

31 January 2017

Dear Siblings in Christ at Faith Church,

This letter is to inform you that I have accepted a call to serve as pastor of Shepherd of the Bay Lutheran Church in Ellison Bay, Wisconsin.

To deliver such news elicits a paradoxical cocktail of emotions: sadness, loss, gratitude, excitement, nervousness, and joy.

In this work and in the body of Christ, we are called to love deeply and loosely. As the beloved of Jesus, we are placed into relationship with each other, even when we might not have chosen each other as friends. We see each other through God's eyes of love and grace, and we recognize, hold dear, and celebrate each other's unique and particular gifts. We do this deeply and loosely, knowing that life is an ever moving stream. As I prepare to leave this congregation, our love for one another and our partnership in the gospel will not end, but it will be different and distant.

I am grateful beyond words for the nearly 15 years I have walked with you in this journey of ministry and faith. I love this congregation, its ministry, and the people who inhabit it. You have trusted me with many things over the years, including your very lives, and you have been faithful to the gospel and to the gospel call to be the church in the world. I have learned much from you. You have taught me how to be a better pastor. In 30 years of ministry, I have never worked with such a talented and Christ-like staff as the people that I presently work with. To leave such an extraordinary team is difficult. I will never forget how you took the risk of calling me out of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod into the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. I love this church body and I will always be grateful to have become a member of such a vibrant and faithful denomination.

We have much to remember with joy and thanksgiving. We have walked together through some difficult days. I thank God for the ways in which we have prospered together. I also realize that often I have fallen short of God's will and your own expectations. For the ways in which I have hurt you or offended you, I am sorry and ask your forgiveness.

So, why now, and why this call? Though I have never over the past 15 years actively sought a new call, from time to time the larger church has presented me with other opportunities for ministry. In each case, I believed that Faith was the right use of my gifts. In this case, I have come to a different conclusion. Accepting this new call is

not based on any deficiency or dissatisfaction with my work here. In the well-known passage from Ecclesiastes, the Preacher wrote these words of wisdom millennia ago: *For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted.* . . . Last summer I celebrated my 56th birthday and began to think more sharply about how I want to spend the last dozen or so years of active ministry. In that prayerful discernment, I have determined that I have entered a new season in life and ministry. I have loved my work here and have found great joy and satisfaction. It is also true that it has been consuming. I have an increasingly strong desire to write and to be involved in organizing work. The demands of this call simply do not provide enough of a margin to engage that work as I desire.

This call to Door County also allows me in some sense to return to my rural roots. I grew up in a town of 1600 people with lots of wide open spaces and a close connection to the land. I have spent the last 34 years in heavily populated areas, always with a desire to return to something closer to the land. (A writing teacher told me that the land is always a major character in my writing. I guess that's something to pay attention to.) The call to the northern tip of Door County allows me to continue pastoral ministry and return to something more like the landscape that is in my bones.

Over the next several days, I will be working with the congregational leadership to formulate a plan for bringing my ministry here to a conclusion, a plan which will include both short-term and long-term transition coverage.

Let me say again how deeply grateful I am for our partnership over the past 15 years, and for the love and support you have shown to me and my family. You have been the hands and face and heart of God for me. I am sad at having to say good-bye, even as I am excited for the prospect of what lies ahead.

Peace,

Pr. Jim Honig