

## **Building Bridges for Our Future**

“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8)

“... for I am verily persuaded the Lord hath more truth and light  
yet to break forth from His holy Word”  
*(Farewell Discourse of the Rev. John Robinson)*

### **Introduction: On Being the Church**

To be the church is to be a people on the move. Through the power of the Spirit, God calls the church together, builds up the community, and then sets the community on the path of discipleship which inevitably leads out into the world where the living Christ is already present as the source of love, truth, and life who animates the whole inhabited earth. As a congregational church we want to follow Jesus and the work of the Spirit in loving our neighbors and bearing witness to God’s love in our time.

### **Re-Forming: Discerning God’s Call for Our Future**

During ReForming we sought to uncover answers to the question, “What is God calling us to next?” The results of this process included the articulation of five distinct core values, of which are comprised: 1) Welcome, Beloved; 2) Risk Together the Messy Path of Faith; 3) Wrestle with the Tensions in God’s Word and World; 4) Immerse in Sacred Spaces and Rhythms; and 5) Do Good, for Christ’s Sake. The ordering of the values was deliberate, beginning with “Welcome, Beloved,” and ending with “Do Good, for Christ’s Sake.” ReForming offered the opportunity for the community together to collectively discern its strengths and challenges, and to begin the process of reimagining how our congregation was going to “show up in the world.”

### **Renewed Vision: “Welcome, Beloved” and Building Bridges for Our Future**

With the energy and direction initiated by the ReForming process, and in keeping with the deepest impulses of our Congregational tradition, our congregation has continued the ongoing work of collective reimagining so that we can continue to be effective in our service to

God in our neighborhoods and beyond. As a part of this work, the congregation unanimously called Rev. Jeff Lindsay as our Senior Minister in February of 2020, energized by his vision to join with God who is doing a new thing in our midst through prayer, and missional re-alignment in this next season. In addition to a long history of loving Christ and this community, Jeff has brought with him a set of ministry priorities to invest in our future together with Christ, the community, lay leadership, and staff. Key developments in building this future include: 1) The creation of an alternative worship service; 2) Reconceptualizing Youth and Children's Ministry; 3) Renewed missional community and re-engage more deeply so that we might "Do Good, for Christ's Sake."

### **Biblical Grounding: What Does the Lord Require of You?**

As we think about how to build bridges out into the world, inhabiting our core value of "Welcome, Beloved," Micah 6:8 represents a helpful text for thinking about a way forward grounded in Scripture. "God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" This passage appears in a section where the prophet Micah is asking the question, "What does proper worship of God actually look like?" God's answer comes in the succinct statement that we are called to seek justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God. What might these three aspects have to say about our Core Value of "Welcome, Beloved" in light of the question of name change?

### **Why We Chose the Name "Colonial"**

With roots going back to 1902, Colonial Church was founded in 1946 in the Country Club district of Edina. The descriptor "Colonial" is, in the context of the United States, above all associated with the early settler period, generally dated from the mid-sixteenth century up to the founding of the Republic in 1789. There are two significant factors that the name was meant to convey when first chosen. 1) To connect the church to the Puritan and Pilgrim traditions from which the Congregational tradition springs; 2) The desire to reaffirm many of the best aspects of the American democratic tradition would have been palpable in 1946 when our church was

founded. Our congregation has a longstanding history not only of celebrating its religious heritage, but also some of the key aspects of the American democratic tradition.

### **Why Might “Colonial” Cause Concern Now?**

The meanings and associations of words or descriptors can sometimes shift over time. And that is certainly the case with the word “colonial.” Notwithstanding the initial desires of the congregation back in 1946, “colonial” doesn’t just name a specific historical era, nor does it speak only about the Puritan migration or later evolution of the American democratic republic. It has, rather, especially come to be associated with the the historical and political-economic processes and events of exploration, exploitation, dispossession, enslavement, oppression, and eventually dependency which occurred as European powers encountered other peoples and lands from the 15<sup>th</sup> up into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when decolonization began. Furthermore, the association of colonialism with these historical events of exploitation and abuse is not just a matter of academic debate—the average person in our time and context often makes similar connections.

**I. Colonialism as a Historical Reality:** Overall there are three significant processes/systems with which colonialism has come to be connected: 1) the genocide of native peoples and dispossession of their land; 2) the creation of the modern slave system and the construction of racial hierarchy to justify it; and 3) the engagement with cultures, peoples and lands in Africa and Asia which have resulted in an asymmetrical relationship of dependency. For a rigorous examination of those three systems, we encourage you to read the full position paper, but suffice it to say that here that these historical realities have come to shape the popular imagination for understanding the word “Colonial” today.

### **II. Colonialism in the Popular Imagination**

The following quotes come from individuals who live in the Twin Cities region, but who are either not currently associated with our community, or who have some loose connection. They come from both our white neighbors and neighbors of color and are of varied ages and

spiritual persuasions, indicative of a broader perception of the name “Colonial.” Their responses were given to the question, “What do you think of when you hear ‘Colonial’?”

