



Pastoral Reflections: A Season of Change, Renewal, and New Possibilities for Peace and Trinity UMC

- *“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.” -- Isaiah 43:19:*
- *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” -- 2 Corinthians 5:17*
- *“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” -- Jeremiah 29:11*

As people of faith, we take comfort in knowing that our God is constant and eternal -- unchanging from age to age. However, what we also know is that this trait applies only to God. The Scriptures, as well as our own life experience, tell us that for everything else in all Creation, change is as essential as it is inevitable.

And so it is that God is doing a new thing among the United Methodists of Richland Center.

Yesterday, on September 24th, both Trinity and Peace UMCs voted to approve the unification of the two congregations for the purpose of forming a new, single-point charge dedicated to United Methodist ministry in the greater Richland Center area. The unification is expected to take effect on January 1, 2024, which gives both churches time to prepare for changes, as well as to honor their individual histories and identities -- which will not be lost, but rather blended as elements of the newly formed congregation.

There will be special services and other events planned during the last quarter of 2023 for each church to meaningfully commemorate the transition, as well as ceremonies and celebrations planned for a “grand opening” of the new combined church in 2024. Our plan is to invite the local community to participate and help us to celebrate this hopeful, new chapter in our story.

It goes without saying that there is going to be much to talk about and do in the next several weeks and months - as well as many questions to be answered -- but for the moment, here are some of our first administrative steps.

On January 1, 2024, the membership rolls of both churches will be counted together as the membership of the new congregation. This gives current members of both Trinity and Peace time to prayerfully discern where they want to belong and worship after the new year. I, along with administrative staff and Membership Committees for both churches, are available to answer membership questions and to assist with individual concerns and changes as needed.

In the meantime, before the end of this year, a new Church/Charge Conference will be formed, in compliance with the 2016 United Methodist Book of Discipline, by a Nominations Committee consisting of members from both congregations. Anyone wanting to be considered, or recommend someone else, for specific leadership roles should contact me at their earliest opportunity. Out of this process, all the necessary committees and work groups will be re-formed with members from both churches, in order to begin work in January.

That is the bulk of what I can tell you as of today. More is coming soon and we will make every effort to keep everyone posted as plans emerge and clarify.

Meanwhile, I want to thank everyone who has participated in this process thus far -- most especially for their time, patience, and loyalty. I want to thank everyone for their prayers of camaraderie and support. I ask that we would all please continue to hold both congregations; all our members, friends and missions; the new church; and most of all, our good leaders -- past, present and future -- in our warmest thoughts and deepest meditations of our hearts.

Together, with God's grace, guidance, and loving encouragement, through Christ, we can do all these things. And more!