

GRACE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Timothy M. Smith, Senior Pastor
Sarah E. Bolick-Lang, Associate Pastor

December 15, 2009

Dear members and friends of Grace:

It is with sadness and mixed emotions that I have to announce to you that Pastor Tim Smith has submitted his resignation as senior pastor of our congregation effective February 10, 2010. He has accepted a call to Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Atlanta, Georgia.

The council has accepted Pastor Tim's resignation also with sadness and gratitude for his 17 years of ministry at Grace. The council feels that his decision to go to Redeemer, where he is desperately needed, was inspired by God and he goes with the prayers and blessings of the council.

For more details about Pastor Tim's resignation, please refer to the attached documents, which include his letter of resignation and frequently asked questions page.

Sincerely,

George L. Sox, President

Grace Lutheran Church Council

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December 14, 2009

Dear Congregation Council and members and friends of Grace,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Christ, whose coming we anxiously await!

Sunday evening I received a phone call from the Search Team at Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Atlanta, Georgia indicating that their congregation has voted to call me as their next Senior Pastor. I was in conversation with them four years ago and withdrew my name, but this time around I have felt the Spirit's nudging and have indicated to them my intention to accept that call.

For me this is an exciting and rather unexpected possibility in a totally new type of ministry setting, but even as I embrace this new calling my heart is heavy because, in order to do that, I must of course resign as a pastor at Grace. This letter is officially my notification to you that my last day at Grace will be January 24, 2010. I will begin my responsibilities in Atlanta the week of February 10.

I shared this information with our Mutual Ministry Committee and with our Council several weeks ago, and most were disappointed but not surprised. I know that many have been guessing that when all of our children graduated from high school I might make a move, but the truth is, since coming to Grace nearly 17 years ago, I have interviewed with other congregations from time to time and have always discerned that Grace was where I was still called. This time, until visiting with Redeemer's Council, I thought the same thing, but something kept pulling at me. In that meeting in November, it became clear to me that not only was my excitement and energy and passion for that ministry overwhelming, but also on the drive home I also realized that Grace needs and deserves someone with that same excitement and energy and passion and vision for this place. I decided then that if they called me in Atlanta, I would go.

We raised our family here. We love Grace, and we love Boone. This is tremendously difficult, but I have the advantage of having been processing all of this for about 6 months now. For many of you, this is new information, and all sorts of emotions and questions are evoked. I'm enclosing with this letter my own "Frequently Asked Questions" (FAQ's) about all this, which may help at least from an information standpoint.

With holidays and winter weather, this makes leavings and goodbyes a challenge, but know that I am forever grateful for this incredible ministry we have shared and forever hopeful that Grace has a wonderfully faithful ministry and its best years still ahead! *See Philippians 1: 3-11*

Your partner in ministry,

Pastor Timothy M. Smith

I pray with you this prayer I have shared with many in transition through the years, from Holden Village's Sending Service and from *ELW* pp. 304 and 317: *O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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FAQ's regarding the Smiths' situation and the future of Grace (written by Pastor Tim)
December 13, 2009

Why is Pastor Tim leaving? Who/what upset him?

Nobody/nothing has upset me. I love this place. When I left Startown almost 17 years ago, most folks had to invent something that made sense to them, and the best reason they could come up with is that somebody behind the scenes had pressured me to leave. It wasn't so then, and it isn't here, either. I simply feel that at this point, the best use of my gifts is at Redeemer in Atlanta. 17 years is a long time! A great 17 years!

It's that whole ELCA Sexuality vote, isn't it? That was the final straw for Pastor Tim.

Not at all! If that were the determining issue, I would stay here, as the congregation in Atlanta has not during the pastoral interim really dealt with what the implications might be for their congregation. By and large Grace has handled this divisive issue with grace and respect.

What about your family?

Your best bet is to ask them yourselves, but my take on it is that, whereas Wendy was adamant four years ago about not going to Atlanta, she now is reluctantly willing. Though I will leave Grace in late January, Wendy will stay in Boone at least until the end of the current school year and perhaps beyond, to sell our house and to work toward her NC retirement. No, just to nip the rumor mill in the bud, we're not "separating" in any divisive way; we simply will be working temporarily in different places. This could, in a small town like Boone, be awkward for both Wendy and for Grace members. She probably won't be around Grace much except when our children come home to visit. Our understanding from them is that they will retain their "home church" membership at Grace, but since they're all away from home, you won't see them very often.

How could you leave us with this large debt, over \$1 million on the Norris House?

That's a glass half-full vs. glass half-empty question. In my opinion, though we have spent a tremendous amount on property in the past 4 years (over \$2.8 million), it's close to 2/3 paid for, and we get to stay on this corner! A priority around which everyone at Grace can rally, it seems to me, is to reduce debt to free up funds for Grace's near-term future mission, including getting a new senior pastor and dedicated intentional staff for Youth & Family Ministry. The August 2009 congregational meeting seemed to mandate the Youth & Family part. I concur.

The Council's not really going to do a capital campaign after you leave, are they?

Well, I lose my vote in any compelling way by virtue of my resignation, but I can tell you that I hope you will move ahead with that. It's not as if you're taking on a new project for which you ought to wait for the new senior pastor's opinion. The "Norris House" house is already bought and mortgaged, and the parking lot is already done. The debt is sitting there. The more you pay off now, the more you open your future from a financial point of view. Senior pastor candidates would be pleased to know that the debt is being addressed.

