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I have been putting off writing this. It is my last official scheduled communication with the ABCCR family I have loved and served for so many years, and I'm not sure what I want to say. I feel immense gratitude for the privilege of serving as your ABCCR Executive Minister for these past 10 years. I have never felt worthy of this honor but am grateful nonetheless. During the search process 11 years ago, my repeated prayer was that God would lead the search committee to the right person, to the person of God's choosing. When the call was extended to me, my prayer changed — that I might be the right person and that God would give me wisdom and grace to serve in the ways of God's choosing.

If any of us could see into the future, we might be amazed at the places God sends and the ways God chooses to use us. So often, at the time, we may question whether or not God truly knows what God is doing. It is only in looking back that we get enough of a glimpse of Divine Purpose to say, "Thank you, Jesus. Forgive me for not trusting You more." And so I have sought to be faithful. There is a paragraph I keep on my desk that only I can see. It has been a constant reminder for many years. I don't remember where I got it or who said it, but it has informed my approach to God's calling on my life:

*Ministry is giving when you feel like keeping,
praying for others when you need to be prayed for,
feeding others when your own soul is hungry,
living truth before people even when you can't see results,
hurting with other people even when your own hurt can't be spoken,
keeping your word even when it is not convenient,
it is being faithful when your flesh wants to run away.*

A number of years ago, during a particularly difficult time in my life, I came across a statement by Ivy Baker Priest that has been immensely helpful: "The world is round, and the place which may seem like the end may also be only the beginning." And so in ministry, as in life, there have been a number of new beginnings. I suspect the same is true for many of you.

I had the joy and privilege of participating in two ordinations last Sunday. When I presented the ordination certificate at the first one, I commented that there is no power in that piece of paper. The power of God's call, the power of our ordination, is from God. To you who have been called and set apart for the ministry of the gospel, God has empowered and equipped you for something remarkable, something we cannot even imagine and something none of us can do in our own strength. If there is a parting message I should leave, it is the reminder to remain faithful to your calling, be wholly dependent upon Jesus for your strength and wisdom, be diligent in your study and in your prayer, maintain clear boundaries in your care of self and others, serve with humility and always remember that ministry is never a solo act. Always go with others. Always maintain connections. Always stay plugged into the Family. The writer of Proverbs offers this charge: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil."

My words of thanks to God and to the people of the Central Region for 25 years of pastoral ministry and 18 years of regional ministry are wholly inadequate for the gratitude that wells up in my heart and soul. I have been given incredible opportunities for service; I have been blessed to work with some of the most dedicated and gifted of all God's people; I have found friendships that go deeper into my soul than I could have imagined. You have honored me and blessed me; loved me and encouraged me; chastised me and forgiven me; and you have nourished my life with the love of Christ and the fellowship of the Saints. Thank you and thanks be to God.

So my parting words, Blessings always & forever.