



July 2, 2025

A Note from Pastor Jon

Friends,

This year I celebrate 20 years of serving full time within the United Methodist Church. It has been quite a journey.

About 10 years ago, the United Methodist Church began offering renewal leave to pastors, an opportunity to take a leave every six years in order to prevent burnout and to restore vitality. Beginning July 13, I will be stepping away for my own 12-week season of renewal. After these 20 years in ministry, I'm deeply grateful for this opportunity to renew my body, mind, and soul—and, God willing, prepare for the next 20.

These 12 weeks will begin with a week of decompression alongside my wife—a chance to breathe deeply and be fully present together, without schedules or responsibilities pulling us away.

My personal theme for this leave is ***Reconnecting To Roots***. I'll be traveling with my wife and our youngest children to Virginia, visiting the places of my childhood—spaces they've never seen but that are deeply woven into my story. I'll also spend time in places that shaped and formed my early faith.

While I've grown theologically over the years, and in some cases grown apart from those traditions or mentors, they remain part of my foundation. Even relationships that have changed or faded are still important threads in the tapestry of my life.

This moment also invites reflection on what we've shared and accomplished in these past six years at HUMC. Just as I was getting to know the community, we entered the uncertain and isolating days of COVID. I learned to become an online preacher—week after week delivering messages to an empty sanctuary alongside nine other people helping bring worship to life. And still, we worshiped.

Together, we became a Reconciling Congregation, publicly naming our commitment to the full inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons in the life of the church. We relaunched weekly worship in Warehouse 839, reimagining a space for bold, creative, Spirit-led connection. We've deepened our identity, widened our welcome, and held fast to the sacred work of being love in action.



Renewal leave isn't simply a vacation—it's a time of intentional spiritual work. It's about stepping away from the rhythms of daily ministry so that I can return with fresh perspective, energy, and imagination.

Pastoral life is a gift. I love my call, but it can also be consuming. In this season, I'm hoping to recover not only my energy, but also my sense of *why* I do this work, what grounds me, and where God is inviting me next.

I'll be carrying questions with me: **What practices have sustained me—and which ones have I let go of? What needs to be rekindled? How can I show up more fully for my family and for you, the people I'm called to serve?**

I also hope this season might be a kind of renewal for you as well. What roots do you need to return to? What rhythms bring you closer to God? Where might you find rest and reconnection this summer?

I cannot say enough how grateful I am for where I serve today. My time at Hilliard UMC is the longest I've ever served in one church, and I look forward to *many* more years with you. The relationships here, the ministry we share, the vision we're leaning into together—it's all a gift. **You have loved my**

family so well, encouraged me as a pastor, and challenged me in the best ways.

While I'm away, I hope you'll be patient with Pastor April. I remember what it was like to step into this space while she was away—and you were so patient with me. You helped me find my footing, and I trust you'll do the same for her during these 12 weeks. She's a gifted leader, and you are a beloved community.

Thank you for the grace to take this time. I'll miss you. And I look forward to returning with new energy, a renewed spirit, and deeper roots—for whatever comes next.

With love and deep gratitude,

Pastor Jon



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