

Pastor's Ponderings - October 2022

On September 25 the congregation voted to “call me” as the “Settled Pastor” here at Faith Church. We use the language of “call” in the church because we understand ministry as a calling, a vocation. Derived from the Latin word for voice, the word “vocation” literally means “a calling, or to be called.” God calls each of us to work in some way toward the building of his kingdom—the realm of God according to the vision and teachings of Christ. As a pastor, I have a calling to make ministry my life work. In voting “yes,” you as a congregation have affirmed this calling and my ministry here in this church. I am grateful—grateful to God for this place of ministry, and grateful to you for embracing my work and my calling here with you.

I have been thinking lately about who we are as a church here at Faith Church, Boston, NY. What are some of our defining characteristics? As part of the United Church of Christ we have some defining characteristics in terms of ways we govern ourselves and make decisions. While we receive guidance and support from the UCC, we make major decisions by congregational vote and there is no overruling authority outside of the congregation. In many other churches the ultimate responsibility for major decisions goes to a bishop, or presbytery, or synod, or in some cases to the pastor. We also have some lingering ethnic identity as a congregation. A large portion of the founding members of Faith Church came from a German Evangelical and Reformed background at the former St. Paul's Church in Boston. Many of the founding members who came from the former Boston Community Church to form this church were also of German heritage due to the large German population who settled in this area long ago. Certainly, we are not all of German heritage and being German is not a defining part of our identity as a congregation. But I think the hard work, strong organization, and steadfast commitment that built and formed this church *are* characteristically German traits. As a UCC church we are also more explicitly open and welcoming than many other churches. The UCC (when including the prior denominations that united to form it) was the first Protestant denomination to ordain an African American (1776), a woman (1853), and an openly gay person (1972). There are many churches that still do not ordain (and therefore do not fully include) women and gay persons. As with our ethnic German heritage, being a woman, African American, or gay are not defining characteristics of who we are as a denomination or as a church. Rather, the point is that these things are not our concern in terms of who we are and what we do as a church. We welcome everyone and anyone to worship with us and join with us in seeking to carry out the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ.

As we look ahead and move into our future together, it is that mission and ministry that is and must be our focus. We are here to worship God. We are here to be the church, the Body of Christ in the world. We are here to love our neighbors, to care for those who are hungry or homeless or lacking in clothing, and to seek peace and show compassion for all. May it be so.

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