



Peace River Presbytery

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)

August 17, 2020

5600 PEACE RIVER ROAD NORTH PORT, FLORIDA 34287

Dear Brothers & Sisters at First, Sarasota:

Now that we have established the very broad overview of the road ahead, we wanted to take some time to lay out all of the details that go into the Designated Associate Pastor search process. These are consistent with the Designated Associate Pastor search process outlined in the Committee on Ministry's Administrative Manual, with some additional guidelines as necessitated by having an Administrative Commission in place.

But first, in our haste to give you a Road Map Forward, it appears (as you will see below) that our timing was overly ambitious. It is important to take responsibility when one makes a mistake and we want to apologize for providing you with a timeline that is not going to be faithfully feasible. We hope that this document will serve to bring greater clarity and transparency for the entire church going forward.

We need to be extremely clear what the Administrative Commission has and has not authorized. We HAVE authorized the establishment of the position of a Designated Associate Pastor. While this may possibly become a pathway for Kelly Fitzgerald to ultimately return to First, Sarasota, we need to be clear that it is NOT a forgone conclusion --- thus, this is a true search.

We want to make clear to you that Rev. Fitzgerald's call with First, Sarasota has been dissolved. And that means, quite bluntly, that she has no standing or affiliation with First, Sarasota at this time. Therefore, it would not be appropriate for there to be communication between any current pastors, staff, elders, or members of First, Sarasota with Rev. Fitzgerald, as it might compromise the integrity of the search. We cannot stress enough that the members of First, Sarasota need to understand that in the eyes of the Presbytery and the denomination, Rev. Fitzgerald is no longer on the staff of First, Sarasota. It is important to note that Rev. Fitzgerald, who is still considered a member a Peace River Presbytery, has been made aware of this information and has agreed to abide by it.

That said, per the Administrative Manual of Peace River Presbytery, these are the steps that we will need to walk through to move forward with a Designated Associate Pastor Search:

6.1413 DESIGNATED PASTOR. (*in this case, Designated ASSOCIATE Pastor*)

The Book of Order (G-2.0504a) states that a teaching elder may be installed in a pastoral relationship for a designated term determined by the Committee on Ministry (*in this case, the Administrative Commission*) in consultation with the congregation and specified in the call. The Designated Associate Pastor plan is ordinarily used when a church is in significant conflict or in significant economic distress and needs two to four years to address the conflict or the economic problems before a permanent pastor is called. A Designated Associate Pastor plan offers a few years for planning a new mission or ministry and can build self-confidence in the church's ability to call a pastor rather than continuing in a stated supply relationship. Churches often feel that a stated supply relationship is temporary and may be terminated on short notice. The DAP plan provides for a 2, 3- or 4-year period of consistent leadership. Because the DAP is called and installed, the congregation and the pastor are able to gain a sense of self-assurance in their ministry. After consultation and approval of the Committee on Ministry, (*in this case, the Administrative Commission*) any congregation may call a Designated Associate Pastor. The Associate Pastor Nominating Committee (APNC) and the minister will evaluate each other in a manner similar to the usual process.

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The congregation still elects an Associate Pastor Nominating Committee. The difference is the number of ministers whom the APNC will consider. The COM (*in this case, the Administrative Commission*) will ordinarily recommend a limited number of pastors (*typically 3-5 Personal Information Forms (pastors' resumes) will be shared that have already been vetted*). At any time the Committee on Ministry (*in this case, the Administrative Commission*) can recommend, or the APNC may request, that the Designated Associate Pastor plan no longer be pursued and the usual calling procedure be used (*however, by the authority granted to the AC, only the AC could consider such a change and the AC is not open to doing so in this situation*). The terms of the call, including the length of time of the contract (two, three or four years) will be agreed upon at the beginning of the term with the COM Ministry (*in this case, the Administrative Commission*).

6.1414 Designated Pastor Search Steps: (*in this case, Designated ASSOCIATE Pastor*)

- A. The COM discusses this alternative with the session and secures their agreement to proceed. (*By the authority granted to the AC, it is not necessary to have the conversation about this alternative, the only conversation is if the Session wants to proceed or not*).
- B. A congregational meeting is called to elect an APNC (*typically an APNC will be between 5-7 members*) and approve the Designated Associate Pastor process. (*The AC has determined that no one who has served on a prior PNC or APNC or IPNC, serve on this search. In addition, no member of staff, nor their spouse, will be permitted to serve. It is extremely important to get an impartial nominating committee that can evaluate candidates with clarity of vision and call in mind. The Nominating Committee of First Presbyterian will bring all names of potential APNC members to the Administrative Commission prior to calling a congregational meeting.*)
- C. The plan is outlined to the congregation; and an APNC is elected.
- D. The Committee on Ministry (*in this case, the Administrative Commission*), meets with the APNC to explain its requirements for forms and process and outlines the suggested timeline. APNC completes all these requirements which may (*per the Administrative Commission, "which WILL"*) include the writing of a Ministry Information Form. (*The Ministry Information Form must be approved by both the Session and the Administrative Commission before proceeding.*)
- E. The Committee on Ministry (*in this case, the Administrative Commission*) ordinarily provides the APNC with the Personal Information Forms of persons whom they have pre-screened and who are interested in a call as a Designated Associate Pastor.
- F. The APNC considers these persons. The APNC, Committee on Ministry (*in this case, the Administrative Commission*) and the candidate selected agree on terms of call, including the contracted time of the call. (*The Administrative Commission would like for First, Sarasota to have their final candidate go through a Leaderwise Assessment (not to be administered or evaluated by anyone within the presbytery) prior to an official offer of a call.*)
In the event, however unlikely, that a chosen candidate would be from another presbytery, it would be necessary for that candidate to be received by the Committee on Ministry.
- G. (*Having been given permission from the AC*), the APNC asks session to call a congregational meeting; the congregation hears the report of the APNC and elects the pastor in the usual manner. The COM liaison (*this will be a member of the Administrative Commission, acting on behalf of the Administrative Commission*), reports the action of the congregation to Peace River Presbytery's Stated Clerk for PCUSA processing. The Designated Associate Pastor is installed in the usual manner.
- H. One year prior to the ending date of the call, the session, the Designated Associate Pastor, and the Committee on Ministry (*and/or the Administrative Commission*) conducts a review of the ministry. If the Designated Associate Pastor and the session want to continue the pastoral relationship beyond the agreed upon term, the congregation is asked to join in making a request to continue the relationship either for another specified period of time or to proceed to call the minister as the permanent installed associate pastor.

We hope that this communication serves to bring clarity as to the nuts and bolts of the steps necessary to move First Presbyterian Church forward in these uncertain times. Thus, the next step would be to nominate a Designated Associate Pastor Nominating Committee, while simultaneously, the personnel committee of the congregation works on solidifying a job description.

With this information in hand, let us move forward in faith towards God's great future for First Presbyterian Church Sarasota.

In the Grip of Grace,

The Administrative Commission of Peace River Presbytery,

Rebecca Nicholson

Rev. Dr. Hope Lee

Rev. Holly Wildhack

Stan Butcher