

June 2021

To the Congregation of Kenmore United Methodist Church

Dear Friends:

It is not long until I will be appointed as pastor of Kenmore UMC. There will be lots of "getting to know you" going on for quite a while but let me give you a head start.

I was born in Buffalo, and raised in its suburb of Snyder, close enough to the city line to walk to catch the bus, so we didn't have to pay the suburban fare. Dad was a pipefitter, Mom was a homemaker, making practical use of her training and short experience as a Home Economics teacher. Dad died in 2000; Mom in 2017. I have three siblings, all living, all older: a brother in Cuba, NY, a sister in Snyder, and a brother in San Diego. I graduated from Amherst High School (1975), SUNY at Geneseo (1980) and Colgate Rochester Divinity School/Bexley Hall/ Crozer Theological Seminary (as it was then known) (1988). I spent a semester abroad at the Sorbonne in Paris and at the business school of the Paris Chamber of Commerce. I can still speak French. I worked for a few years as a Paralegal at law firms in Chicago and Rochester. In high school and college, I worked in the kitchens of a bakery, a bar, a diner, and college dining halls.

My wife, the Rev. Dr. Cathy Hall Stengel, is Senior Pastor at Pendleton Center UMC and is also a part-time chaplain at Roswell Park Cancer Center. We have 3 adult children. Our oldest son, Marty, shares a home in Rochester with Jules and several pets. Our daughter, Katie Robertson, lives with husband Jeff in Lake Havasu City, Arizona. Our son, Jordan, is married to Sarah, and they have a son, Charlie. They live in Rocky River, a suburb of Cleveland.

I have been a pastor for 35 years, and a pastor's spouse for 39. Cathy and I served one charge together as co-pastors, but have had separate charges at all the others. I have been a pastor in Limestone (2 years as a student local pastor), Medina (9 years total: 5 years co-pastor, 4 years sole pastor), Marilla (7 years), Macedon Center/ South Perinton (3 years), Fredonia (3 years), one year interim at Corning First and Big Flats churches, and the past ten years at Greece UMC in the Rochester suburbs. I have served as Co-Chair of the Upper NY Conference Board of Ordained Ministry and the Western NY Conference Commission on Archives and History.

My work in ministry began with four college summers (1977-80) as the Work Coordinator for Tyrand Cooperative Ministries, in Mill Creek, West Virginia. At Tyrand, high school and college groups worked in the community on homes and churches doing repairs, and helped with VBS, senior nutrition project, community woodpile, and the Good Samaritan Center food and clothing ministries. I have continued to be involved in missions, building homes and schools in the US, Israel, and Nicaragua. I am certified for the Early Response Team of UMCOR, and have responded to disasters in Biloxi, MS, many places in NY State, and with FEMA in the American territories of Saipan and St. Croix.

I like woodworking, woodcarving, gardening, and enjoy working on cars (when its not too cold or too much of an emergency). I like to have the proper tool to do the job, and yet I can make a pocket knife do many things. The work that pastors do day to day often does not show immediate, tangible, results. Like many pastors, I like to have my leisure activities do it instead. So, I coax plants up out of the soil; I cut straight lines in wood; I fix things that are broken. It gives me the illusion that I am in control of some part of my life.

I like my coffee strong and black. I like nuts by themselves, but I prefer not to have them in cake or cookies. Chewy oatmeal raisin cookies are the best! But I am willing to try new things, and I will eat anything that is put in front of me.

I believe that God loves us and that we are only able to love God and others because God first loved us (1 John 4: 7-12). I believe that people need to know that before they can accept God's judgment and grace. I believe that faith and good works belong together. I receive Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior, but I know that I am called, with all Christians, not to keep it to myself, but to take my personal relationship and make it a public ministry. The public ministry is one of personal piety, stewardship, working for social justice, and caring for all the people God gives us to live with. I believe it matters to God how we act (Matthew 25: 31-46). I believe that God loves us regardless of whether we believe or not, but that God's love calls all to believe, and to love the people that God loves (1 John 4: 19-21). I believe that Christian love is lived out in how we treat other people - people nearby and far away.

This is just a glimpse of who I am. I look forward to getting to know you, and letting you get to know me. There is a lot more to me than can be communicated on paper (or a computer screen!), but I'm sure that we will all learn many things about each other in the days ahead and in the years to come.

In Christ's love,

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(Rev. Matthew H. Stengel)