

Acting Pastor's Annual Report

What began as a fill-in Sunday in late September a year ago, turned into something very different as we all remember, Dewey was working hard to manage and recover from his illness, and he set successive target dates for his return to the Acton Church. He did return in mid-winter for several Sundays, but longer term plans were not to be. Failing health led to his resignation as minister; then in the early summer we were deeply saddened to learn of Dewey's death. On July 5th, a celebration of Dewey's life was held in our church sanctuary. It is clear that his pastoral legacy and the memories of his loving presence are now a permanent part of our church's fabric.

The definition of my role here at the Acton Church has had to flex with the circumstances, prompting the term: "Acting Pastor." As mentioned, I began as a guest preacher, and then was invited to be a temporary substitute until Dewey's return. This was a type of "holding action." It meant keeping the wheels turning but not interrupting established patterns or process. Then we entered a transition period when it became evident that a new settled pastor would be sought. Again, an invitation for me to continue as Acting Pastor was extended, this time at a Special Church Meeting. My Sunday role would be compromised between June and August because of previous commitments; but would become more regular in September. The duration of my time in Acton is left open-ended, but I do not intend to be a candidate for the position of settled pastor.

This period, up until the call of a new minister, is going to be much more than a time of treading water. Our project of information gathering was initiated in June with a series of questionnaires made available to our members and friends. The response has been good, allowing us to get a valuable read on what we think, prefer, and hope for. The job of tallying results has taken longer than expected because new responses for #'s 1-4 kept coming in, even into September. After the information is collated and made available, a number of group conversation and discussion opportunities will be scheduled to help us with next steps and clearer priorities. All of this will be valuable not only for the immediate work to be done, but also for the Pastoral Search Committee. It will in large part shape the profile of our church to be made available to potential candidates; and it will help determine the type of minister, abilities and strengths that would fit this congregation. In addition each program area of the church will be charged to recommend "next steps" on the basis of information gained appropriate to their area.

This does not sound to me like a church motor running in neutral. Keep your seat belts close; it could be an interesting ride!

Before closing, I must express my deep gratitude and respect to the active core of the Acton Church for your faith, work, and support. I won't begin to list names (you know who you are), because for sure I'd have a brain cramp and miss someone. You have made my ministry here both possible and a joy. My prayer for our church community is that the coming year will offer us renewed strength and purpose; focused listening for God's voice; and the excitement of holy surprises. Grace and peace as we continue our time together.

Peter Mercer