

The Road Less Traveled – June 3, 2016

My house is a flurry of activity these days. It usually is around the end of school, but this year is even more so. Our younger son, Connor, is graduating from high school. So in addition to the normal end-of-year activity, we also are juggling a baccalaureate, Senior Breakfast, a graduation party, not to mention the graduation ceremony itself, preparations for which will begin almost as soon as church lets out on Sunday. Throw in the fact that Connor flies out in the wee hours of Monday morning for his graduation present – a week of sailing off the Florida Keys – and I leave almost as early to join our church's Annual Conference already in progress, the fact that summer is here almost gets lost in the process.

But as we approach Connor's graduation ceremony on Sunday I can't help but think back to my own high school graduation. It seemed that the watchword of the day was commencement. We were reminded that the ceremony that would mark our successful completion of high school was called a commencement. And that while we were celebrating the end of a journey, the ceremony itself marked the beginning of a new one. That's what commencement means, we were reminded, a beginning. Celebrating an accomplishment, a completion, to be sure. But mostly celebrating the journey that is still to come.

Interestingly, that's where we are as a church, I think. Ending one journey and set to begin a new one, one that will guide us into the future. This fall we will welcome Dr. Eric McKinney to help us start down that path. Eric is a longtime friend and mentor to me. After a long and distinguished career in parish ministry – including a stint as District Superintendent – Eric joined the Texas Methodist Foundation, where he helps churches discern where God is calling them and helps them develop the strategic plans to answer that call. I am delighted that Eric has agreed to begin that process with Aledo UMC.

This fall Eric will begin guiding us through a series of holy conversations designed to help us as a church discern where God is leading us. Eric's approach differs from others. He is not a consultant who will come in from the outside, evaluate our church, and then tell us what we need to do. Instead he will guide us to discern as a unique community of faith where and who God is calling us to be as we move into the future. Together we will wrestle with those questions, and together we will develop the plans to move into God's future.

This is a process that will involve the entire congregation, and it will be imperative that we all take part in it. Eric will be here during the Sunday school hour on Sunday, June 12, to begin sharing what this period of discernment will look like and to answer any questions you may have. We are inviting all Sunday school classes to come and share in this time, and I hope we pack the Sanctuary.

I am excited about this process, and I hope you are, too. The past couple of years have been a time of healing and restoration, and together we have come through it and are stronger because of the journey. And we are ready to turn our attention to the future. God has big plans for Aledo UMC, and I am anxious to begin exploring just what that future looks like.

That's the nature of commencement.

See you Sunday.