FROM THE PASTOR’S STUDY,

I came back to United Church serving as your pastor beginning with Easter of this year, following the death of Johanna, my wife and partner of 49 years, I realized that there was the need for a break from the regular ministry to aid in the healing process. Your ministry to me during this time was greatly appreciated. As the months passed I began to feel that I simply had too much time on my hands. In the early part of this year, I offered my services to the Executive Board of the congregation which it graciously accepted.

There were several additional reasons why it seemed best to return to United Church. First, early on I made the decision not to make any radical decisions such as moving near one of my two sons either in Burlington, Vermont or Raleigh, North Carolina. An additional choice was to move back to my home state of Pennsylvania. As a pastor of 46 years, I have always counseled parishioners when they have lost a spouse not to make any radical decisions such as a physical move for a couple of years.

It was now time to heed the advice for myself. Second, over the years I have served on Church and Ministry Conference Boards and Association Committees and know that it often takes a long time for vacant churches to secure permanent pastoral leadership. This problem is particularly acute for small churches in Vermont given the shortage of pastors. As such, I tend to see myself as your interim pastor to allow the congregation a time for self-evaluation in preparation for seeking new leadership in the future.

Third, since coming to Vermont in 1990 and teaching at the College of St. Joseph, my ministry in Killington, Shrewsbury, and United Church has been what used to be referred to as a “tent-making” ministry or part-time ministry. I particularly enjoy leading the service on a Sunday morning and visiting members and friends of the church at the hospital and in the home.

Finally, there is also the opportunity in retirement for continued teaching, although in a different form. For the past three years, I have served as a Tour Guide at the President Calvin Coolidge State Historic Site, Plymouth Notch, Vermont. One of my greatest loves is to share the story of Coolidge and the Twenties with visitors from the United States and around the world.

The other staff has been quite helpful achieving our goals for the worship experience and congregational life. Sandra Russo, the church secretary, does a professional job in preparation of the church bulletins, organizing the church office, and keeping the pastor up to date on matters relating to the congregation. It has been a pleasure to work with Terry DeYoung, our new organist. Her musical talents have greatly enhanced our services of worship. One can sense a revival of spirit in the congregational singing. Her renditions for the preludes and the benediction responses have received the praises of all.

As we begin a new fiscal year, I want to encourage the congregation to complete a church profile. You are fortunate to have Bob Kottkamp as one who will lead you in this needed process. He brings to the task expertise from both his experience in the wider church and educational realm. I first came to United Church as your interim pastor nearly 17 years ago. With the joint agreement of the Vermont Conference and the Executive Committee of the congregation, I was called to be your pastor. A church profile was not done at that time. All congregations need to do this process periodically especially in times of change to evaluate current strengths and weakness, what we want to be, and what is our mission for the future as we seek to serve our Lord Jesus Christ in the world in which we live.

I close with some words of wisdom from an immigrant who came to the United States in very difficult times.

*“Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow.*

*The important thing is not to stop questioning”*

*- Albert Einstein*

Yours in the faith,

The Reverend Dr. Donald E. Harpster

October 31, 2018