North Decatur
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
611 Medlock Road, Decatur, Georgia 30033 • 404-636-1429

August 14, 2014

Dear NDPC Community,

It's not often we write you a REAL LETTER. On paper. With a stamp. You know *this must be important.* We think it is.

During the almost 4 years we have been your pastors, we have rejoiced at the spiritual revitalization and growth in our church. Growth has created (wonderful) problems. *How do we stay in relationship with each other when there are so many new members? How do we feel truly connected when we can't all fit in one room for worship or meals?*

Last fall, two church members approached us with an elegant idea: **what if every member of our congregation belonged not only to NDPC but also to a parish—a geographically-based group of families who could meet periodically for worship, friendship, and care?** Every member of NDPC would have a parish; every new member would have a place to belong immediately. We loved the idea. **Today, with the approval of the session, we are introducing you to your new parish. You are invited to meet together with your parish for the first time for lunch after worship on Rally Day, Sunday, September 7th, from 12:15-1pm.**

Your parish is a community of 5-8 families (15-20 people) who live closest to you. After our first meeting in September, parishes will meet quarterly in member's homes. At each parish gathering, there may be a potluck meal or refreshments, worship and prayer, and time to talk about life and faith. Each parish will have flexibility to grow as it chooses. Parishes might choose to meet more often to celebrate anniversaries, retirements, and births in the life of parish members, or for dinners, or for service in their neighborhood. In addition to regular gatherings, parishes provide a reliable ongoing structure for ensuring that *every* member of NDPC has access to pastoral care, prayer, meals, and visitation.

We believe, in time, parishes will answer several questions that our growth has demanded:

- How do new members find an immediate home at NDPC?
- How do we create vital intergenerational spaces?
- How can we help families learn how to worship at home and introduce meaningful faith practices into family life?
- Can we find more spaces in which to share faith stories and sacred conversation?
- How does a church that is getting larger still feel "intimate" and "tight-knit?"

Parishes answer these questions without putting too much strain on staff and without asking an unreasonable time commitment from you, our incredible members.

Your parish roster is attached. We made our best effort to place people in parishes that make geographic sense. However, we know that *you know* where you belong better than we do. When you come to church, in the downstairs lobby you will see a map of every parish. If you are concerned for any reason about the parish in which you have been placed, simply reach out to Rev. Lewicki and we will discuss the best fit for you.

We will be asking for volunteers who are willing to offer leadership for your parish for the first year. We would like our first year's leaders to be ordained elders who are not currently serving on the session. Leadership will involve working with the pastors to convene and organize (but not host) four meetings in 2014-15.

We sincerely hope you will be in worship on Sunday, September 7th for Rally Day. After worship, we will gather for our annual lunch and we will have a table set for your parish to eat together. You can get to know each other, put names and faces together, and begin to share your life stories.

I hope you can hear the excitement we share about the possibility that parishes can lead us all into a deeper and richer faith life. This is something new for our church... and with anything new, it involves risk. We risk changing our church's ecosystem. But the staff and the session believe that God is leading this change toward deeper relationships, more meaningful sharing of our lives, and more mutual support. We are grateful to the Spirit for her guidance on this path.

Grace and peace,

Rev. Elizabeth Wakeman

David and Beth

Parishes at NDPC
A vision for a community of belonging within the wider congregation

What is a "parish?"
A parish is a group of 5-8 families (15-20 people), organized by the proximity of members' homes.

Who is a member of a "parish?"
Every adult and child member of NDPC is part of a parish. Regular visitors who are not members are invited to participate in the life of the parish closest to their home. Whenever new members join the church, they are immediately assigned to an existing parish, which serves as their "welcome committee" and helps them feel at home at NDPC.

What does a parish do?
Parishes meet in member's homes, at minimum, 4 times per year:

1. September (on or near kickoff Sunday)
2. December (beginning of Advent)
3. February (beginning of Lent)
4. June (early summer)

At each parish gathering, there will be a meal or light refreshments, worship and/or prayer, and informal time to talk together.

Each parish has the flexibility to grow and adapt as it chooses. Parishes might choose to meet more often to celebrate special events in the life of parish members (anniversaries, retirements, births), for monthly dinners, or for service to their neighborhood.

In addition to regular meetings, parishes provide a reliable ongoing structure for ensuring that every member of NDPC has access to pastoral care, prayer, meals, and visitation.

Why parishes?
The introduction of parishes at NDPC is a timely, meaningful response to specific concerns raised during our recent season of growth:

- How do new members find an immediate home at NDPC?
- How do we create vital intergenerational spaces?
- How can we help families learn how to worship at home and introduce meaningful faith practices into family life?
- Can we find more spaces in which to share faith stories and sacred conversation?
- How does a church that is getting larger still feel "intimate" and "tight-knit?"

Parishes address each of these goals without putting great strain on the staff and without adding an unreasonable time commitment into the life of our members.

Who leads the parishes?
Parishes are intended to be self-organizing and led by the interests of the members. Initially, ordained elders (non-serving) in each parish will be asked to be organizing leaders.