

A MESSAGE FROM PLANNING COUNCIL:

The Planning Council has been weighing options that are available to move forward with pastoral leadership. We are excited to share in this message that we will be bringing on a new intentional interim pastor, Pastor Walter Still, starting on January 8th.

Pastor Still will help us continue our journey to calling our next lead pastor. As our interim lead pastor, he is being asked to; provide us stability in this transitional period, actively manage the staff to foster a collaborative and open work environment, intentional listening with the objective of helping the congregation heal some grievances, move us forward with more unity and energy and leverage past experiences to be a visionary to help guide us to a place where we are attractive to pastors for our call.

In making this decision, the Planning Council has discussed and debated the issues from many perspectives. In particular, input from members of the congregation that have strong feelings regarding Pastor Craig returning. This input was given careful consideration, and these decisions were not taken lightly. We acknowledge that Pastor Craig was a valued staff member at OSLC, and many feel it would be beneficial for him to return. His ministry was cherished by the congregation, and he established treasured relationships with many, particularly the Amazing Grays group. Pastor Craig was not an ELCA sponsored pastor, but it remains the synod recommendation that healthy boundaries should be maintained with prior pastoral staff.

We've acknowledged the past and now we're moving forward. Change is difficult. We recognize that not everyone will agree with these decisions and that there will be differences of opinion as to what is in the best interest of OSLC. We ask that you respect each other's opinions, and we thank those that have requested and participated in conversations with the planning council. We need to remember that Pastors come and go. The strength of this congregation is the members and the relationships we've developed with each other over the years, and over many pastoral transitions. Please open your hearts to welcome Pastor Still into the congregation as he begins to establish a relationship with each of us.

Please also consider how you can support OSLC during this time of transition. The Mission Exploration Team (MET) has completed and compiled the survey used to develop the Ministry Site Profile (MSP). Your response to the survey and the interviews was used as the basis for the MSP which will be used by the Synod and the Call Committee as the basis for seeking a lead pastor.

With God's guidance and the sharing of your time, talents and treasures, the Planning Council is confident that OSLC will grow in its ministries to bolster its members and the community.

Our Savior's Lutheran Church Planning Council
(continue to read an introduction provided by Pastor Walter Still)

January 2, 2024

Dear faithful siblings in Christ of Our Savior's,

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

I am excited to serve as the Intentional Interim Lead Pastor with Our Savior's beginning Monday January 8th. I look forward to working with the staff, leaders and faithful of another of Christ's churches in the St Paul Synod of the ELCA. As partners in the faith, the Holy Spirit will lead a renewal toward the readiness to call a Lead Pastor.

The Spirit has called me to serve Christ's Church in three congregations over forty years in Pittsburgh PA and Ft Myers FL. In the second call in Pittsburgh, I served as a "Redevelopment Pastor." This meant that with God's help, I lead a struggling congregation to a renewed sense of mission and vitality with staff and facility expansion. In addition to faith-filled worship, a growing Sunday School and youth ministry, we partnered with area ELCA congregations for a shared Senior's ministry. One of our favorite events was "Saints and Sinners"—we'd visit a historic church in Pittsburgh and enjoy lunch at a brewery. It is exciting that Hope Lutheran Church, Cranberry Township has grown into the largest ELCA congregation in the SW PA Synod.

I was invited to serve as the Pastor Developer and, after its organization in 2003, was called as the First Pastor of Peace Lutheran Church, serving south Ft Myers and Sanibel Island for 21 years. Planting a new church, in partnership with God, is a challenging venture as visions for ministry and mission were crystallized, a site selected, and plans for staff, facilities, and ambitious evangelism, stewardship and strategic plans were developed. Worship swelled to over 500 a weekend in the Winter and about 100 during the Summer. We developed a strong small group ministry, parish nurse, BeFriends and other programs to support the many seniors of the congregation and area. A dream of developing a Senior Center began and continues post-Covid pandemic in a new way. With a few hurricanes and tropical storms battering the area, plus the "boom and bust" economic cycles of Florida, challenges were always present. We celebrated the many ways that God led us to be a strong, welcoming, and vital church of the ELCA. The development called upon and grew my gifts of persistence, community, preaching, teaching, and leadership within the Church of Jesus Christ. What a joy it was to plant and grow, with God's help, a new congregation of the ELCA!

