

Rev. Dr. John Ross Retirement Announcement  
April 21, 2020

Dear Friends:

Today I come to you from the library of WCC... where more than 17 years ago I first gathered with a Senior Minister Search Committee to explore a good fit between my gifts and your needs. Our ministry together began soon thereafter, providing me and my family not only a place to do the most meaningful work of our lives, but also the rich soil within which to grow as a family.

From one on one friendships, to thousands gathered for 17 Christmas Eves... from teamwork among our amazing staff, to coming alongside deeply grieving families... from travels around the globe to sacred moments right here in our Chapel... and from sunset moments of silence with kids at summer camp to curtain calls of Good Works Community Theater productions... it has been both the challenge and the privilege of my lifetime to serve among you.

And so it is with mixed emotions, that I share with you my decision to retire from pastoral ministry at the end of this calendar year. After 30 years of full time ministry, this decision was not made easily or lightly, but in response to the still, quiet voice of God and in the context of a loving relationship with you. I recently said to a trusted friend that "I love this church as much as the day I arrived..." He corrected me saying, "No you don't. You love it even MORE." He's right.

The time is right for us as a family. When we first arrived, we carried Logan in our arms as an infant... he is now 6' 3" and about to graduate from high school. Our nest is emptying as our older kids are actively adulting. You have honored us across the years by allowing me to be a husband, father, and minister... in that order. Because Minnesota has been our home through the richest years of our family's life... it will continue to be our home and we have no plans or interest in moving away.

"Long days and short years" has never rung more true than it does right now. After 30 years of full-time ministry I will NOT be seeking a settled position at any other church. And at 53 years of age, I believe I have another full chapter of career work before me— the 3rd 3rd of life if you will — in which I intend to show that the church isn't the only place one can serve as a follower of Jesus. Not knowing what is next for me, I covet your prayers.

I also believe that the time is right for leadership change at WCC.

First, the church is at an important inflection point. As we emerge from the disorienting months of a pandemic, we stand on the threshold of a new and exciting future filled with innovative ways to be the church in the world. It's time for fresh, new ideas.

Second, and in that direction, we are in the midst of a strategic capacity building process. Participating in that effort over the past 6 months, I can assure you that you are being well-led by really smart and dedicated staff and church members.

And finally, we have just begun bringing on several new staff members, who will join our faithful and creative team of servant leaders, under the gifted leadership of Danielle Jones. It wouldn't be right for me to help form a team I will not lead.

In the next few days, you will hear from Moderator Mark Palmer and Vice Moderator Meg Good about the process that is before for us as a church. It will be my honor to do my part in creating a positive and productive transition as I continue in my current role through July, and after that in a reduced capacity.

Bashert is a Yiddish term that loosely translated means "...of God." That is how I feel about all of this... but most especially about these gifted lay leaders... it is of God that they have been called for such a time as this. Trust them and support them starting this Saturday at our Annual Meeting.

It is not lost on me that this news is coming at a tender, uncertain, and fearful time for everyone. Emerging from the pandemic; faced with increasing violence and injustice; the lingering threat of civil unrest. But this is a time when the church must live into its mission. This is a time when the church can inspire the world with the inclusive love of Jesus. This is when the church should be at its best: all-together and all-in for the love of God, neighbor, and self.

If you've been watching and waiting for a time and a reason to re-engage your faith in God... NOW is the time. If you've been watching and waiting for a time and a reason to serve the world in all ways...NOW is the time. If you've been watching and waiting for a time and a reason to put your faith to work... NOW is the time. As Jesus promised, the Spirit is with us... but needs our hands and hearts... through which to do God's work. NOW is the time.

We're in no rush to say "thank you and farewell" to one another, so I won't attempt either of those things now. Instead, I hope to greet you at church tonight or this coming Sunday as we launch a new series on Grace. I leave you for now with the words of the Prophet Jeremiah: "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope."

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church... thanks be to God! Amen.