

PASTOR TODD TAKING LEAVE STARTING JUNE 20TH

Message to Saint Mark Disciples May 15, 2022

If we look back over the past few years, we can all agree it has been a time of upheaval and uncertainty. The stresses and challenges of these years have taken a toll on many of us and our Pastor is no exception.



Todd began experiencing some significant health challenges about a year ago and typical of Todd, he has kept a smiling, brave face and has continued to perform his duties at Saint Mark without complaint. However, after being under the care of several medical professionals, Todd's health issues have not fully resolved. It has been recommended to him that he take a leave from his work to focus on his physical and emotional well-being.

The Book of Discipline recommends that pastors take a Spiritual Renewal Leave one week each year and one month every four years. During his 21 years in ministry, Todd has never taken such a leave. The *Discipline* goes on to prescribe up to 6 months of Leave if the need requires. Todd is requesting an 11-week leave. The Book of Discipline guarantees him the first month and the SPRC and COS have unanimously approved the remaining 7 weeks.

The challenge for Saint Mark is three-fold:

1. We made the decision a year ago that we would move from two full-time pastors to one. The reason that decision was made was to free up money from salaries to be able to fund more mission work within our community and beyond. Data told us that our size church with our income needs only one full-time pastor. Last fall the SPRC recommended and COS unanimously approved the move to one pastor. Todd served as a solo pastor for 15 years in his previous appointments so we know he is fully capable of handling these responsibilities, with our help.
2. Todd's health requires he take the leave as soon as possible. With his previous commitments this Spring and with Shawna preparing for her wedding, he feels he cannot begin his leave prior to June 20. Shawna's last day with us is June 19.
3. We know the best time for Todd to take such a leave is in the summer when general church functions slow a bit. Unfortunately, his health issues can't wait until summer of 2023.

Todd has spoken candidly with SPRC and COS and has explained in detail the issues he is facing. Even though we know now is not the optimum time for Todd to be away, we all agree that for his health and well-being it is imperative that he take this leave this summer. SPRC and COS have both unanimously approved Todd's leave to begin June 20 and conclude September 5. During this time, he will not have any pastoral/leadership responsibilities. Though he and Cara will spend a good deal of this time at home here in Seneca, he will not be responsible for anything at Saint Mark.

We asked our District Superintendent Steve Patterson to begin the search for one or two pastors who will lead us during Todd's leave. Steve has successfully completed the search and Rev. Bruce Sayre has agreed to serve as our pastor for the 11 weeks of Todd's leave. Rev. Sayre recently retired and he and his wife, Ann, have relocated to the Seneca area. Rev. Sayre most recently served at Leesville United Methodist Church in the Greenwood District. Rev. Bob Stillwell has agreed to assist with pastoral care duties during Todd's leave. So we will be in very good hands. Also, I, as chair of SPRC, and Russ Larson, chair of the Trustees will assume administrative and managerial responsibilities for the staff during the leave.

We will pay Todd his full salary while he is away as is directed in the Book of Discipline. Also, SPRC approved a range that we recommend compensating our interim Pastor(s) and an amount will be finalized when the Finance Committee meets later this month.

Todd has been a faithful pastor to our church during the past six years and we wish him healing and health during this time away. The lay leaders of Saint Mark pledge to you that we will do our best to ensure a productive and faithful summer and that when Pastor Todd returns, he will find us engaged and ready for a busy fall and Christmas season.

Your support of Todd and our Lay Leadership is critical. We hope you will exercise kindness and compassion, that you will offer to pitch in and help as you can, that you will be faithful to attend church and give of your time, talent and offerings. God is watching us and I pray that we will choose to make him proud of how we respond to this brief period in the life of our great church.

Debbie DuBose, Staff Parish Relations Chairperson

AN INTRODUCTION TO REV. BRUCE SAYRE



As we announced last Sunday, Pastor Todd will be taking an 11-week Spiritual Renewal Leave beginning June 20 and ending September 5. We are very fortunate to have **Rev. Bruce Sayre** agree to serve as our interim pastor during Todd's absence. Assisting Pastor Sayre with pastoral care responsibilities will be Saint Mark's very own **Rev. Bob Stillwell**. I think we can all agree that with these two great men leading and caring for us, Saint Mark will be in excellent hands for the summer.

Let me introduce you to Rev. Sayre. Bruce recently retired after a long and distinguished career in ministry. He has an undergraduate degree from Florida Southern College and a Masters from Perkins School of Theology at SMU in Dallas. He is married to Ann, and they have one son, Alan, who is a Deputy Sheriff in Oconee County and lives in Fairplay.

His most recent appointment was at Leesville United Methodist Church, but he has had appointments starting in 1976 and running through 2020. Over this long career, Bruce has served in Rock Hill, Greenwood, Easley, Anderson, Hartsville, Marion, Walterboro and Leesville. He retired in 2020 and has expressed a willingness to lead churches such as ours during a pastoral leave. Bruce has experience with prison ministry, Salkehatchie, starting and leading contemporary services, children's bereavement camps through hospice, cross racial events, ecumenical prayer/ worship services and outreach.

When asked about his spiritual and personal sensibility, Bruce writes, "Having come from an extended family of preachers and church attenders, I was a church-oriented person before I was a faith-oriented person. But I loved going to church and its activities, attended a small Methodist College and a large United Methodist Methodist (SMU) where I participated in campus ministries and enjoyed learning from solid Christian teachers and fellow students along the way. While in seminary in Dallas, I often went with classmates to their weekend appointments and saw first-hand the intersection of theology and pastoral ministry and felt firmly drawn to it myself.

I have felt at home in pastoral ministry, as if there is no other place I would desire to be, sharing what I learn through Bible study, preaching and pastoral work. I am blessed to have a spouse who has given of herself to 'our' ministry for 42 years, first as director of Christian education and then as a supportive, active parsonage wife and mother. Our son, also, continues to be a part of a congregation as assistant church musician and director while being a SC law enforcement officer. "

Rev. Sayre has been active in several civic groups over the years -- Sertoma, Rotary and Kiwanis. He has been very involved in the local jail ministry. He took communion quarterly and at Christmas and even baptized eleven inmates for inclusion on his church's baptismal roll. He has been on the Board of Directors of Greenwood Wesley Fellowship at Lander University and Piedmont Tech. He is a member of the Midlands Reconciling Ministries and the Reconciling Ministries Network.

We are so blessed to have Rev. Sayre lead us during the coming months. He and Ann are anxious to meet you and become a part of our congregation.

Debbie DuBose, Chair
SPRC