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August 16,

2026

Dear Saints in Christ,

Recently, I received a very unexpected phone call from a member of the call committee at Concordia University Nebraska. He informed me that they were interested in extending a call to me to serve as Assistant Professor of Theology. To say that this was a surprise was an understatement, especially considering that I do not yet have my PhD.

Two weeks is a short turnaround to consider a call, but because of the timing of their call process and the beginning of the fall semester, they requested to hear by today my decision regarding the call. I have taken this time to speak with my family, to visit campus, and, most importantly, to pray for God's wisdom, discernment, and direction. I know that many of you have been praying earnestly for me and our family, for which I am extremely grateful. Over the course of these weeks, God seems to have answered our prayers for wisdom. It is with a full and heavy heart that I will be accepting the call to serve as Assistant Professor of Theology at Concordia University Nebraska.

It will be tempting to think that I am taking this call because we did not want to be at Immanuel, that this is somehow a "step up" from serving in the parish, or because there was some reason here for us to leave. But, none of that is true. This has been an extremely difficult decision. This is not a call to a different congregation, but into a different type of work all together. Yet, this is not a 'step up' or something 'better.' We love Immanuel. We love the parsonage. We love the Ministry. We love every one of you here. Immanuel was never a stop before moving somewhere allegedly 'better' or a steppingstone to something else. It is a call to serve, a home, a congregation of supportive people. In other words, I can scarcely imagine a better call to answer.

Though the semester begins soon at Concordia, my final days of service to you will not come until October. This move will be hard for us, and I know it will be hard for all of you. Satan will be working hard to make many of you think that Immanuel will be vulnerable, even abandoned. But, to Satan's face, you can speak the certainty of what God has spoken to his Church for 2,000 years. God is with you in Christ through his Holy Spirit. The Church will continue to be the Church, just as it always has. You will all continue to gather around God's holy Word. You will continue to receive his promises of forgiveness, life, and salvation given to you in his holy Sacraments. You will continue to come together to sing his praises and to bless him by giving thanks for

his steadfast love and mercy. You will find a pastor to fill this pulpit. Christ says, *I am with you always, even unto the end of the age* (Matthew 28:20).

As we begin the transition, I and the leadership will be working with Pastor Burns, our Circuit Visitor, to arrange for a vacancy pastor to serve until the next call can be extended. I can say without hesitation that it is my honor and my pleasure to have served all of you as your pastor these eight and a half years. We have been through much together, from the joys of God's saving love to the depths of pandemic and despair. But, the Church is not about me, just as it is not about you. It is the Body of Christ. Jesus Christ is Lord of the Church, just as he is Lord over death. I can tell you confidently that our Lord will provide you with a faithful man of his choosing to lead you and proclaim God's unceasing love in Christ, who was crucified for our sins, raised for our justification, and who will return in glory to raise you from the dead and restore you to life.

In the coming weeks, please continue to keep me and my family in your prayers, even as I pledge to do the same for all of you. This will be a difficult transition for all of us. But, with God leading, we cannot help but to find solace in his grace.

Yours Always in Christ,

Rev. Mark R. Squire, Pastor

*yester*DAY*Today*forever

Hebrews 13:8