

Dear Christ Church Family,

We are launched! The “Senior Pastor Transition” is upon us!

For a couple of years now we Elders have had preliminary discussions about Pastor Lyle’s eventual retirement from his position as Senior Pastor. We knew that it was coming, and we also knew that we needed to prepare for it. As to the timing, we trusted God to reveal to us when the transition process should begin.

And God answered. He opened up a wonderful opportunity for Lyle to serve in a part time new Chaplain position at South County Hospital that draws not only on his pastoral skills but also on his previous five-year experience as Hospice Chaplain and team leader. It is a great fit for Lyle and an awesome opportunity for him to practice what he preaches: living the good news of Jesus Christ for the flourishing of patients and those who care for them.

With a clear sense that God is in charge and God will care for Christ Church we are moving ahead with a transition plan. For the next 18 months or so Lyle will continue to serve as Senior Pastor on a part time basis, and continue as our primary preaching pastor. His availability for pastoral care and other pastoral functions will be more limited, however, and the availability of our four other pastors for these functions will correspondingly increase. As seminary graduates and ordained ministers themselves, they are more than “up to the job.”

Meanwhile, a plan for the “succession” of a new pastoral leader for Christ Church is being developed. The first step in that plan is a consultation with Rev. Howard Burgoyne, the Superintendent of the East Coast Conference of the Evangelical Covenant Church. Rev. Burgoyne is a long-time friend of Christ Church, and has preached here several times. This meeting will take place on March 2. We plan to investigate what model of succession best suits the needs and resources of our church and best supports our Vision and Mission Priorities.

On Sunday, January 31, the Elders hosted a “Q & A” session with the congregation. It was a time to celebrate Lyle’s new opportunity at South County Hospital, though tinged with the sad realization that his time as our beloved Senior Pastor is gradually drawing to a close. Those who attended were wonderfully supportive and responsive. Some of the questions that were asked and answers that were given are set out below.

Finally, we want all of us, our whole congregation, to commit together to trust our God to lead us through and beyond those 18 months that lie ahead of us. He will part the waters of uncertainty and lead us into the land of his promise.

“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid ... for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Deuteronomy 31:6

Faithfully His and yours,

Elders Rick Bonin, Lyle Mook, Elaine Romeo, Scott Thurber, Don Yeoman and Don Zeyl (Chair)

Some beginning Q & A's re: the Transition

Q: *What is Pastor Lyle's new job at South County Hospital (Health) (SCH)?*

A: As Chaplain, Lyle will serve as a member of a specialty team coordinating the work of a new Palliative Care Department. The focus will be quality of life and end-of-life care: bringing comfort and spiritual care for patients and families facing life-limiting illnesses. (This is not the same as hospice care.) He will also be available for general chaplain duties throughout the hospital system, including for staff.

Q: *Will Pastor Lyle be preaching less on Sunday mornings during the transition? What differences will be evident?*

A: No. Pastor Lyle will continue to preach as before and there should be no visible changes on Sunday mornings during the transition, or any felt gaps. His position at Christ Church will be part time, and his position at SCH will also be part time. In addition, he will continue teaching his course at URI.

Q: *Will Pastor Lyle continue to be a member of Christ Church and attend services after retirement?*

A: This is up to Lyle and Mary. Lyle would “step out” for a time to give the new Pastoral leadership “space” to be established. He would discern (with the Elders and new Pastor) when it would make sense to return. Out of professional courtesy, Lyle would never after retirement officiate at weddings or funerals, for example, without an invitation from the Pastor.

Q: *When will the process to hire a new Pastor start?*

A: The Elders are due to meet on March 2 with Rev. Howard Burgoyne, Superintendent of the East Coast Conference of our denomination, and great

friend of Christ Church. We hope to develop a process and projected timeline in consultation with him.

Q: *Would new pastoral leadership potentially mean a new direction in the teaching or theology of the church?*

A: Any new pastor will have a different voice, but will certainly be in step with the doctrinal distinctives, core values and mission priorities of Christ Church and the Covenant denomination.

Q: *Are we hiring a part time Pastor to replace Pastor Lyle?*

A: No. Our other pastors will take on more responsibilities, such as weddings, funerals and hospital visits. Pastor Lyle will continue to be involved in pastoral care and ministry projects such as *The Center for Faith at Work*.

Q: *As a church, how do we protect Pastor Lyle from taking on too much work between both jobs?*

A: The Elders and other Pastors are here to assist him and monitor his workload.

Q: *How will the congregation be kept informed and updated on the whole process?*

A: The Elders, Pastors and Staff will strive to be diligent in maintaining good communication with the congregation.

Q: *Who makes the final decision on whom we would hire as a new Senior Pastor?*

A: Our bylaws require a Search Team and Congregational vote to approve the call of a Senior Pastor.

Q: *Does a pastoral candidate have to be a Covenant pastor to be hired?*

A: Yes. Senior Pastors of Evangelical Covenant churches must be ordained or commit to seeking ordination in the denomination.

Q: *Where do we look for candidates, and how much say will Superintendent Burgoyne have over the process?*

A: We will certainly look for candidates within our denomination, but are not restricted to looking there. We will post this position on selected search sites to generate an applicant pool. Rev. Burgoyne will give us counsel, but his role

is mainly advisory. Also, he may bring potential candidates to our attention. As stated, the final decision on whom to call will be made by congregational vote.

Q: *Is the expansion of the church facilities still a priority?*

A: We are still in discussion with State officials about the state-owned corner property, so we are not yet in a position to consider long-term expansion plans. That said, we are aware that we need to upgrade our current facilities, especially to accommodate people with limited mobility. We are putting the expansion project on the “middle burner” for now. The growth of our church is in no way “on hold!”