

Dear Countryside,

The Moderators and the Transition Leadership Committee (TLC) are committed to transparency and want to assure you that Countryside's mission and vision remain the same, along with its commitment as the Christian Partner of the Tri-Faith Initiative. The lay leadership wanted to release Chris's resignation letter to the congregation unedited to give her a voice, but in doing so, there have been a lot of questions and anxiety. The uncertainty already provided by such a trying year has understandably put us all a little on edge. In an effort to answer concerns that have been received, the Moderators and church staff have worked together to provide the following explanations.

1. Some of you may have wondered at the meaning of Rev. Dr. Chris Alexander's comment in her resignation letter about not feeling called to the direction the church has charted for our future.

*"Countryside is discerning its future for ministry as well, and is heading in **a direction that I do not feel called to follow.**" - Rev. Dr. Chris Alexander, Resignation Letter to the Congregation*

The direction Chris Alexander refers to is the Interim Model of Collaborative Leadership and the position of Interim Minister of Engagement and Formation with responsibilities of the Tri-Faith Initiative partnership which the committee felt best matched Chris's gifts and talents. **The church is not changing direction. We will continue to grow and maximize our involvement in the Tri-Faith Initiative with our partners.**

With the resignation of Rev. Dr. Eric Elnes and his departure in November, the Church Council appointed the TLC to determine the best path forward and to enter into a period of discernment with an interim period of 12-18 months. The committee, in consultation with church leaders and staff, with Chris Alexander and Dan Loven-Crum, developed a collaborative leadership model (see attached information found in the November newsletter). This model was approved by the Church Council in October and the position of Interim Associate Minister of Worship and Congregational Care was posted. The TLC has already started receiving resumes to fill that position. **The church will move forward with the collaborative leadership model and now hire two interim ministers to start the discernment process.**

2. It's also easy to think that with two departures, Countryside may have a void in leadership. We want to assure you that this is not the case. While we have lost two wonderful people, this church is led by the congregation, with God's help. Countryside is not Eric's Church or Chris's Church, but our church. We swell with pride at the talent we have on staff, on our boards, and on the TLC. We also have at least eight ordained ministers in our congregation, an active worship team and the Nebraska United Church of Christ Conference who can be called upon to help with worship and ministerial services. Dan Loven-Crum is amazing and continues to handle the day-to-day workings of the church. The Moderators will be working with Dan to support him and the staff. In addition, the TLC has hired a consultant to help with the interim period to make sure that we have a professional change agent to help them.
3. Finally, we know you all just want some certainty in an unusually uncertain world. These two departures are untimely at best. However, we need to understand that this is an amazing opportunity as we move forward. We have the opportunity to break down entrenched ideas of

leadership by developing a collaborative leadership model. This interim period will be a change for our church leadership structure, and the adjustments we make once the interim ministers are in place, to see if we are able to effectively adapt and utilize it to our advantage.

As with any departure, there is apprehension. As the group that has been tasked with lay leadership in this difficult time, we ask you to trust that we are moving the church forward with the best interests of the staff and congregation. The pandemic makes it more difficult to feel connected and easier to believe that things are going awry. In our view this transition is an opportunity to move forward into a bright new future.

We will share with you our Pastoral Care Coordinator Jan Brown's comments to those reaching out to her:

"Our sadness and confusion are normal. It can feel like another loss. Personally, it does to me - like two dear and wise friends have left me. Countryside now faces a clean slate, though -- and that allows the Spirit to get more creative with who can best lead our church in this transition time. We'll have excellent candidates to consider. We have only scratched the surface of our mission in this community and world -- through Tri-Faith and through the many gifts in our congregation. The remaining staff is very committed. We are here for you. It'll turn out well even if it currently feels empty in our hearts and pulpit. Trust this river. It flows on... God is very near. Please pray for our church and staff. Thank you!" - Jan Brown

In addition to Jan, many on our staff have voiced both sadness at the loss of Eric and Chris, while also recognizing the opportunities moving forward:

"Although we temporarily do not have a minister, we have a strong team of staff members who will provide the needed support for the congregation during this time of transition. We have access to supply and bridge pastors to fill the gap until an interim minister arrives so we will be able to meet any needs that arise. Even though it is sad to have team members who I have worked with for the past eight years leave, I am excited about the great things Countryside as the Christian Partner of the Tri-Faith has in its future." - Dan Lovencrum, Director of Administration and Communication

As we say in our Mission Statement: *"We are an inclusive, open and affirming family of faith, welcoming all to God's table of love and acceptance. We are diverse, yet united by Christ's example. We care for one another, support one another and challenge one another to become all that God creates us to be. We work together to nurture our community and to promote peace and justice in our conflicted world."*

We are working on opportunities as a community to say goodbye to Chris and wish her well. Details to follow soon. In addition, our associate conference minister, Rev. Darrell Goodwin, will be preaching December 27 and we will follow our service with an all-church informational meeting for the congregation at 11:00 a.m. via Zoom. The Moderators and Transition Leadership Committee sincerely appreciate the support we have received from you, as well as your questions and concerns. Together we all continue to move forward, listening to Spirit and where God has called us together in ministry.

We continue to ask God's guidance for our church and leadership in the days and months ahead.

Blessings,

Moderators and Transition Leadership Committee

Moderators can be reached at moderator@countrysideucc.org and the Transition Leadership Committee can be reached at tlc@countrysideucc.org.