



Westminster United Methodist Church

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October 9, 2014

Beloved Ones,

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1 NRSV).

Sometimes God’s timing is out of sync with our timing. Sometimes what we believe to be the best timetable turns out to be quite different from the timetable we receive from heaven.

That is the case today, as I announce to you that I will be leaving the senior pastorate of Westminster United Methodist Church on October 31, 2014. I plan to take a couple of months of sabbath leave, then take early retirement (with 32 ½ years of service) beginning January 1, 2015.

I have thought and prayed over this matter for many months. Some of you may know that I went through a difficult period of depression during the past year. While it was painful, and I am happy to report that I am much better now, it nonetheless forced me to consider if the pastoral ministry was God’s best plan for me for the rest of my working career.

I have been interested in pastoral counseling throughout my ministry. I am humbled that God has worked through me to bring healing and wholeness to many individuals, couples, and families. Pastoral ministry has many different tasks, and few pastors (if any) are talented enough to do them all well. I believe God is equipping and calling me to a specific ministry that I am now stepping out in faith to pursue. After I leave Westminster UMC, I plan to transition to full-time status as a student in the Master of Science in Pastoral Counseling program at Loyola University of Maryland. This degree should take me about 2 years to complete. I hope to work part-time as a pastor while attending school, then eventually switch to working full-time as an ordained, licensed pastoral counselor.

I am disappointed to leave you after serving as your senior pastor for just a year and a half. This was certainly not in my original plan when I accepted the appointment to Westminster UMC last year. However, I believe that God is calling me into this new ministry focus in God’s time, not my time. Be assured that I am not leaving because I don’t love you! I do love you, and I will pray for you to prosper as a church and as individuals for the rest of my life. You can be assured that our Bishop, Marcus Matthews, and our district superintendent, Edgardo Rivera, are already working to find an excellent interim senior pastor who can start fairly soon. In consultation with Westminster UMC’s staff-parish relations committee, Bishop Matthews will then appoint a new senior pastor to begin July 1, 2015.

I pray God’s best for all of you, and I covet your prayers for me. As Ralph Abernathy said, “I do not know what the future may hold, but I know who holds the future.” God will provide. We can trust that promise.

Much love in Christ,

Pastor Mark Smiley