

September 10, 2020

First Presbyterian Church of Philipstown
10 Academy Street
Cold Spring, New York 10516

Dear FPCP Beloved Community and Friends,

On the first Sunday of Advent 2017, I came to companion with you at a bend in the road at First Presbyterian Church of Philipstown...came trusting that the nominating committee's invitation, my acceptance and the blessing of Hudson River Presbytery, through the Committee on Ministry, was God's doing. I added my shoe to the collection of shoes that inhabited the sanctuary. Each shoe contained a foot made of clay, a foot that dragged, a foot that stumbled; but on those feet we sought to follow the road...the way...through a world where there are many roads to follow.

In companioning with you on the road, there have been countless sacred moments. Deacons preparing communion elements on communion Sundays and setting up festive coffee hour welcome tables filled with food and drink. Choir members donning their robes, lining up in the hallway, and preparing to glorify God through song. Christmas Eve candlelight services--where musical notes surrounded by red and white poinsettias filled the sanctuary and God's *I AM* presence was palpable. Ordination and/or Installation of Deacons and Ruling Elders-- where the laying on of hands offered a holy blessing. Pentecost--where surrounded by a sea of red geraniums, confirmands shared their favorite scripture; stood before the baptismal font; and said yes to promises made by their parents during infant baptism and yes to God. A Pentecost Chili Fellowship meal--where confirmands cut their confirmation cake as goodwill floated on the air and bowls of Pentecost chili dotted fellowship tables. Backpacks were blessed, Bibles awarded, Sunday School teachers appreciated. The children graced us with creativity and joy during imaginative Christmas and Easter pageants and the Hallelujah Chorus had the final word on Resurrection of the Lord/Easter Sundays. Ash Wednesdays--when shoes holding clay feet moved silently up the sanctuary's center aisle. Foreheads were marked with ashes as these words shattered the silence... "Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return". God bringing new faces through the doors of the church. The smiles of new faces, who Spirit nudged to say, "I want to place my shoe in this sanctuary and be in community in this place." Together we have celebrated life and grieved death. We have rejoiced and made promises to love and encourage those we have baptized. Together we have walked the uncertain and unexpected path of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In my first letter to you, as your new pastor, were these words sung by Bilbo Baggins in *Lord of the Rings*:

"The road goes ever on and on
Down from the door where it began.
Now far ahead the road has gone,
And I must follow if I can,
Pursuing it with weary feet,

Until it joins some larger way,
Where many paths and errands meet.
And whither then?
I cannot say.”

“Wither then? I cannot say.” ---Only God knows the course of events and purposes for our lives. The writer of Ecclesiastes 3:1 says it this way: “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.”ⁱ This verse reminds us that there are seasons in our lives. Times of beginnings and endings.

Such a time has come now for me, as a PCUSA Minister of Word and Sacrament. God has called me to serve as the fulltime installed pastor of a PCUSA church in Michigan; and I have said, “Yes” to God’s call.

“Apparently God’s plan all along was that endings would be part of life for God’s people.”ⁱⁱ Yet endings require the hard work of preparing for and living through them. Adapting a quote from A.A. Milne in Winnie-the-Pooh—“How fortunate I am to have placed my shoe in sanctuary among you and experienced God’s beauty in the Hudson Valley... something that makes saying goodbye so hard.” Serving as your pastor has been a holy privilege.

Peace and all good,

The Reverend Dr. Doris Chandler

ⁱ Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version

ⁱⁱ Lindberg, Mary C. The Graceful Exit.