

Jeff's Jottings

September 20, 2019

Home

*Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people,
and your God my God.* Ruth 1:16

Long ago (well, May of 2015), in a meeting not so far away (Peace Presbyterian in St. Louis Park), the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area voted to elect a transitional executive presbyter named Jeffrey Japinga and make him a temporary member of the Presbytery for the length of his service here.

That's because I came to you with standing as a minister of the Reformed Church in America, a sister denomination to the PCUSA. An agreement forged in the 1990s, called the Formula of Agreement, permitted this by establishing "full communion" of four denominations—the PCUSA, the RCA, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the United Church of Christ. In doing so, the denominations recognized each other as churches in which the gospel is rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered according to the Word of God; continued to recognize each other's Baptism while authorizing and encouraging the sharing of the Lord's Supper among their members; and recognized each others' various ministries and made provision for the orderly exchange of ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament.

For these last four-and-a-half years, first as your transitional e-p and then as installed, I have served you on that basis: as wholly one of you, in body, mind, and spirit; and yet not fully as one of you, with membership still held by the Classis of Holland, Reformed Church in America. This summer, I asked the Committee on Ministry if we might change that; if I might become fully accountable to the Presbytery in my ministry. Last week, you all said yes.

At the meeting, the body rightfully asked, Why this? Why now? What I told them, and want you to know as well, was about home. About being welcomed in a place in such a way that it becomes yours, not simply with an address on an envelope but at the very core of who you are.

I came here in 2015 as a stranger, an immigrant, a member of another denomination knowing but a small handful of people. You invited me into your lives and into this ministry, and together these past four-plus years, we have attempted to forge a compelling way forward. That's often been fun, and sometimes hard. The meeting I was elected was the same meeting we approved a gracious separation agreement with Christ Presbyterian Church; the reverberations of that and other similar actions through the middle part of this decade still tug at our souls. Through it all, however, both the good and the difficult, we've walked this journey together, as one. And

each day, each week, each year, this place—geographically and ecclesiastically—became a little bit more my home.

The geography of God doesn't recognize borders quite the way we do, of course; Presbyterian and Reformed are our designations. God's way leads us through our lives as they are—complicated mixtures of joy and disappointment, strange stews of nobility and pettiness where, all too often, the meaning and larger purpose of our lives gets shrouded by the fog of struggle and uncertainty. God's way goes as life goes, not out of this world but deeply into it, wherever and however that might be. That may lead us one day to a place that pleases us deeply. More importantly, it leads to a life and place pleasing to God. And there—here, for me, among colleagues and friends—we put down our roots.

Not all that much changes, really. For the first time in my life, on September 11, 2019, I woke up as a Presbyterian minister, and then went to the Presbytery office in the exact same way I had done so many days before. Not much changes, really, except for this: that your people are now, officially and formally, my people. Light for the journey that we travel together. I think that means something, and I am proud it is now this way.

Thank you for welcoming me home in the ways that you have.