

Honored, Humbled, and Committed

I want to start by stating how honored I am to be asked to fill in as Moderator for the rest of Brad Rudich's term. Sincere thanks to the Prudential Board for the trust and encouragement you have given me. It was clearly visible at our first board meeting and it really means a lot to have so much support. The same can be said for many other people in the congregation that have been so kind with words and hugs. Thank you.

I also want to say thank you to Brad Rudich. Brad, on behalf of the congregation, thank you for the work you put in as Moderator and co-chair of the search committee. Thank you for the concern you have for our church. I know we all want you to recoup and we look forward to seeing you on a Sunday morning when you feel ready. I will be glad to share my hugs with you.

There is no way for me to not be humbled when looking at the task at hand. We need to tackle some pretty big agenda items in the near future. There is a search committee at work and we need to get our church in order before (yes, before) the next pastor arrives. I'm not sure how much time that will be, but we need to get moving. In order for this to happen, we need to band ourselves together and help each other. None of it will happen without God's help, so let us pray for strength, patience and love within our church.

A few weeks ago, we were tested at a pretty intense level. We found some very strong opinions about the topic of same sex marriage and how we should view this societal shift in relation to our congregation and our building. There is a lot of disagreement in our group, and yet, I feel there is a strong desire to stick together. My number one goal is to address this issue head on and help us come to a place where everyone feels heard, all views are understood, and we can reconcile our decisions based on the teachings of Christ. The Prudential Board has taken the first step and is beginning to build a process in which this is accomplished. This will take some time but it will keep moving toward a conclusion and a policy. In the meantime, as the executive committee of the church, we have adopted a temporary policy:

“Until we come to a congregational consensus on same sex issues, we will not knowingly authorize the use of the building for same sex weddings or commitment ceremonies”.

Please understand that this is not “No”, this is simply, “Not at this time”. We simply ask for patience while we sort through the feelings of our congregation and work to adopt a policy.

I am committed to finding a solution to this issue that allows us all to stay together. The beautiful part of this church is that we all have different backgrounds and different views on many different topics regarding church and society. We are surely not a single-minded group. We are Congregationalists because here, this is ok. We don't have to think alike. Yet, we choose to walk Christ's path together. We don't fit into any mold and maybe that is what we truly know about ourselves and just maybe how we found our way here. We should see that quality in each other and celebrate the journey together. This is what makes a controversial topic like same-sex marriage so difficult in our church. We don't have some national governing body telling us what to do and believe. We have decided to figure it out ourselves and we should do it with love and understanding. God will help us, we just have to ask. Please pray for the people of our church to unite. Please pray for the search committee as they look for our next pastor.

And remember, if you are feeling a little out of place, this is the place for you.

In His service,

Jon Van Raalte
Moderator