

We are midway in my interim tenure. I'm grateful to serve as your interim pastor and teacher. You have welcomed me warmly and have been generous in responding to, frankly, a pretty demanding workload. Even in this short time together, I sense some new thinking about the church in today's world. Comments I've heard lead me to believe our work together has generated new ideas and opened a new way to think about this church, especially as it relates to a post-modern world.

This interim is new for you and for me. Typically, I work with a congregation until it calls a settled pastor. This can typically be a couple of years. This time, however, I'm engaged for six months to help you think about your options for your future. Following my tenure, you will engage another interim pastor who will work with you to narrow your options in order to secure the right settled pastor to lead you into the future you will decide. Though I plan to finish in mid-November, should a pastor not be available for Advent, we can extend my contract until Epiphany. Epiphany, however, is my absolute final date.

We have looked forward and backward. We read a book about postmodernism and the challenge we face ahead. We are presently in the middle of a Bible study on Acts to help us to reconnect to the ancient church. I have circulated through the website various articles about churches and how they are wrestling and responding to the secular world today. We have had three community discernment sessions to learn our core values, our identity, our concerns, our wider community, our habits, and our challenges. All of these will coalesce to become a pointer towards your mission as TCC in Northfield.

Since I arrived, you have had three fundraising events. They were successful because of your hard work. On the other hand, I've heard many comments about being tired and wondering "how much longer can we keep doing all these fundraisers?"

TCC like many congregations, large and small, urban and rural has reached an inflection point. Standing still and not changing are not options for longevity. Changing sounds good, but change to what? Truthfully, no one has a definitive answer because the path forward in a postmodern society is unknown as the cultural markers with which we orient ourselves are not clear.

Since the end of July, first among church leadership and later in the most recent discernment session, an idea to use 2020 as a sabbath year arose. Leviticus 25:1-7 instructed Israel to observe a sabbath year every seven years. Sabbath was a way for the community to reset itself.

Periodically, a congregation should reassess itself. Congregations should examine their commonly held understandings of their practices, their assumptions, and their connection with their wider community. Reexamination allow congregations to reassess their life together. What are we doing well? What areas need strengthening? Is there a need in our community that we can meet, which we are not doing now? What are we doing now, that doesn't seem to work as we originally intended? How well are we engaged with the Holy Spirit? How do people in our community see us as incarnating Jesus? How faithfully are we using the spiritual gifts we have? How are we living God's blessing to our community?

Reassessment takes time and energy. Furthermore, because congregations don't do reassessments every year, it is a new endeavor added to all the other activities in the congregation. Taking sabbath sets aside the busyness of life to allow time to unfold in order to reveal the possibilities God holds before us. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel described sabbath in his masterful book **The Sabbath** as a cathedral in time thus letting us glimpse eternity.

Observing sabbath well is a discipline. We may think of it as time off, a break, which is correct, but only to a limited extent. Sabbath is a break from our routine so that we can engage with God and what truly matters in life. What matters is not making money or buying things or repairing things but thickening our relational bonds with one another in order to nurture and strengthen our community so that we can experience shalom, God's peace. Peace rooted in justice shaped by love.

We will have our final community discernment meeting of my tenure on September 8. We will consider whether a sabbath makes sense in 2020 and how we might carry it out. A sabbath will mean setting aside some of our usual activities in order to spend time reflecting and reassessing in order for TCC to enter its next phase of its interim time.

Quentin