- "I think of colonization. I think of colonial rule which is power rooted in controlling and taking....dehumanizing..." (Genevieve, 25)
- "A country is under the control of another" (Richard, 63)
- "I think of a bunch of white colonists, likely carting slaves, with an out of date world view. Colonialism at its core assumes superiority of world view. It assumes there's a lesser culture or human who must be guided by smarter, most likely white, rulers"- (Michael, 29)
- “The word has changed meaning over the past few decades. To ‘colonize’ means to wipe out what is there before. In 2020, it comes across as outdated and arrogant. It sounds culturally tone deaf.” (Thomas, 51)
- "I think of someone/something in power exerting their power over someone/something weaker." (Joy, 43)
- "I think of past and continued colonization of indigenous people"- (Julie, 33)
- "When I hear the word colonial I think of colonization and loss of power, land, and culture. I immediately think white people." (Vanessa, 28)
- "Old, conservative, Southern, imperialist" (Todd, 55)
- "When I think of the word 'colonial,' I think of an oppressive system that enslaved millions of people, not just in the US but across the globe, by white Europeans in order to steal land and resources from indigenous people. It still exists today in the US through mass incarceration and other systems." (Anna, 30)
- "It just makes me think of a verrrrry white space that has not even begun to do the decolonizing work that will make the space even remotely safe for my Black self. if anything, it sounds proud of a colonial (aka violent as hell) legacy. So it's a giant nope for me" (Anonymous, 27)

We share these perceptions to raise the question of whether our use of the name “Colonial” impedes our mission to serve our world, to share the gospel of God’s reign with everyone in word and deed, and to be a community that is truly welcoming. Because if our name “Colonial” is not only historically associated with a history which Christians would rightly abhor, and if that descriptor offers a significant stumbling block to people who might otherwise join our community, and if keeping the name is interpreted by many as perpetuating a history with which we would not otherwise want to be associated, then perhaps it is time to consider a different name.

**Keeping in Step with Our Congregationalist Tradition: More Truth to Break Forth**

To consider changing the name of our church at this moment is deeply consonant with the spirit of innovation in the Congregational tradition which has animated our congregation from its inception. Though Congregationalists and the Congregational tradition was certainly entangled in the history of colonialism, some of the loudest voices who protested mistreatment of native peoples, dispossession of lands, slavery, racism, and foreign domination, have come out of Congregationalism.

### **What Will Changing Our Name Enable Us to Do?**

Embarking on this process of communal self-evaluation means to courageously step into the next chapter of the church with trust in God's guidance and love for our neighbors here and now. Many members of our community would acknowledge a heart's desire for our beloved church to grow and this is a critical step in engaging an entirely new demographic of people. It shows our neighbors and surrounding communities that our church is not culturally tone-deaf and is not committed more to the past than the future, rather, we will be intentionally positioning ourselves as a community of faith who hear the needs of people and respond with love, respect and a gospel that can speak to all people.

If nothing else, choosing a new name allows us the opportunity to more authentically embrace who we want to be and to make this clear to those around us, especially those with whom we want to reach with the good news of God's love. Our burning hope and desire is that whatever name we discern God is calling us into, it will be one that is deeply rooted in our Congregational identity, given life through the relationships we have forged over time, and imbued with the impulse to serve our neighbors no matter who or where they are.

### **What Won't Change, Even if We Change Our Name?**

In taking up this invitation to change our name, we want to affirm that what will *not* change is our mission: our commitment to the gospel as we continue to invite others to know Christ, our being a wonderful community of faith who love and value our relationships with one another, and our desire to love and serve all of our neighbors. Our commitments to each other and the strong relationships we have built over time will not change but rather it will build a

bridge so that we can carry the legacy and mission of this community long into the future as we invite others to join us.

### **Costs of Changing our Name**

With any change comes the potential cost of fracturing our congregation and losing community members. We have heard it repeatedly said that what makes our congregation special is not so much the building, the name, or even the ministries, as it is the relationships we have built over many years, and the culture of welcome that we have sought to live into. While we acknowledge that not all members of the church will initially be in favor of such a change, we encourage every person in the congregation to view this process as another opportunity to lean into conversations with one another and embody one of the key components of Congregational culture with the objectives of understanding and learning.

### **Costs of Not Changing our Name**

Our community will have to bear a significant burden as the need to explain why we have kept the name “Colonial”, even after we have deliberated on it, will only grow over time, especially given our stated desire to be a wholeheartedly good neighbor and witness of God’s redemptive love. This burden extends to our ministry partners, some of whom already hold reservations regarding our church’s name, as well as the potential to have new ministry partners, especially among those groups that are actively working for justice in our neighborhoods. Finally, in a similar way that changing our name has the potential of losing members, not changing our name may also result in the loss of current members. This fact, added to the clear disadvantage the name presents for new growth, portends a difficult future for our congregation.

### **Conclusion**

Jesus has long been in the business of building bridges and we believe that we are called to follow this Jesus in being bridge builders of hope, reconciliation, justice, kindness, peace, freedom and love. And as we do this work we are reminded that we are not alone on the Jesus way. We are travelling together with God, with one another, and with potentially many, many

other partners, communities, and individuals. This truth, and the call to be a people who do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with the God of justice and mercy, places before us the solemn task of considering whether a different name for our community would not better communicate our values, open more doors for ministry, and signal to the wider world that we want to be a healing presence in a hurting world.

We pray for God's guidance, wisdom, presence, and energizing love to lead us into the new future which God is preparing for our congregation, our community, and the wider world.