



First Church in Cambridge, Congregational, United Church of Christ

February 4, 2024

Dear Friends,

With a heavy yet grateful heart, I write with big news about a new chapter that will soon open in my life and the life of First Church. After 25 years of ordained ministry, 20 years with First Church in Cambridge, and 16 years as Senior Minister, I've discerned that it's time for me to step away from this wonderfully vibrant, engaged, Spirit-infused community of faith. My last Sunday will be in mid-June.

As I've said and will continue to say until my last day, I love my job. That love is rooted in my deep and genuine love for you. It's also because of the wide, never boring, almost always meaningful array of things I get to do every day. This ministry has been an enormous blessing for which I will always be grateful. Given my all-in style of ministry, it has also been a weight on my heart and soul that I'm now feeling called to set down.

When approaching a major turning point, Quakers often share the phrases "way closing" and "way opening." I've felt over time that the "way" has been closing for me at First Church. I'm 50 years old. I knew that staying until my retirement would be too long for the church, if not for me. I'm excited for First Church to welcome new and hopefully more diverse staff in the coming years, who will enliven the ministry with new energy, experience, and fresh ideas. By God's grace and with deep bows of gratitude to our current staff, First Church feels all the more solid having not merely survived but also thrived through Covid. Our deeply faithful and dedicated lay leadership is at a place of peak wisdom and strength! I have no doubt that you all are poised to move from strength to strength in the coming months and into a fifth century.

With all of that said, I haven't been sure until recently how the "way" was opening for me. It's hard to imagine a more faithful, engaged, gifted, and challenging (in a good way) congregation to serve. First Church will be a tough, if not impossible, act to follow. I'm not ready to serve another congregation, at least not yet.

So, what does come next for me? As many of you know, I've found something of a call within my call these past few years. I continue to find a great deal of meaning and hope in the work of truth-telling, remembrance and repair related to living legacies of slavery and white supremacy in the local church, in Cambridge, and beyond. In this next chapter I'm eager for a season to rest, to focus on my health and family, and hopefully to write some about my and our racial justice journey. I also look forward to continuing my teaching and work with Harvard and other congregations and communities who are beginning to wrestle with their own legacies. Soon I can share more about some specific ideas that are in the works. I'm excited to see what emerges next, and if this ongoing racial justice work eventually manifests in full-time work or if after a season I return to local church ministry. I trust that God will continue to open a way for me and for

us all. Meanwhile, Nancy and I are hoping to move to a small condo on the Cape from where we both can work remotely and commute a day or two a week, at least for a time.

As for my connection with First Church, the next several months will feel different between us. I know that I, for one, will be grieving a lot, and no doubt bawling during many a hymn; and yet I will still be here to “love and serve” you until June. I will also be feeling enormous gratitude for what you all have meant to me and look forward to taking time later this spring to take stock of what, by the grace of God, we’ve accomplished together in these past 20 years. I expect you all will have a range of emotions as well, from sadness to gladness and eventual excitement about a new chapter in First Church’s life together. Some of you may be angry or upset with me. Others may feel relieved. I hope we can be as open and honest with each other as possible before I leave and before you start building connections with an interim minister and whoever comes next.

I know this is a big change, and it comes at a time when many other things are changing all around us. I am thankful that we are approaching the season of Lent, which for some may feel especially tender this year. Lent brings a focused invitation to ground ourselves in spiritual practice and to find courage and strength in God and in our community for all that lies ahead. In the coming months, there will be time for me and for church leaders, with help from Southern New England UCC staff, to share more about what this transition and “letting go” will mean for us all.

For now and this coming Sunday, our Deacons and I will be available after church for informal conversation and to answer whatever questions you may have. Some may be hearing the news for the first time when they arrive at church. I wholeheartedly trust our current staff, leaders, and transition team; and I am so grateful to them for stepping up in ways they weren’t expecting, both since they first heard the news and in the months ahead. Most of all, I’m grateful to God for calling me to First Church, for bringing us together these past many years, and for opening new ways for us all.

God’s love and mine,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dan".

Dan