**FAIRVIEW MORAVIAN CHURCH**

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Rev. Jeff Coppage *Interim* *Pastor*

Lewis Phillips, *Pastoral Assistant/Director of Music*

July 17, 2019

TO: Fairview Moravian Church Congregation

FROM: Pastor Jeff Coppage, Marshall Mathers, Jody Brendle

RE: Pastor Lasley leave of absence

Earlier this month Associate Pastor Victoria Lasley applied to the Provincial Elders Conference for a leave of absence, which the PEC subsequently approved. The Joint Boards became aware of her pending leave on Monday, July 8, when Elder Vice Chair Marshall Mathers talked with Victoria on the phone. Marshall presented a letter from Victoria that evening (addressed to the congregation) at the Joint Boards regular meeting. Pastor Victoria conveyed to Marshall that she intended to be on leave through the end of the year, that the leave was effective July 15, and that she did intend to preach and lead communion July 14.

In her letter to the congregation, Pastor Victoria requested leave “for personal reasons.” These were not specified and we respect her privacy and confidentiality.

It is clear to everyone at Fairview that Pastor Victoria is wonderfully gifted in her sermon content and delivery and her leadership in worship. Her absence will be felt on Sunday mornings for some time to come. Pastor Victoria took this action on her own, with no foreknowledge, encouragement, or advice from the boards. Our role is to honor her request and offer encouraging support in her time of leave.

Pastor Jeff has recently been in contact with board leaders and staff as needed to prepare for his return from medical leave. He will be back in NC in early August and in the office on and off before working full-time again starting Sunday August 11th.

Also, Pastor Jeff has been in contact with Pastor Victoria by phone and will continue to do so as a clergy colleague as well in his role as the Senior Pastor at Fairview to offer support and a listening ear while she is on her leave of absence. He understands and supports her need to take a leave of absence. Like any workplace, there are issues which the elected Joint Board addresses with all staff periodically (within the standard, appropriate level of confidentiality). Our elected leaders are serving Christ and Christ’s church as imperfect humans who are seeking to lead and trusting faithfully in God’s leading. Your continued prayers are valued.

Pastor Jeff regrets that his illness prevented him from fully carrying out his role in staff supervision and then reporting to the boards as appropriate for a Senior Pastor. No one caused this unfortunate disruption of responsibilities by the head of staff. It is good to remember that worldly responses of conjecture, rumor, and “they vs. we” are not Biblical responses to concerns about the observed, or perceived, actions of others and cause offense among Christians. Our Joint Board leaders will engage with the congregation directly this Sunday. A process will be put in place so that in the near future all voices can be heard and considered respectfully. Fairview’s commitment to outreach and mission will continue to be a high priority. Naturally, we all must adjust those efforts given this significant staff change. We still follow our Lamb first and foremost.

There have been no board discussions putting forth any names for the next senior pastor. That would be highly disruptive to our orderly processes. As announced at open congregational meetings, the goal from the start has been to engage members in the call process this fall.

In her letter, Pastor Victoria advises us “… love should be present in your hearts, through the words that you speak, and through your actions so all people will see the light of Jesus illuminating at Fairview Moravian Church.” Let us respect and appreciate her time with us and honor her wishes.

In Christ,

Jeff Coppage

Intentional Interim Pastor

Jody Brendle

Chair, Board of Trustees

Marshall Mathers

Vice Chair, Board of Elders