

Charge to the Congregation

Friends in Christ,

There are few words that can express my excitement for this celebration of installation. This day is full of hope for the future. You have discerned in *(name)* the gifts of preaching and teaching and have called him to serve among and with you. In the Congregational tradition, it is the body of Christ – all of you together – that blesses this installation to ministry. No bishop examines or consecrates this time. It is the spirit of God, through the witnessing congregation that declares the joyful discernment and call of _____ as your minister. Your presence here today is a vital expression of our faith.

But after this sacred celebration ends, then what? This day is not just about *(name)*, it is about all of you and how you will partner with *(name)* to do God's work.

No successful, transformative, healthy ministry is ever a one-person show. If church and pastor are to form a partnership that is strong and enduring you must honor each other as Christ has already honored you. You are all in this together. Given this, I charge you as God's gathered people at _____ Congregational Church, with these things.

First, as your years with *(name)* unfold, expect to change. That is because the Spirit still broods over us, Christ still walks among us and God still calls us. As your relationship unfolds, time will continue to work changes because all authentic

ministry changes us. Expect to be comforted by this as your minister establishes bonds of affection with you, but also challenged and confronted as well.

Second, remember that you are all called together as the body of Christ for God's great purposes. (*Name*) is not a proxy for your work. God doesn't need another fan club. God needs workers in the vineyard. Paul reminds us in Ephesians, there is one body and one Spirit and each of us was given Christian gifts, . . . some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teacher, not for personal glorification but so the saints would be equipped for the work of ministry for the building up of the body of Christ. (Eph. 4) This world, yea, this part of the world needs to know God's love and grace through *each of you*. This is a partnership of people and pastor on behalf of a mighty and merciful God. You are embarking on holy work.

Third, honor _____'s ministry. While this is a partnership, there is also a peculiar setting apart that happens when you grant a minister the privilege of your pulpit and he commits to this ministry before a trusting, yearning congregation. Ministry can be lonely and often there is little to go on to know if you are making a difference. A pastor is more likely to hear the vocal complainers than the quiet supporters, and is under enormous pressure to wade into conflict with wisdom beyond human capability when it gets personal. So honor _____'s ministry. Pray for him. Contact him – notes, texts, phone calls, however – contact him with words of encouragement. Thank him for being a preacher, pastor and prophet in your midst. And honor him by challenging him, asking for clarification, sharing your

viewpoint. Be full, and real and honest in your support.

The apostle Paul frequently began his letters with wonderful words of thanksgiving, as here in his letter to the Philippians: “I thank my God every time I remember you” - not just occasionally, but every time – “constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you,” – constantly and for everyone – “because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now.” Paul goes on to say, “I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God’s grace with me...” (Phil. 1:3-7).

Indeed, today affirms once again that *all* of you are in God’s grace and are partners in the sharing of the gospel. With joy, thanksgiving and prayer, God’s good work will be manifest among you, if you give thanks for each other, honor each other, and remember that God has called you to this time and place for a reason. May you perceive this with the excitement and hope that only the Spirit can give and may your years together be marked with great faithfulness. Bless you all.