

Dear Highland Brothers and Sisters:

April, 2021

The fancy term for my work is *Specialized Transitional Minister*. Highland Church has never had a transitional pastor before. So I thought I would convey what it means, how it developed, and what shape it will take for me at our church.

A transitional pastor is somewhat different from an interim pastor. Usually an interim pastor is retired, serves on a part-time basis, and generally covers basic ministries to sustain a church between pastors. In contrast, a transitional pastor is not retired, generally serves full-time, and has specialized training to help a church address deeper dynamics, major transitions, long-term issues, and fresh vision moving forward.

The need for strategic transitional ministry was recognized back in the 1980's.

The Pastor Church Resources office of the Christian Reformed Church began supporting one or two transitional pastors to help in difficult church circumstances. Over the years the need and desire for transitional pastors has steadily grown. Today there are almost twenty transitional pastors who have been officially endorsed- with the experience, gifts and training needed. About a dozen are Americans; a half dozen are Canadians.

I have served four previous churches as a transitional pastor. They have included great diversity in location, size, and culture. The first was Bethany in Gallup, New Mexico. The church began as a mission to Navajo people. The second was Fredericton CRC in New Brunswick, Canada. It was founded by Dutch immigrants who came after WWII. The third was Faith Church in Nashville, Tennessee. And the church Ruth and I just moved from is New Life Church in New Lenox, a far suburb of Chicago.

Transitional pastors generally focus on five core areas:

1. Provide steady pastoral leadership and care after a church has gone through rough waters
2. Name and promote healthy grieving over the various losses a church may have suffered
3. Address any friction/conflict in the congregation to seek reconciliation and mend fences
4. Help focus vision for the church's future
5. Serve as an adviser to the pastor search team when it is formed.

Here I'll add a few personal notes: Ruth and I have two boys- both adopted.

Paul is a captain in the Marines and will soon be stationed at Camp Pendleton in California. Derek works in the Information Technology (computers) field and lives near Grand Rapids. My day off is Friday. Ruth's doctor advised her to talk as little as possible to help her tongue recover from surgery; so if she is quiet or avoids big groups, you know why!

I stand ready to put my weight behind Highland Church's ministry. I hope you are too!

Warmly yours in Christ, Pastor Neil