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Why are you leaving so soon?

Once the word is out that I'm leaving, I'm definitely a lame duck. Those for whom my leaving produces pain, loss, and abandonment, need me to get out of the way so that there can be closure and moving forward. I think timing a move just prior to the beginning of Lent could be liturgically quite helpful both for Grace and for my new congregation. As ashes are placed on our heads and we walk through that penitential season, we remember that death and resurrection, sorrow and joy, no and yes, always walk together. Some things will have to painfully die for both you and me, but what that opens up is the possibility of something new being born. That something new could be positive or negative, depending on how centered we are in God's will for us.

When will we get a new pastor? How?

Lots of people think that in a case like this, we'll have a new senior pastor at Grace by summer of 2010. That could happen, but it's not likely. A representative of the Bishop's Staff (NC Synod) will come to meet with our council sometime this winter or spring, and then the council will appoint a call committee of probably 6 people who represent a wide range of our congregation's interests and demographics. There will be some sort of congregational event and/or survey to determine our vision and needs for the future which will help determine priorities for a new senior pastor candidate. The call committee will be trained by a synod rep, and then they will collect names of potential candidates to interview. That will all be confidential (names, at least) even to the council. This process will take, at best, several months.

What will we do in the meantime? How will we survive pastorally speaking?

Pastor Sarah currently has no specific plans to leave Grace and will help provide continuity, as will Vicar Lisa as a pastoral intern and Pastor John as Visitation Pastor. Unlike 16 years ago when Pastor Young left after about the same number of years, we will have continuity. In addition, the synod will assign a part-time interim senior pastor for Grace--perhaps a Sunday or two a month helping with worship and a couple of days a week in the office. All of these, plus our support staff, will help Grace through the transition. Ministers of Grace and other lay members of Grace will need to step up to the plate as well.

Will we be able to get interns for 2010-2011 then, to help at Grace and with the Coalition?

At this point, Bethany could get their own intern, regardless of what Grace does, but it is a possibility that Grace could move along in an interim with another intern supervised by Pastor Sarah and even possible that we could have another intern couple for the Coalition.

Hey, don't you owe us some money?

Indeed I do. When I moved here, Grace graciously provided me with a \$16,000 interest-free loan to use as a down payment on our house. This came from the \$16,000 Grace had loaned Pastor Young when he bought his house here in Boone. I will repay that money to Grace so that it can be used by Pastor Sarah, should she decide to buy a house, and/or by any future senior or associate pastor as an

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incentive for them to come to Boone. It sure helped us 17 years ago when we moved out of a parsonage, had three small children, and no home equity! Thanks!

But you'll fulfill all your commitments you already made--confirmations, weddings, funerals, etc.... right?

This is one of the more personally painful realities: the answer is no. I intend to work through January 24th. You have a capable pastoral staff with Pastors Sarah and John and Vicar Lisa, and you will also get an interim Senior Pastor. The Call Process Manual of the NC Synod is very clear that I am not to return to do pastoral acts here at Grace. To do so would be both confusing and impossible. How could I come back for so-and-so's funeral/wedding/baptism but not for someone else's? This also undercuts the pastoral authority of your existing staff and especially of any future staff. Please know that it's not that I don't love you, and I shall grieve mightily not to be available to you, but your church will be here for you, and I will step out of the way to make the transition clean and clear. Please do not ask me to come back "just this once" for a pastoral act here at Grace, as I will have to disappoint you. When Jerry Moore retires from ASU, you won't find the trustees inviting him back to coach "just this one special playoff game." So as you may grieve me, embrace your current and future pastoral staff. They will be visiting, baptizing, counseling, marrying, and burying our dear ones at Grace. Let them be your pastors.

This congregation's going to go down the tubes without you—you know that, don't you?

As the British say, "Pish-posh!" If that happens, it's your own fault! Let me turn the question around: You know that Grace is a fantastic congregation, and that there is no reason in the world you can't get a fantastic senior pastor to lead you on this next leg of the journey, don't you? For my part, I couldn't bear to leave if I didn't fully believe that! Not only that, but I feel the need to get out of the way precisely so that new energy and vision can happen here. Transitions are not easy, but I am so excited for who your next pastoral leader will be and how you will grow into serving God together. No, s/he won't do some things like I do or even maybe "as well as" I do. But s/he will do a lot of things better than I and things I never thought of. Hang in there, and give it a chance!

Are we going to get a gay partnered pastor? Is that even a possibility?

As of right this moment, there is no mechanism for congregations in the call process to call a partnered same-gendered relationship pastor, as "Vision and Expectations" of the ELCA still precludes it. The only thing that has happened is that the ELCA has voted to explore "finding a way" for "congregations who choose to do so" to "allow" such possibility. In our polity (structure), congregations call pastors; they are NOT assigned by the synod. Being in the call process after the ELCA vote this past August will likely at some level beg the question here at Grace, but only in the sense of a potential discussion, after the ELCA decides what it's doing, as to whether Grace "chooses to do so," which I rather seriously doubt. Bottom line: you call who you want. 'Nuff said.