to meaningful conversation and change. I like my fellow pastors, but I agree with that assessment. Pastoral longevity and "comfort" are NOT always good for a church. It creates lethargy. "Boxes" are formed that become difficult to move beyond. Faith cannot afford to do that. The church cannot serve Christ unless we are moving to where Christ is calling us. It is a necessary discomfort and *I know I made everyone uncomfortable*. I'm sorry for that.

Thirdly... you are Faith United. Do you understand HOW that makes you different? You have done the trauma of merging. I said this in church; you do not talk about being from 'Salem' or 'St. John's'—you speak as the people of Faith United. It been about 14 years since the merger. Other local Lutheran churches don't have that experience. **You know how to adapt**. Think of that opportunity to move not only Faith United, but teach other congregations.

Fourth, we have missions that changed the life and view of Faith United. You are NO longer a pastor driven church. By God's grace and the work of the Holy Spirit, Faith has moved to where members initiate projects, take leadership, suggest books for study, host outside organizations, and act in ways where YOU ARE the chURch. That is what Lutherans teach. It is the gathering. It is the baptized. It is God working among us. Pastors are part of the baptized.

Fifth, if I stayed, important decisions are affected by my presence. Things get framed by what it means to 'the pastor.' This is not my church. If useful (but hard) decisions are needed; I should not slow that process. Faith is able to do much. It needs the "next step." I must love you in a way difficult to see—I must leave. I need to show you a love that means I give you up...the people I truly love.

Some will say my decision is driven by personal needs. I may not change what they think. I admit the pain of Faith's last "call process" influenced me—how it was VERY long, how it was mishandled by the Synod, and how it was traumatic. I can't do that to you. I won't do that. The Synod suggested to me to announce in May or June, but I told them I wanted Faith United to prepare. You know me. I don't think as many pastors. I do not see the world as others. My theology confesses an active God leading and directing me...directing us. I trust that for Faith. These six months are important. It is a time to listen and MAYBE create a different paradigm for Lutherans. What is our mission? Where is God calling us collectively and as individuals? I need you at church to consider Faith's future. I took a risk—a risk people may drift away. I know this happened at another Lutheran church when the pastor tried to give the congregation the gift of time to prepare. I believe Faith will use this time. May God guide us.

*With blessings, Pastor Joe*