In the Florida Bahamas Synod, I served on several synodical teams and chaired the Synod's Commemoration of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation. I was nominated as a candidate for the Office of Bishop in 2017 and rejoiced with the election of a colleague. In my Ft Myers neighborhood, I worked with Jewish, Christian, and Moslem leaders on Interfaith Dialogues, led Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogues with the neighboring Catholic parish and shared worship with the ELCA Full Communion Partners. I was an adjunct Theology Professor of Barry University working with police, fire fighters and educators seeking degrees. I have led several study tours for Luther/Bach to Germany and the Holy Land.

My hometown is Columbus PA, a small town in Northwestern PA. I have earned degrees at Penn State University, the Lutheran Seminary at Gettysburg, and a Ph D in Theology from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. My wife Elizabeth Spang is a professional flutist. We are blessed with two daughters and grandchildren who live in Minneapolis.

I retired from Peace Ft Myers during the Covid pandemic in October 2020. I continue to enjoy serving the Lord as an Interim Pastor. In the Southeast Iowa Synod, I served over two years at St John's Lutheran Church, Des Moines as Interim Associate Pastor, Senior Bridge Pastor, and Transition Pastor with the new Senior Pastor. In the St Paul Synod, I served this past summer as Interim Lead Pastor during the sabbatical of Pr Peter Christ at Prince of Peace, Roseville and most recently as the "Bridge Interim Lead Pastor" at St James' Lutheran Church, Burnsville.

In discussion with the bishop and staff of the St Paul's Synod and the Planning Council of Our Savior's, I will work as Intentional Interim Lead Pastor to develop the readiness to call a pastor to serve Our Saviors. I will focus on spiritual vitality, imagination of ministry and mission, and staff and leadership development during the interim time to foster the congregation's readiness to call a pastor. I envision interim ministry as the time to work with God on essential matters to calling a new pastor. I view our time and relationship as a privilege of being entering a pilgrimage of renewal as a "sabbatical" -- a time to "be transformed in the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12.2)

The objectives that I believe will lead to a sense of preparedness includes:

- A spiritual vitality is present as the faithful connect with the Spirit as the Body of Christ. Primary to this vitality is the central role of Word and Sacrament ministry as a worshipping community. To further the community, a Spiritual Director could be brought in to work with us to open healing, gratitude, and faith development. Core values and spiritual gifts will be identified and celebrated. We'll grow in generosity that leads to ministry development.
- The Spirit opens the imagination for the ministry and mission of Our Savior's. Key ministry areas of worship, youth, senior and other areas will be celebrated and strengthened. Connections with the community, Synod and ELCA will be built. The Planning Council will be equipped to lead effectively. We'll find ways to invite the Spirit to bless the creativity and dreams of the ministry of Our Savior's.
- The staff is supported, appreciated and functions effectively with leaders and the congregation. A Staff Development Resource person could be enlisted to work with the staff and congregation on developing healthy relationships and systems, Boundaries will be defined. Means of communication will be developed that convey transparency that updates the faithful and visitors. A Personnel Committee will be developed to support the staff.

These keys to readiness and components are ambitious. One of my important values is partnership—as we work together with God as the body of Christ my prayer is that the vitality and spirit of the faithful of Our Savior's will see God at work. St Paul, in writing to the faithful at Corinth wrote, "...so, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation." That new creation is happening at Our Savior's in its ministry and mission. We have much to celebrate! Alleluia!!!

I look forward to the exciting and surprising ways that we will celebrate Christ's ministry with all you during this holy time of Interim Ministry.

In Christ,

Pr Walter+