



A Farewell Letter
from
Pastor Kathy

July 26, 2022

For I know the plans I have
for you...to give you a
future with hope. (Jer. 29:11)

Dear Friends in Christ,

The time has come for us to say our goodbyes, yet as people of faith perhaps more appropriate is “farewell for now.” During these almost six years in ministry together, God has blessed us in so many ways. We have been gifted with sharing in many of life’s milestones, both the heights of joy and the depths of sorrow. We have shared in many new ideas and so much change and transition, and yet we have also celebrated beloved traditions and the rich history of The First Congregational Church of Wallingford and the surrounding community. We have embraced technology in many new ways, and our church plant has received a variety of improvements. We have grown in our understanding of the challenges facing the church in our time, and we have begun the work of engaging more in ministry with the community and its needs. And yet we know, this is a “journey” of faith and there is more yet to do and more for each of us on the horizon. God is not finished with us yet!

It has been my deep privilege to serve as your 18th Senior Minister and the first female to do so in the church’s long history. The Dylan song says, *the times they are a changin’* and perhaps this has never been more prevalent than in these unprecedented days of Covid-19 and the shifting of so much in society. It is daunting to be sure, but I still believe it is also ripe with possibilities, if we are willing to embrace them. It is certainly understandable to feel the anxiety of these days, but we cannot let that keep us from fully living as God calls us to live in this moment. In scripture, when Jesus prepared to leave his disciples, he offered them three promises. He promised to make a home in their hearts and be with them always. (John 14:23) Jesus promised to fill the disciples with a spirit of courage and comfort...The Holy Spirit. (John 14:26) And Jesus promised to sustain the disciples with a peace that passes all understanding... “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.” (John 14:27) These promises are blessings that can also help us to face whatever may come with a spirit of trust.

Know that though we are parted by space and time, what we have shared will always be a part of the life we have known. I am grateful for experiences of welcome and hospitality, for mission outreach and workcamps, for creative worship and musical expressions, for ministry relationships of care, and for the hard and long work of leading a congregation and all the learning that has come through an unexpected pandemic. It really has been an extraordinary time in the life of this church. We have embraced what we could, together, and now the continuation of that work will be embraced by an Interim pastor and eventually a new settled pastor. I pray for

their ministries in this place, that God will provide them with what they most need to serve. I also pray that each of you will be provided the same.

We have known moments of kindness and grace, generosity, and love. We have also known times of struggle, disagreement, disappointment, and even hurt. Such it is with human beings because none of us are perfect. I hope you will forgive the ways that I may have fallen short, as I will seek to do the same on behalf of all of you.

When a pastor departs a congregation, there are certain boundaries for departure, ethical procedures that must be followed to allow for the success and thriving of the pastors who will follow me. In the Ministerial Code of Ethics, a minister is asked to follow these guidelines so as not to cause any undue interference in the ministries of those who will be your next ministers in the coming years.

This means that when I am released from your service, I will no longer be called upon to provide pastoral care through visitations, funerals, baptisms, or weddings. I will also honor the recommended social media policy, which says that the outgoing minister should “unfriend” congregation members on Facebook for a period of at least one to three years, depending on the circumstances. The former minister is also asked to refrain from offering pastoral care via social media. All of this is very hard to actually do when we have shared in life milestones and meaningful ministry, but I do understand why it is wise and so I will comply. I hope you will understand. After a period of separation, we may decide if a continued relationship outside of pastoral ministry is possible or desired.

My hope for the congregation is that you will continue the work that we have begun and see through to completion many of the seeds that have been planted. I am especially hopeful about the continued Implementation process and the pursuit of becoming an Open and Affirming congregation. In addition, I hope you will embrace a spirit of trust and curiosity, a spirit of permission giving and experimentation that can lead to new ways and new vitality and relevance. I know that the church will celebrate its own 350th anniversary in just a few years. This is a perfect time to plan for goals that can be reached and celebrated by then. The pastors who will serve you next will help you to do just that. Be willing partners in all that you can accomplish together!

As we part, you will all be in my thoughts and prayers in the days and years to come. Thank you for everything that we have shared in together, as we sought to discern and answer God’s call to a future bright with hope. That Jeremiah passage shared in the heading of my letter, the focus of our vision and mission process is still relevant for all of us. May that future be so for you and for me.

Wishing you all God’s blessings...

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Kathy

The Reverend Kathleen T. Cunliffe

Senior Minister

The First Congregational Church of Wallingford

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