

“Our Story”
Stouffville United Church
Sunday, June 27, 2021

Philippians 4:4-9

In our time together, we have walked along paths lined with flowers of joy and bird song of laughter, and we have seen days of cloud, and troubling storms. I have seen your tears, your sighs, your worried brow, your laughter, your smile, your chuckle, your twinkle, your hope, your daring, your encouragement, your zest, your determination, your faith. I have known your story, and my story has become a part of your story. And together we can celebrate this wonderful gift of faith and love that we share.

I remember when I first came into this sanctuary for worship. I was welcomed by your love and joy, and that warmth and support has never diminished in the seven years of ministry with you. Worship is your bedrock. It is where you remember your identity, your purpose. It is where you gain insight and energy for your path moving forward. It is where you reconnect, recharge, listen and share, and nurture relationship, old and new. It is where you welcome newcomers, where you baptize, where you share in the bread and the wine at Jesus’ table. It is from here you are sent out into the world as disciples of Jesus.

When I think of this congregation, I know that you are loyal, dedicated, and fun-loving. You have a long history in the community. Your music tradition has always been held high. You can be formal, and protective. But you are also warm and welcoming.

It is hard to say goodbye without seeing any of you. This live streamed worship service is helping us to say our good-byes as best as we can. What a strange time you and I are in. Today in this sanctuary, when Nikki presses ‘End’ on the live-streaming button, it will feel like the final episode of Friends because we’ve been together for over a year as a production team.

The friendships I have made and that have deepened along the way will be always in my heart. I am a far better preacher because you gave me the time and place to do my doctoral work for my Doctor of Ministry in Preaching, and I will be eternally thankful to you for granting me this opportunity. I hope that my ministry has helped Stouffville United to explore the world outside its four walls. I hope that what I have been able to add will be a stepping stone for your next minister.

This church has been my home for many years. It’s a bit of a mystery as to how and when ministers feel the prompting of the Spirit to look up from their ministry and out into the world to see where God might be calling them. It’s as if God is saying, ‘You’ve been what you needed to be. You’ve learned what you needed to learn. You have cared for your flock in the time given to you, and now it will be another shepherd who will move them into their next chapter. This is not your work, but the work of another.’

I deeply believe this. I leave Stouffville United, deeply enriched by your love and support. I will carry you in my heart, always.

As a blessing, I leave you with a version of the Beatitudes –for you, the Congregation of Stouffville United Church.

Blessed are the poor in spirit
for they will be comforted by a faithful pastoral care team.

Blessed are those who mourn
for they will be surrounded by the love of this church family.

Blessed are those who are humble
for they will keep this church anchored in love.

Blessed are those who thirst and hunger for righteousness
for they will be the ones to lead you to the work of reconciliation with indigenous communities,
to be advocates for the homeless, to denounce racism in all its forms, to stand against
Islamophobia.

Blessed are the pure in heart,
the children and youth of this congregation, for they are the promise and the joy in our midst.

Blessed are the peace makers
For they will soothe rifts and grievances amongst the people.

Stouffville United Church, dear church,
you have all these gifts and more.
And you have the wisdom to know how and when to use them.

Be open to the leading of the Spirit.
Keep the presence of Christ in your center.
And may the love of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, rest, remain, and abide with
each of you, this day and always. Amen.