

Kim McNeill's charge to the congregation at John Weicher's installation, November 17, 2019.

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Charge to the congregation

I think John asked me to charge the congregation because I have a bit of a reputation for telling people what to do. However, I know I don't need to tell *you*, First Presbyterian Durham, how to best treat your pastor. This congregation has a long history of loving their pastors well. Instead, I hope to tell you a little about how to love John Weicher in particular, and I hope to challenge you to be radical in your care for him.

You have called John to be your pastor, specifically a pastor for your youth. But you are not getting *just* a youth pastor. For one, there's no such thing as *just* a youth pastor - youth ministry isn't done in a vacuum or just in the youth room. In John, you are getting a gifted preacher, teacher, mentor, and leader; an experienced pastor who knows a thing or two about church in the midst of staff transitions; a listener and a fun-maker; a church nerd and someone who will help you see how the living God is at work in your life and through this congregation.

As you enter into this covenant with him, there are ways that you can love and support John so that he offers his best to you.

John will bring to you his many gifts and so I charge you to bring yours too. No church and certainly no church program is made to thrive with only the gifts of the pastor. But when partnered with a gifted pastor, you will grow and bloom in ways you might not even imagine now. John's ministry here is a ministry alongside *your* ministry here. Use your imagination, your patience, and out of gratitude to God, share your gifts with John as you serve this church together.

Take time to ask John what he's excited about...because he's always excited about SOMETHING. Transitions in staff are not easy for churches, even when they are right. As you move through these staff transitions, you may have days that are challenging. Let John remind you why you love this place and these people. Embrace John's joy and borrow it when you need a lift. He's got it to spare!

Pray for John. Really, pray. Not just prayers of gratitude, though I know you are grateful for his presence here. Pray for John's wisdom, for his spirit,

and his energy. Pray for his family. Pray each and every day of those long summer youth trips. Pray that he continues to grow in the knowledge and understanding of God and in relationship with all of you.

While John is **your** pastor now, he is not *only* a pastor. He's also called to be a husband and father. I charge you to help John be a present part of his family; Laurie, Tate, and Lucy are counting on him. If you hear of him spending too many nights at church for meetings, send him home! Honor his day off and ask him if he's taking it. Encourage him to get out of the office before rush hour so he's home for dinner, homework, and bath time. Honor his time away to recharge after overnight trips and retreats. Share in Sabbath practice along with him and together, give thanks to God for time to refresh and renew your spirits.

Ok, here's an easy one: I charge you to love Tate and Lucy. These poor kids are double PKs (preacher's kids) and they'll need all the help they can get! Truthfully, they will need at least a few adults in their lives that *don't* work at a church. You're it! While you didn't witness their baptism in person, each time you baptize a child you reaffirm the promises for all the children in the church. While they may be at First Presbyterian Raleigh some weeks and here some weeks, do your best to make sure they know this is their church home, too. And save them the best desserts at potlucks- they have loooong Sundays too!

I charge you to trust and respect John's vision. When John asks you why a custom is part of the life of this church, I challenge you to have an answer that doesn't sound something like "we've always done it that way." Help John see why you love the things you do about this place. Help him understand and hold the traditions that are dear to you. But trust John to lead you into a new place as well. God has called John here and together, you will usher in new, exciting ideas and probably let go of a few old ones. Remind John that it's ok to change. Stay alongside him as new things are tried and as surely some of them fail. Don't leave him hanging. Together, write a new chapter for First Presbyterian Church in Durham.

I also charge you, on behalf of all of his Southern friends, help John understand the South. Customs, phrases, food, sports, seasons...help his northern heart with all of it. The sooner you can fully indoctrinate him, the better for us all.

Finally, I charge you to grow in your intimacy with John. John will love and pastor your young people...and their parents...and grandparents...and Sunday school teachers...and confirmation mentors...and church officers... and... the list goes on. Help John be a pastor to all of you by giving your heart to John. He'll take great care of it and fill it with enthusiasm for the Lord and for all God is doing here and out in the world.

So, maybe I did sound a little bossy with all those instructions. But I believe they're important as you embark on a new kind of love for John and as you enter into this covenant with John to serve God through this church. May you all find joy on this journey together. Thanks be to God for all the ways John Weicher will be a pastor to First Presbyterian Durham and for all the ways you will minister to him.

Amen.