

TRANSITION

FINAL STEPS

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS
BY DALE

From the beginning of Dale's talk yesterday morning.

It's a very big week for us here at the Stamford Church of Christ. This Saturday, June 3rd, the Pierces arrive, ETA, 2:00 PM, with a U Haul. So come if you can to welcome Brandon and Sierra and Oliver and Elliott, and Sierra's folks, and to help unload their truck. And then in early evening we'll have a POTLUCK COOKOUT in honor of our new minister and his family.

I know they're excited to be coming, but maybe they're also a little nervous. It's a long drive. It's a long ways from Junction, Texas to Stamford, Connecticut (though for us that path is well and lovingly worn). So I hope that we will each do everything we can to set them at ease, to accept them, to encourage them, to empower them, to love them. I want to remind you why ministers thrive in Stamford and sometimes don't in other places. It goes back to something J.G. (he who first blazed the trail from Junction) said a long, long time ago, that: "We hire the ministers we trust, and then we trust them." He said that in the context of our gender studies twenty some years ago, and he meant that elders here might even disagree with their minister, but if the minister is acting in good faith, they will support and defend the minister's right to freely study and teach whatever conscience and integrity leads him (or her) to. But J.G.'s counsel has always had broader application. So we hire the ministers we trust, and then we trust them.

And now I want to talk a bit more at length about this transition. Maybe it's just my perspective. But it's been a very good transition at least until now. We haven't had to go six or nine months without a minister. We've had all the time we needed to plan and to recruit an amazing new minister and his family. And now the big moment comes, and Brandon's ... stuck with my being here! Think about it! Now I believe by the grace of God that Brandon and I have a great relationship, a great spiritual relationship. I eagerly look forward to working with him. But it's one thing to come to a church without a minister that's kind of desperate to have you – that ran through its fill-in speakers months ago. And it's another to come to a church where the old guy's still around, and he preached last Sunday.

And that has some big pluses and it has some big minuses, so there's a reason why here in Stamford at churches like First Congregational and First Presbyterian when a pastor steps down, that pastor's gone – shipped off to retirement in New Hampshire or upstate New York, literally to not be heard from again. The former pastor doesn't come back, not for weddings or funerals or anything. All that seems draconian to me, and I keep thinking mature Christians should be able to do better. But one thing it does do is make plain the role of the new minister. He or she's the Senior Minister. And there's no confusion about that! Well, let's make sure there's no confusion here either. Brandon Pierce under our elders' direction is our Senior Minister. It's like, this Saturday morning, June 3rd, I am; by nightfall Brandon is.

And for some of us that might be hard to keep up with. But it's true. The blessing of a smooth transition should leave no one doubting that a big transition is occurring. This then is the last great challenge in this transition – that everyone treats, honors and appreciates Brandon as the go-to Senior Minister.

I can be your friend. I'm still on staff. I'll still teach. I'll do lots of other things. I may even get to some things I've never before had a chance to do. But don't let that confuse us: Brandon is our Senior Minister. And this can be done without shipping Debbie and me off somewhere. I'm counting on this. I'm really liking life at 47 Riverside Avenue here in Stamford.

O.K., I said all this because maybe it needs to be said, and there's nobody better to say it than me!

WELCOME TO THE PIERCES

From the letter introducing the Pierce family back in December 2016.

Brandon, described as a great dad, is a scholarly type and a deep thinker and superb writer who has the ability to connect to all types of people no matter their background. Likewise, **Sierra** comes to us as an accomplished minister, schoolteacher and dedicated wife and mother. She is lauded for her experience in Adult and Children's Education. This expertise will be extremely valuable. Brandon and Sierra make a great team.

Oliver, just turned 7, has just finished up first grade. Sierra says he loves school and that he's discovered that he likes math a lot. Oliver asks for math worksheets or problems to do at home any chance he gets! Oliver is also an early riser and he serves as the six o'clock family alarm clock every morning.

Elliott is 4, well, 4-and-a-half, but does not let that stop him from keeping up with his brother in almost every way. Elliott loves to listen to music with Brandon, and is very proud that he can write his own name! He is a night owl like his dad. He likes to stay up late and hates getting up in the morning. But he does.

Also with the Pierces will be Sierra's folks, **Richard and Merry McDuff**, who will be staying on for a week or so while Brandon travels June 6th through 9th to Nashville to lead a Christian Scholars Conference session.