



First Presbyterian Church of Lancaster

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April 24, 2017

Dear First Family and Friends,

Our friend, Don Hackett, Pastor of Congregational Care and Missional Ventures, has requested to be released from his call to this congregation, so that he may seek a new call. Don has been talking with our community about being sent and he believes that this is his moment to be sent by this community into a new adventure. Although this corresponds with discussions Don and I have had, the motivation for this, it seems, has been brewing for a while. Don believes that he needs to make a bold step to follow a desire that's been developing for years. He's said to me and to our Personnel Committee, "If I don't do it now, when will I?"

Don has been a mainstay in the recent history of this congregation serving longer than all but two other ministers in our church's history. The Alpha study, the Cherry Street service – our contemporary worship expression, and The SENT Festival are some of the new initiatives Don established during the tenure of his ministry. He has been a constant ambassador of grace to our city and county, consistently bringing that smile, warmth and assuring calm to many who were coming to the church in need. Don also reached out to those passing on the street with an air of invitation, inviting people to make a new friend. Don is always seeking to know someone's name and their story.

One of the striking gifts Don brings into any situation is discernment. He can teach on it with depth because of his practice of it. Another element of grace is his confidence in the immediate presence of God, which is always displayed as he raises a hand and prays at any moment when a need is expressed. And when he preaches, you can always expect that you will walk away with practical tools for your spiritual walk. You will find yourself with at least three clear practices to put into place and a solid word of comfort or direction any time Don is in the pulpit.

Beyond just what Don brought to the life of this church are the numerous gifts carried by his family. Rila's piano playing, worship leadership and teaching has woven itself into the life story of this community. There are too many times to number when any amount of people left a service feeling moved by the sensitivity of her Scripture reading, her explanations of its setting and the voice she gave to its characters. Ian, Brynn and Colin have each stepped into the days and experiences of the church with a vibrancy that was infectious.

The gap that is expected to be felt here as they move into this new future will be tangible, and that tells us how loved they are. But they have brought strength, and fostered a foundation on which we also can move into a new future. If we were to focus on the gap, we wouldn't honor the friendship or the gifts they gave us here. As they move into a new leading, we must surround them

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with our prayers and also look to our next steps as well. We celebrate with them the call of our Lord and friend into what he is creating in all of our lives.

There will be a called meeting of the congregation to receive and vote on Don's request. In the Presbyterian Church (USA) system, the congregation calls and releases a pastor from a call, while the Presbytery dissolves the call, officially. **A Congregational Meeting will be held on Sunday, May 21 at 10:00am in the Sanctuary.** Please plan to attend if you are able.

If the congregation releases Don from this call, his last day in the office will be June 16. The Session will also work with the Presbytery to follow its guidelines in developing a covenant of healthy boundaries after the call ends.

A day of celebration of Don's ministry here at the church will be announced in the very near future, including ways that you can join in recognizing and thanking him for his ministry here. Feel free to talk with the Elders – all members should have received contact information for one of our Elders recently – or with the pastors.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Geoff Kohler', written over a thin horizontal line.

Geoff Kohler
Lead Pastor