

Greetings in Christ,

Hello. My name is John Porter. I am excited to join you on August 16<sup>th</sup> as your Interim Senior Pastor. Major transitions can disrupt our lives. Disruption can be both disorienting and exciting. There is no right way to navigate these transitions, but there are best practices for charting a healthy path into the future. I have been called and equipped to coach congregations in these best practices during pastoral transitions. Since 2008, I have served exclusively in positions of transitional pastoral leadership. In 14 years of transitional ministry in 8 different congregations, I have learned that trying to formulate a standard answer to how the church should respond to transitions is as futile as trying to put a box around the God that calls it into existence. I love dynamic and engaging worship of many forms and look forward to experiencing God's presence through worship with you. I am naturally curious and enjoy discovering how things work. I like to process information through conversations with others. I hope that each of you will be open to some fruitful conversation about what God is doing in your life and in this community.

My life outside of the institutional church is enriched by God's creation and creative spirit. I love movies, spending time outdoors, and making things both in the kitchen and in my workshop. I have been married to Heather for 28 years. We have two sons, Kirk and Tim, living in Pittsburgh. Heather teaches history at Butler Senior High School. Kirk is an engineer working in research, design, and product development. Tim is entering his last semester of study and will graduate from the University of Pittsburgh in December with his degree in Mechanical Engineering. The support of my family is the most significant way that God cares for and sustains my heart for ministry. As I have moved from one congregation to the next, I have respected their need for an independent and consistent spiritual fellowship of their own choosing. Though they have not been active in the congregations I have led through transition, each congregation has been blessed by them. The value I offer in ministry is due in large part to their presence and support in my life.

The transition that the State College Presbyterian Church is stepping into is a common one. But you are entering it during an uncommonly disruptive period of transition for the church. Every faith community is currently experiencing dramatic changes due to circumstances beyond their control. But even this season of change is not too much for God to handle.

Together we will work through a process of discernment and preparation that will culminate in the calling of your next installed Senior Pastor. Because I am called to and specifically trained for transitional ministry I will not be a candidate for that installed position. Though I come to love the congregations I serve, I express that love by preparing a healthy space for the next person who will be called and installed to that position. Leaving when the time comes is also an expression of my love. My parting gift will be a healthy farewell, so you can step into a new partnership for ministry with enthusiasm and joy.

I will be with you each Sunday as we celebrate God's presence and activity in our lives. Each week I will maintain regular office hours at the church. I will be in State College five days a week, returning to be with Heather in Butler for two days, working from home one of those days. When in town I will be on call for pastoral emergencies and will work with the church staff and the Deacons to ensure a consistent level of pastoral care. I will facilitate the work of your congregational leaders as the Moderator of Session. I will provide support and accountability to your talented staff and seek to draw from them their greatest gifts. Together we will seek God's will and discern an authentically faithful path forward. I look forward to meeting and getting to know you in the coming weeks.

At some point, you may need to call on me as your Pastor. I'd rather get to know you before you have need for my pastoral support. I am setting aside a significant amount of time in my first few weeks to spend time visiting with as many of you as possible. You are an important part of this community and connecting with you is my priority. Information about scheduling a visit with me will be available the week before my arrival. When we meet, I look forward to hearing your story and satisfying your curiosity about mine. Please keep both my family and the church in your prayers as we enter this season of change. We will be keeping you in ours.

Yours in Christ,  
Rev. John Porter