

Dear beloved members of St. Lucas United Church of Christ:

Let's just say it: the interim time is uncomfortable. You know that I am only going to walk with you for a relatively short time and that the pastor who will come is out there somewhere. Some have named wanting to leap forward and end the discomfort.

But there is a lot of work to do during this time to make it possible for the pastor who will come to succeed. Like Moses and the children of Israel, this is an opportunity to shape the congregation for the future. The challenges and opportunities facing us today are much the same as faced the Israelites:

- Leaving behind behaviors and attitudes that limit our ability to pivot from looking backwards to looking forward. Conversely, what aspects of St. Lucas' history and traditions will help us going forward?
- How do we organize effectively for present day ministry, developing and encouraging new leadership and finding more inclusive ways to make decisions?
- How do we relate to one another, our neighborhood and other partners in ministry?
- Most important, who are we? This is a time to clarify our identity as God's people and develop a vision which will call us to meet the spiritual growth needs of our members, thus enhancing the ministry of all.

We have been through an adjustment period since February, getting to know each other, introducing the Rev. Dr. Carole Barner as the Interim Minister of Congregational Life and getting to a place where we can worship together again. It is now time to select a Transition Team – a group of people who are not current church officers yet represent the congregation. This Transition Team will work with Carole and me to develop an action plan which will lead us through the interim process toward beginning the search process. Time is of the essence, as ours is a limited time engagement.

We will focus on St. Lucas' heritage – developing a healthy perspective on the contributions of past pastors and learning from prior “critical path” moments in the church's life (admitting what didn't work and celebrating what did). We will ask what prevents us from moving forward and begin to seek out new ways of “being church” even as we honor our traditions.

Only then will we seek a new or renewed vision for St. Lucas. How will we manage conflict going forward? Where are there opportunities for reconciliation? Who are we as a re-energized, re-newed people of God? What do we believe? What is our mission in the world?

Once St. Lucas' vision has been clarified, we will focus on how leadership needs to be organized to fit that vision. How could lay leadership be organized to

prevent burnout? How do we work through succession planning? What can we do to allow everyone who wants to participate in leadership the opportunity to do so? This is also the time to determine what is required in terms of professional staffing needs and to create an atmosphere of openness and transparency as to processes. We intend to make our governing documents reflect open decision making processes and structures. You already have a solid basis in some of the work that's gone before.

Now it's time to begin reaching out – to review relationships with mission partners and become acquainted (or reacquainted) with the many resources available through the United Church of Christ's St. Louis Association, the Mid-Missouri Conference and the national setting.

With the vision before us and the processes in place to support that vision, it will be time to share our vision. We will set clear and shared expectations about the desired leadership traits, skills, professional and personal attributes of the person who will come. It will be time to select a Settled Pastor Search Committee and draft a Church Profile. The Transition Team, with the support of your interim pastors, will be available as resources as St. Lucas begins the work of seeking the pastor who will come.

Once a new Senior Pastor is identified and called it will be time to begin planning for my exit and the new Senior Pastor's meaningful installation and start-up plans for a smooth beginning to his or her hopefully long-term tenure.

All of this will take time. How much time, and a successful interim process, depends on you. There is no "normal" interim process, but in a congregation where there is a lot of work to do it can be 18 months to two years. Each of the steps outlined may take 3 or 4 months, or may take a shorter time. Sometimes, as with St. Lucas, more than one interim pastor is needed. It's helpful to remember that there is *chronos* time (the world's time) and *kairos* time (God's time). *Kairos* time doesn't necessarily march in a straight line – it's a season, an opportune moment.

We are in *kairos* time now. May God bless us with a healing, hopeful and joyous spirit.

Yours in faith,

Rev. Victoria Hampton  
Interim Senior Pastor