

Pastoral Transition Update from the Session September 20, 2022

Because of the long tenure of our current pastor (29 years this fall), AVPC doesn't have much experience with pastoral transitions. But with Brad's decision to retire in the fall of 2024, we will be facing our first pastoral transition in over 30 years. The Session recognizes the importance of communicating with the congregation about this process, and we want to begin that with some Questions and Answers we feel are relevant.

Question 1: When Brad's retirement was announced, it was stated that the Session had appointed a Transition Subcommittee of the Session to lead in this transition process. What is the purpose of such a committee? Will this committee have a role in selecting a new pastor?

Answer: This committee will not have a role in selecting the new pastor, because our Book of Church Order (BCO) makes it clear that such a role is reserved for the congregation (see next question). Rather, the role of this committee is to lead the Session in preparing the church for a successful transition. The sad reality is that many transitions following a long-tenured pastor fail not because of any shortcoming in the successor pastor, but because the church was not well-prepared to set that pastor up to succeed. The job of the Session is to govern this church in such a way that the church is ready for the flourishing of the pastor God has already appointed for AVPC. For example, if we just presumed that the new pastor would be ready to assume Brad's current job description, we would be placing on him an undue burden. Even if his gifts are largely identical to Brad's, it will take time for him to get to know the church and learn its people and procedures. During such a steep learning curve, it would be unrealistic to expect him to just seamlessly plug in to Brad's current role. So job descriptions may have to be shifted somewhat among current staff, and this is an issue only the Session can address.

Question 2: What, then, is the role of the pulpit committee?

Answer: According to our Book of Church Order, which has constitutional authority for us, it is the right of every congregation (and not the Session) to elect its own pastors, subject to the approval by presbytery of his credentials. The BCO lays out the process for that in the election of a pulpit committee. It is the congregation that elects its own pulpit committee, and not the Session who does so. The Session can make recommendations regarding the individuals to be members of this committee, but the congregation can choose whether or not to accept those recommendations. And then it is by congregational vote alone that a pastor is elected, as the congregation votes on the candidate recommended by the search committee. To summarize, then, the Session is to prepare the church for a successful transition, while the pulpit committee is to find the candidate called of God and best suited to serve the church so prepared by the governance of the Session.

Question 3: When will the Session call for a congregational meeting to elect our Pulpit Committee?

Answer: The Session hasn't yet made that decision, but it probably won't be any time soon. When a pulpit committee begins considering specific candidates, it is important to be able to act to recommend a candidate when the candidate is ready. It would put both the church and any potential candidate in a

difficult position if we had to tell a candidate that the position won't be available for another 12-18 months. Though it is possible that we might have a candidate ready to start the day after Brad leaves, it is more likely that such ideal timing will not happen. In that case, we believe it is more advantageous to the church to have a gap between Brad's departure and the arrival of a new pastor than to have an overlap between the two.

Question 4: What can we as a congregation do now to help this process?

Answer: We would ask two things of you. First, and most importantly, be praying. No matter how well we manage this process, it is God's hand of blessing that will supply AVPC with the pastor we need. To help encourage us in this area of prayer, keep an eye out for some prayer meetings and prayer updates that we plan to have in the future. Second, if you have questions or concerns about anything the Session is doing in leading this, please share that with us, so we can provide the answers/explanations for the benefit of the entire congregation. Pastoral transitions can be a vulnerable time for a church. With God's help, though, they can also be great times of building our trust in God.

Question 5: What are we going to change about the ministry of AVPC during these next 2 years prior to Brad's retirement?

Answer: The Session has determined that we do not want or need to make any changes to our vision and mission as it is currently defined. Almost all of the ministry of AVPC is led by ministry teams that plan and execute the ministry of each ministry area, and each of those ministry teams have a pastor and elder as part of their leadership. These ministry teams operate under the oversight of the Session, and we fully expect each ministry team to continue to strive to find new and effective ways to carry out the mission of the church. We believe one of the most impactful things we can do during these next two years is to continue to work for the strengthening of the existing ministries of the church.