

CCC
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Saying Goodbye

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In my fantasy, preparing to say good-bye to you this morning would have been steeped in endless quiet space for meditation and reflection. I pictured the week leading up to this moment as an extension of my trip to Maui, staring at the ocean gently, a breeze in my hair, my mind running through my memories of these past eight plus years. But in that fantasy, I did not have to contend with a wife, a six-year-old, two sets of parents, a young dog, an aged cat, and a new house with plumbing issues. And when I say plumbing issues I mean the *mother* of all plumbing issues. I won't go into detail, but it took seven plumbers four days to sort it all out. Suffice it to say I did not sit as I had imagined, mai tai in hand, staring into the sunset savoring my thoughts. It turns out, the future rarely waits for us to catch up with the past.

You have heard me say often at memorials that the service is but the beginning of the goodbyeing. What needs to be said about a lifetime together cannot be said in an hour, and certainly not in 12.5 minutes. Rest assured that I will spend the rest of my life remembering you and the adventures we have had together. This morning I will share but a few of my favorite moments and reflect on what I feel together are our greatest accomplishments.

It began with the Christmas Concert in 2007. I will never forget that after a very full day of candidating and voting, we all came back that night for the concert. Once all was said and done and the concert was over, we all felt tired but happy, and Katie and I walked out the doors to you all gathered in a circle around the piano singing "Silent Night." I knew then that I had found my new home.

My first official Sunday was Easter Morning, 2008. I remember getting lost on my way to work and dropping cream cheese down the front of my dress. Parishioners loyal to the early service greeted me and cautioned me not to yell "Alleluia" too loudly or the neighbors would complain. It was freezing outside at 6:30 in the morning, and Bernice's nose turned blue. We were off to a rip-roaring start. It got better from there, but I knew I was going to need all the help I could get.

So my first act as pastor of CCC was to get approval from the Conference to install four Pastors Emeritus. Carol Saysette (even though we had to temporarily reassign her to a four-way covenant, this position will await her when she finally retires), Dan Hatch, and Ann and Bill Eichhorn happily obliged.

I remember then the ordination of Beth Erickson, and going on to nurture Kate Dalton, Donene Blair and Heather Wiedemann through the ordination process and into four-way covenants with CCC, later adding Carol Hannon to the four-way covenant list.

We loved Charles Wei and Shari Moran through the in-care process, and launched our interns Alexis Wright, Emily Labrecque (now Rev. Snowden) and Ally Vertigan into lives of ministry. Over this past decade, CCC has earned a reputation as a teaching congregation.

I was proud of our decision several years back to divest from the big banks and redouble our investment in local efforts to make Marin a fairer and more just place for all of its citizens through ongoing support of the Marin Interfaith Network, the Interfaith Street Chaplaincy and the Marin Organizing Committee. It is, of course, my great hope that the work of justice in Marin County will continue to see this church leading the charge for change.

I was so pleased to have been able to celebrate CCC at fifty-five years of age and to invite all of its previous pastors to offer remembrances of their life with this community. That was a very healing moment. Here's to another fifty-five years.

I am proud to have been a part of shepherding our outdoor spaces into completion so that regardless of age, class, belief or ability, anyone can experience the presence of God in this space.

I have loved making music with you. The choir has been an anchor for me, as has been creating music that reflects the living theology of this congregation. I couldn't be happier that Carl is now at the helm of the choir, and of course my life has been made magical by the presence of our dear Scott.

This past Thursday at the last Stone Soup gathering I will lead, Dan Hatch asked me what I felt I would take with me into the next chapter of my ministry. Here is what I know.

- I will remember that walking beside a congregation is better than walking in front of it.
- I will remember that when people forget they are beloved they can behave in ways that don't reveal who they truly mean to be, so it is important to remind them often that they are beloved.
- I will remember how important it is to have a group of trusted people with whom to meet on a regular basis and wrestle the issues of the day.
- I can never again do ministry without a Stone Soup group.
- I will also remember that my relationship with the congregation as a whole is a long-term relationship, and mistakes made here and there don't have to be the end of the story.
- I will remember that I do not have to be perfect; I just have to be authentic.
- I will remember that I have been loved, and that I will again experience the love of a congregation.
- And I will remember that love is worth the cost of loss.

Equally important to *what I will remember of you* may be what *you* take from *our* time together. Here is what I hope you will keep with you:

- I hope you will hear my voice saying “put your feet on the floor and take a deep breath,” “breathe, be here now!”
- I hope you will fight to integrate the stranger and welcome the newcomer among you as you ultimately welcomed me.
- I hope you will remember that I believe in you, in each and every one of you, and the potential you have to live into the fullness of your humanity.
- I hope you will remember that it is indeed possible to have a good experience with a minister from beginning to end.
- I hope you remember that you are the beloved community, capable of amazing things, qualified and equipped to live out God’s vision of love for the world.
- I hope you will remember that you are held in God’s loving embrace whether you fully understand what that means or not, and that Jesus is a great place to start and a great place to return to when the road becomes perplexing.

Lastly, I hope that you will always remember that we are one in the body of Christ, and that nothing will ever separate us from the love of each other made known through the love of God.

May the peace of Christ, the peace that surpasses all understanding surround us now as it did in the beginning, and may that same peace be with us always as we follow our respective paths into the future.

Amen