The Minister Search Task Force is excited to announce that we have found a minister to lead us through this transition time in our church. As you all know, we have dedicated a year since Glover’s retirement to finding the right person to help us create our vision for Pilgrim. It was a long and sometimes difficult process, compounded by the fact that so many ministers decided to stay put in their current congregations during the uncertainty of COVID. A few months ago, we expanded our search from narrowly considering only Interim candidates, which would have required the minister to leave after the contracted period, to including Designated ministers, which provides the option for the congregation to vote on whether to continue with the same minister after the interim period is over. The transition work that lies ahead and the allotment of up to three years of visioning and strategic planning remain the same. After the interim period ends (2024, or earlier if we so choose), we may decide to go through another process, with a Congregational Meeting, to continue into what is called Settled ministry, where the placement would then become permanent. Now we have the flexibility to keep someone with us who we feel can continue to lead us into the future. We are very excited to have that option with the candidate that the Task Force has chosen.

So now for the fun part! We are thrilled to let you know that Rev. Laura Folkwein, who is currently Associate Pastor at University Congregational Church in Missoula, will be our new Designated Minister. She is a trained social worker and pastor whose skills will serve us well as we navigate this time together, where emotional support will be as important as structural support. She has a way of thoughtfully considering all sides of a topic and then asking clarifying questions that get at the heart of a matter. She is inclusive and caring and ambitious and determined. She stands up for justice and cares for others deeply. Laura has high hopes for Pilgrim and is excited to be leading the team that moves us forward. The Task Force chose her for her experience and enthusiasm.

Laura graduated from high school here in Montana. In 2005, she earned her Master of Divinity and Master of Social Work concurrently at Iliff School of Theology and the University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work. She has worked as a Designated Minister, Youth Pastor, Small Groups Minister, nonprofit Program Manager, and nonprofit Executive Director. She brings a broad range of wisdom earned along the way paired with an openness to ideas that will serve us well as we brainstorm who we are becoming as a church. Above all, she is a collaborative worker who will bring us together as we wrestle with our vision for the future.

Pastor Laura will begin her time with us starting on October 15, 2021. We look forward to hosting a few, mostly online, events leading up to her full-time arrival here during which we can meet up and get to know her better. Thank you to all of you for your patience and prayers and hopes and dreams. The Minister Search Task Force dedicated significant time and effort to bringing Pilgrim the right leader for us in this moment, so when you see any of them, please give them your sincere thanks: Jack Lehman, Wendy Morical, Eric Semerad, Sally Sullivan, and Kerry Williams. You could also give God a high five while you’re at it. This process of growth for our church won’t be without setbacks. We may not always see eye to eye on the direction we’re heading. We may have emotional reactions to a new way of thinking and being. But rest assured that we are in capable and supportive hands with our new minister, and the future is bright for Pilgrim.

Respectfully Submitted, Minister Search Task Force