

Pastor's Report to Session
Kent Winters-Hazelton
August 17, 2022

As the time of my service to Highland comes to a close, I wish to thank each of you, and those who have served on this body for the past 24 months, for your service to Christ, to this congregation, and to each other. During this time, you have faced some unprecedented issues thoughtfully and faithfully. The path forward was not always clear but together, you took the steps necessary to lead this community of faith. In that work, you have also learned to talk with one another about significant issues, some of which have been divisive. You have honored your vows as Elders in the Presbyterian Church. You have served the people of Highland well, and have been good colleagues in ministry to your pastors.

The work continues. As I have looked out over the congregation over the past several months, and in conversations with members and friends, I have seen some very encouraging signs of reconciliation and renewal. There are, however, others within the community who have not reached that point, and may not for some time, or may not find their place within Highland again. Part of your role as Elders is to keep the connection open, to listen to their concerns but also to acknowledge the reality of what had been taking place at Highland, and how things are now different.

One of those realities is the disruption in the relationship between Highland and the Commission on Ministry of the presbytery. In my report to the COM, I will be making two recommendations (both of which I have shared with Bill Williamson and Joel Weibel). The first is that a written covenant be prepared between the session and the COM, specifying the role of the visitation team going forward with this body. Second, that there be a mediated conversation between COM leadership and the personnel committee of Highland, helping the parties really listen to one another and work toward restoration of the relationship, with is important to the ongoing ministries of both.

I want to express my deep gratitude and appreciation to my colleagues and my friends. Megan, Vini and Rob have been tremendous gifts to me, without whom my work with you would not have been possible let alone productive. They have been wise and thoughtful as we have talked through some of the complexities that we encountered along the way. Others who serve the congregation in staff positions have been important to the mission of Highland.

As Highland begins a new phase of the transition, I am pleased to report that Nolan and I have spent more than 10 years over the past two weeks – most of it one-on-one – as he prepares to serve this congregation.

We are happy to report that Brian Allred has agreed to serve as the Interim Organist.

We are also pleased to hear that Becky Slagle has agreed to serve as the moderator of the youth ministry committee.

In addition to the usual staff and committee meetings, I made two hospital visits, met separately with Bill Williamson and Joel Weible, held supervisory meetings with Vini, Rob, Melissa, and Clyde, and had 16 pastoral contacts/visits.