

Transformation and Vision: Our Next Steps

First Church Friends –

Few are the moments in one's life that are so transformational that you know you are experiencing one *in real time*: saying "I do", the birth of a child, the death of a beloved. They are moments so profound, so disorienting – so *re-orienting* – that you know you will be changed forever.



Pentecost, which we just celebrated in worship, was one such moment for Peter. Having denied even knowing Jesus three times, at Pentecost he finally had the chance to take it all back – to be who Jesus believed he was: the rock upon which even our church here at 38 South Winooski is founded. Here at First Church, we are in an extraordinary place, because we are living in the middle of two transformational moments at once.

The first is, of course, as a country. Thanks be to God, we will never be able to go back after watching the 9 minutes of video where George Floyd was murdered by a man so blasé about it that he had his hands in his pockets. As I said on Sunday, George Floyd's death was not the first, nor the first to be filmed. But it occurred at a time when I believe the pandemic leaves white America unusually able to empathize.

Certainly, we have a choice about where we can go from here, but it is a choice that will leave us profoundly changed – or scarred - depending. If you struggle to see how the need for profound anti-racism work relates to church, I could not recommend more highly my friend and colleague, the Rev. Tim Pantoja's sermon on the importance of breath, linked [here](#).

The other transformational moment is for us as a church. At the Annual Meeting on the 31st, we voted overwhelmingly to approve the sale of the parsonage to the Ronald McDonald House. For almost 40 years, we have watched and supported the Ronald McDonald House as it grew to the incredible organization it is today. This sale will mark the end of one of our largest missions to date. This ending, combined with the transformation of our resources from physical to monetary, will clearly involve a serious re-imagining of who we are, and who and how we want to become together.

To this end, the Trustees are working to create a Task Force for 2020 Vision that will launch this summer. This group will be responsible for facilitating a congregation-wide process of discernment. This will be a Spirit-led discussion of how we envision our life together going forward. The end result will be a clearer sense of our priorities, including next steps both for the immediate and long-term future.

At the end of this visioning process, and not until then, we will commission a team to make recommendations for the usage of the funds from the sale of the parsonage. As was clearly voiced in the Annual Meeting, we cannot let the idea of money drive where we go from here. We must start with an understanding of how we want to execute our mission, our foundational identity as love-bound people of God, in this time. Both of these processes *must* involve everyone; we cannot do this without you.

Friends, we are emerging from a decade of profound reconfiguration as a congregation – in staffing, in structure, in membership, and in resources. As followers of Jesus, we are called to be intentional and thoughtful stewards of the resources we have been entrusted with. What has become clear to me in this past year is that our resources are extraordinary – particularly when it comes to people. I have never felt so clearly that God has something in store for us, and that we are being called to be church

in profound and exciting ways. This is daunting, of course, but it is also a moment of uncommon hope. Few are the moments where the possibilities stretch so limitless before us. I can't wait to see where we will go.

Yours in faith,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Elissa".

[The Rev. Elissa Johnk](#)