



New Covenant Metropolitan Community Church

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The Feast of John the Baptist

My Dear Sisters and Brothers of New Covenant,

Six years ago, on 21 June 2002, the community of faith then known as “MCC Howard County” invited me to serve as its first called pastor. With joy and gratitude, I accepted the call, and thus we began a rich and rewarding ministry together. At the time, I was a newly ordained minister, MCC Howard County was a newly incorporated parish extension, and the sense of hope, wonder and excitement born from all that “newness” was palpable. We were eager to grow together into a vital, caring and loving congregation in which people could be transformed, worship God without fear, and become empowered for the life of faith. As I reflect upon our community six years later, I see that God has been incredibly faithful to us, leading us from that place of newness into the heart of our call. Sustained by the Spirit, we have grown into a new name, a significantly larger budget, an inspired mission and vision, a far more diverse community, and a deep commitment to serve the “last and the least.” In name and in spirit, we have grown into a *church*. And, personally speaking, I have grown into a deeper and more authentic sense of my identity as a minister of Jesus Christ. I can say without hesitation that I could not have dreamed of a more positive, authentic, hospitable and open-hearted parish in which to serve.

Now the time has come for me to take the next step on my vocational journey, and for you to take the next step on yours. After a lengthy period of discernment, personal reflection and consultation with my vocational mentors and friends, I have determined that it is time for me to resign as your Pastor. This decision is not about my personal happiness or unhappiness. It is not about my being dissatisfied with my work here. It isn't even about what I want or don't want. Ultimately, this decision comes because the Holy Spirit has made it clear to me that I have been released from my call here. As a person of faith, I fully trust that this means God has something else in store for me, a new vocational context in which I can serve and grow. And I equally trust that God has *someone* else in store for you, a new pastor who can shepherd New Covenant on the next steps of your exciting journey with the Spirit.

The Board of Directors has accepted my resignation, and my last Sunday with you will be August 24th. Our Regional Elder, the Rev. Arlene Ackerman, will be visiting us on

Sunday, 13 July. She will be meeting with the Board of Directors before worship and will be with us during and after worship to offer us a vision for how we can faithfully engage the process of my leaving and of your planning for the future. She will help you put a Transition Team in place to search for your next pastoral leader. Arlene is deeply gifted at leading congregations through times of transition, and she will support you and give you guidance each step of the way.

My beloved partner, David, and I will be moving to Lancaster, Pennsylvania to more fully support him in his vocation as a professor at Lancaster Theological Seminary and to pursue vocational opportunities there for me. We are greatly looking forward to deepening our roots in the seminary community, which has been steadfastly supportive of David in his profession and of the two of us in our partnership.

In spite of our hopeful anticipation, however, we are both profoundly sad to leave you. I love you, and I love the ways you have supported, inspired and challenged me. I love your commitment, hope and generosity. I love the ways you have taught me what it means to be a person of faith and a pastor. I am a more authentic, compassionate and Christ-centered person because of my life with you. I hope that you are more authentic, compassionate and Christ-centered people because of your life with me and with one another. The pain I feel at this time is a sign of the positive difference you've made in my life, and it is an affirmation to me that my past six years of ministry with you were indeed anointed by God.

I am writing this on the Feast of John the Baptist, and my spirit keeps returning to something John said in the Fourth Gospel. In comparing himself to Jesus, John said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). I suppose that's how it is for all of us whom God calls to serve as spiritual leaders in Christ's church. Having led a particular community of faith for a particular period – at times well and at times poorly, but always with the hope that the Spirit is working through us – there is a point at which we pastors must decrease so that Christ can increase. We must let go of the reins and relinquish our roles, we must step out of the foreground and leave behind particular pulpits, so that we and the communities we have led can remember who it was that was *really* leading us all along. Jesus, our brother and our Lord, is the one who for the past six years has gathered us and loved us and fed us and sent us forth to serve in his name. He will continue to gather you and love you and feed you and send you forth after I am gone, during your next pastor's tenure and long after even that.

May God give us comfort and peace as we say our good-byes, plan for the future, and continue to move with her Spirit in the world. I am grateful beyond measure to be on the journey of faith with you.

In the Spirit,

The Rev. Lance Mullins