

Pastor's Report (2020) **Ron Foster**

This report should cover as fully as possible the work of the pastor. Care should be taken not to duplicate the reports of the Church Council, committees, organizations, and officers of the charge.

Submit this report by October 1, 2020.

Pastor's First Name

Ron

Pastor's Last Name

Foster

Church Name

AN | Severna Park || Severna Park ||| 1510

The Pastor shall give a report on the state of the church and an account of pastoral ministry as it relates to (§ 340):

A. Providing support, guidance, and training to the lay membership in the church; ministering within the congregation and to the world; and administering the temporal affairs of the congregation.

My 34th has been my most challenging year as a pastor by far -- more overwhelming than beginning my first appointment out of seminary, more stressful than serving a Washington, DC area congregation in the aftermath of 9/11, more demanding than any of the seasons when we were thriving and simply trying to keep up with all the good things that were bursting forth in the church. Of course, I am not alone in feeling this way. But as hard as this year has been, it has also been oddly exhilarating, creative and probably the most important leadership I have ever offered a church.

So much of this year has been an ongoing experiment in faithful improvisation as we have sought to hold together a large community without the the core practice that typically holds does that somewhat organically: gathering in person for worship, study, mission and fellowship. From the pivot to becoming a virtual community in the matter of days to building new Zoom and Facebook based rhythms of worship, study and prayer, I have been seeking to help us continue to adapt and re-imagine what is possible given the constraints at any point in time. After establishing a robust digital presence and increasingly excellent Livestream worship service, in recent months I have been working with our staff, Regathering Task Force and lay leadership to find ways for us to also safely gather in person for outdoor baptisms, outdoor worship services, mission projects, etc.

My other core task throughout this whole pandemic has been to be a hope-filled, non-anxious presence for my staff and congregation because everyone around me has been stressed to the max and not always at the same time or presenting in the same ways.

B. Provide an update on the status of the vision / mission goals set at last year's church conference.

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Put simply, last year's goals have not been the primary focus of most of this year's ministry as so much of our energy and focus has been given over to reinventing ourselves. But having said that, we have made great progress on many of them because of the creative ways we have had to respond to the Covid-19 crisis. For example, we have been able to simplify (a crisis will do that to you!), refine and broaden the tiers of spiritual formation opportunities we are offering the congregation. We have been very intentional about building back the most important pieces of discipleship -- prayer, Bible study, worship -- and the number of people participating in online groups and classes has grown dramatically (for example, I have 40 people in my 6 week intro to the Bible class this fall whereas in a "normal" year, I might have had 20 people sign up). We have continued to build up our leadership team and the sheer number of meetings that we have had over the past 6 months has formed a deeper sense of community and led to more substantial conversations about congregational dynamic, priorities and direction. The one goal that has really suffered this year has been the commitment to doubling the number of people engaged in and percentage of budget dollars devoted to missions. We have had to cancel ASP and VIM trips and many of our month to month ministries have been scaled back because they are built around face-to-face involvement. But even here, our leaders have been creative and continued to adapt so that we are still feeding people in Brooklyn Park, still partnered with our Back Pack Buddies School, still going to do a Rise Against Hunger Event, still doing local food drives, etc.

C. Provide vision / mission goals for the upcoming year

- 1) Build on the level of excellence we have established and extend the strategic reach of our livestream worship and video capabilities.
- 2) Continue to refine our Discipleship Pathway and integrate in-person with online learning.
- 3) Work with our Anti-racism task force to broaden awareness and develop new cross-racial partnerships and shared ministry

D. Include as a part of the report a statement outlining the pastor's program of continuing education and spiritual growth for the past year and plans for the year to come (§ 350.1).

I participated in the Festival of Homiletics and the Church of the Resurrection's Leadership Institute this year once again and have also taken part in multiple workshops and webinars over the last 6 months on pivoting toward more digital/virtual church. I continue to read voraciously on a wide range of topics from biblical studies to theology to social justice. I have also taken spiritual renewal retreats seasonally (Lent & Advent) and will do the same in 2021.

Discipleship

E. How are you and the congregation engaging with the spiritual discipline of Justice and specifically, the NEJ Call To Action on Racial Justice?

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We have been working on this issue for multiple years now through the Faith & Race group that I formed and lead. So when all of these reading lists of great books (predominantly white) people and congregations could read to self-educate and deepen awareness came out this spring, I was happy to see we had already discussed many of them. By no means have we figured it out, but at least it didn't feel like we were just starting to have these kinds of conversations. Our entire staff came out with a swift and decisive statement against racism in the wake of the George Floyd killing, we have preached, prayed and talked about race regularly in worship and small groups and I have marched in Baltimore, DC and Annapolis in solidarity with my brothers and sisters of color. Our Church Council has developed a statement and made a commitment to be an Anti-Racist Church and our action plan includes

4 steps: (1) Broadening and deepening the work of

The Faith & Race Group to engage more people in the congregation (in addition to book studies, continue to offer movie viewing, field trips, ongoing resources and other experiences to learn about the realities of our racialized past and present); (2) Committing as the pastors and leaders of SPUMC to do our own 'homework' and risk hard and honest conversations around issues of racial inequity; (3) Seeking to build meaningful cross-racial relationships and partnerships in worship, study and missions; and (4) Forming a Task Force to keep us accountable and to help us do this work in loving, courageous and creative ways.

Pastor's Signature:

Ronald K Foster

Date:

09/28/2020

Form Status:

Complete