



## First Presbyterian Church

639 Grey Street

Thunder Bay, ON P7E 2E4

Telephone: (807) 623-0717

Email: [first@tbaytel.net](mailto:first@tbaytel.net) Website: [www.fpresbyterian.ca](http://www.fpresbyterian.ca)

**Clerk of Session**

Lorne Clifford

**Interim Moderator (effective March 1)**

Rev. Joyce Yanishewski

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February 15, 2021

To the Congregation of First Presbyterian Church

Greetings, friends:

I've started a lot of newsletters and minister's reports that way in these past seven years and I mean it when I call you 'friends.' I could write you a letter that simply notifies you of the decision made at our Annual General Meeting on February 7<sup>th</sup>, but I also want to write a bit about what it means for you as a congregation and for me and Colin.

Our Annual General Meeting was held online using the video and tele-conferencing platform Zoom. There were 31 people in attendance, which is comparable to attendance at past in-person AGMs. After our treasurer's clear and robust presentation of our congregational finances, I asked Rev. Joyce Yanishewski to moderate the portion of our meeting concerning our most immediate financial options, as it concerned my position. While I was excused from the meeting, a lengthy discussion occurred, and the following motion was passed with great sadness:

That the pastoral tie with Rev. Susan Mattinson be dissolved due to financial concerns exacerbated by Covid-19.

The Presbytery of Superior has been notified of this motion by letter. They subsequently met on Friday February 12<sup>th</sup> to begin the process of preparing the Settlement Agreement that will contain the terms of the dissolution of the pastoral tie. It includes (but is not limited to): arranging for pastoral care for the congregation and minister, the payment of Transition Allowance to the minister (one month's stipend for each year served), the continuation of pension and benefits and use of the manse or housing allowance during the Transition Period, the final date in the pulpit, and other necessary items. While work on this agreement is currently ongoing, the Presbytery has appointed Rev. Joyce Yanishewski to represent the Presbytery with the authority to prepare the settlement agreement for the approval of First Church's Session, myself, and the Presbytery. Rev. Joyce has also been appointed as Interim Moderator of First Church effective March 1, 2021. Presbytery has set the date of the dissolution of the pastoral tie for Sunday February 28, 2021. The expediency of this process will allow First Church to begin March by paying the minister Transition Allowance instead of stipend. Transition Allowance will be issued from the savings account instead of the operating account, allowing more money to remain in operating each much to pay bills. This frees the congregation to remain financially sustainable past June and engage in creative discussions and decisions regarding mid-term and

long-term ministry goals. Yet, at the same time, we move through these processes recognizing the very real emotions of grief and loss for everyone involved.

Discussions, both in session and at the AGM, were clear that much of this situation is outside of our control. Covid-19 eliminated the fundraising activities on which had been depending to bring in revenue. In these last several years, we have seen a number of our faithful financial givers pass away. And the pandemic is challenging all congregations to consider what ministry looks like in our current time and place; we have adapted and continue to adapt. Church may begin to look radically different in the coming years, no matter a congregation's financial situation.

Which is why I am encouraging you to see this as an opportunity for renewal—to embrace something different and new. The document you received along with your AGM Report lays out a number of possibilities to explore—everything from grants for creative new ministry programs, to partnering in a formal way with another local church, and more. Rev. Joyce will be forming a small committee of Presbytery to journey with you during these discussions. There is still lots of life here at First Church. God is still at work here. I believe that with all my heart!

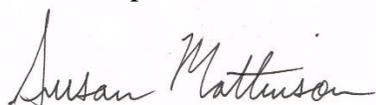
Colin and I have known for a while that the dissolution of the pastoral tie was a very real possibility. We grieve, like you do, the ending of our time ministering with you all. But we will be okay. Colin and I have decided that at some point during the seven-month Transition Period, we will be moving to Nova Scotia to be nearer our family. We trust God to lead us on, just as God will lead you on as a congregation, to a new adventure. And we will be praying for you all, just as we hope you will be praying for us!

As Christians, our Triune God is our great comfort in times of joy and despair. So, I leave you with these words from scripture:

Rejoice in the Lord always;  
again I will say, Rejoice.  
Let your gentleness be known to everyone.  
The Lord is near.  
Do not worry about anything,  
but in everything by prayer and supplication  
with thanksgiving  
let your requests be made known to God.  
And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,  
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

--Philippians 4:4-7

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Susan Mattinson". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.