

March 16, 2009

Dear Friends in Christ at St Michael's,

It is with great joy and humility that I write to tell you how blessed and deeply honored I am to serve you as your new rector. Melissa and I are looking forward to our life and ministry with you and getting to know each of you and your families. We also look forward to introducing you to our three children, Meghan, 14, Nicholas, 12 and Joshua who is 8. We will be moving to South Bend in the middle of June after they have finished school. My first Sunday at St. Michael's will be June 28th.

I am incredibly grateful to the work of the Search Committee. I especially want to commend them on their very prayerful and intentional discernment process. Indeed, what helped us to hear God's call most clearly was their ability to reflect on the calling process with scripture and their being conscious about God's presence in each meeting. I am also thankful for the time they spent traveling to see Melissa and me and for their open-hearted hospitality. In particular, I am grateful to the Search Committee's chair Dan Pfeifer and to your wardens Tim McLaughlin and Lynne Switalski for their leadership and ministry in shepherding the search and call process successfully.

Over the last few months I have met some wonderful people from St. Michael's. I look forward to meeting all of you and sharing with you in the intimate fellowship we find in Christ. I believe it is in our Christ-like fellowship that true faith is nurtured and the Church of God flourishes.

I have also had the opportunity to listen to several stories about the parish; I look forward to hearing many more. I believe the tapestry of our stories is the backdrop for all our future experiences. Sometimes we are helped by our stories, sometimes we are hindered, but they must be told so that we may move forward with clarity so that our new stories may emerge with continuity, strength and integrity.

In the search process I learned about some of the ministries many of you are involved in at St Michael's, including that unique ministry of raising a family. I look forward to learning more about your hopes and dreams for all the ministries of St Michael's that I may lead and serve you as we discover our best ministries together. I believe in leadership that collaborates and walks beside ministries in order to listen, discern, counsel and, when appropriate, direct. I also believe my own ministry grows from being in relationship with and from receiving feedback from those I serve and minister with.

I am excited to be joining you and eagerly await the faith, fun and future we will share. Until then, please remember this: you are in my prayers every day.

Faithfully yours,

Matthew Cowden