

The Hopes and Fears of All the Years

In a recent Christ and Culture Sunday School Class, Bruce Dickson led a discussion about the hopes and fears associated with our transition to a new senior pastor. Bruce used the popular Christmas carol, "O Little Town of Bethlehem," written by Phillips Brooks in 1868 as the context for the lesson. In the second stanza of the carol we sing:

"The hopes and fears of all the years,
Are met in thee tonight."

This will be the final Advent season we experience with Pastor Pete as our senior pastor. Of course, our focus will remain on celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. However, it also seems appropriate this Advent season to consider some "hopes and fears" associated with Pete's retirement and the calling of a new senior pastor for VPC. We know that Pete is retiring, and each of us should anticipate our role in the forthcoming changes.

Pastor Pete James

Hopes

- We as a church family honor and celebrate Pete's forty-plus year ministry at VPC in a way that brings glory to God.
- Pete and Chris discern God's will for their near-term future and approach the next chapter of their lives with a sense of peace and purpose.
- Pete and Chris transition to the next stage of their lives knowing how much we appreciate them and their ministry.

Fears

- It can be hard to say goodbye. We experienced a sudden loss and goodbye when our beloved David Jordan-Haas went to be with the Lord, and now we are experiencing a longer loss and goodbye with Pastor Pete.
- It will be difficult to imagine VPC without Pastor Pete. His ministry has touched our lives in innumerable ways. He has helped each of us go deeper in our relationship with the Lord prompting us to ask ourselves each Sunday, "What difference does this sermon make in my life?"
- Pete and Chris may move from Vienna, and we will miss their loving presence in our community.

New Senior Pastor

Hopes

- We trust in God's plans for our church and how He will guide the PNC to their selection of a new senior pastor.
- We will provide a warm, Christ-like welcome.
- New Senior leadership will be an opportunity to rethink and reinvigorate worship, Christian education, small groups, new members, missions, etc.
- Opportunity for new leadership at VPC and in the community.
- There will be an openness to "new things." Change can be good.

Fears

- We will be unwelcoming of change, holding the new pastor to an expectation of becoming a replica of Pete James, and not providing the new pastor an opportunity to lead us as the Lord guides him or her.
- COVID will complicate the transition to a new senior pastor.
- The new pastor may not embrace some of the ministries that some of us hold dear.
- Other personnel shifts that may accompany the transition may be difficult.

There are many more hopes and fears that might have been listed. The point here is that it is incumbent on all of us to think and prepare for the changes that we know are coming. Of course, the main thing that we all need to do is to continue to pray – pray for Pete and Chris, pray for the PNC, pray for the new senior pastor, pray for our staff, and pray for our church. Giving thanks and praise for all that God has done through Pastor Pete's ministry at VPC, and praying that we might all have open and expectant hearts for where God is calling our church through new senior leadership in the future.

The Transition Committee will be posting a list of Frequently Asked Questions associated with transitions like ours after Christmas. If you have any questions or suggestions, please send them to transition@viennapres.org and a member of our committee will respond. Be on the lookout for additional communications from the PNC and the Transition Committee soon.