

THE PASTOR NOMINATING COMMITTEE
of
THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NEW VERNON
PRESENTS



THE REVEREND DR. RICHARD D. SWEENEY

Senior Pastor/Head of Staff

As of September 1, 2007

The Process

The congregation elected the 9-member Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) in October 2006. In accordance with the polity of the Presbyterian Church USA, the PNC is responsible for recommending *one* candidate to the congregation for its approval.

Throughout our search, the PNC has looked for the candidate who would best serve the *entire* congregation. To that end, we based our evaluation of each candidate on criteria developed from members' input through last year's congregational survey, the Mission Study and the fall 2006 focus groups. Our candidate's characteristics, described within, correspond to these criteria.

During our search, the PNC:

- reviewed more than 100 pastor information forms;
- listened to multiple taped sermons of 15 of those candidates;
- contacted 12 candidates by phone;
- attended 8 worship services and
- had lengthy interviews with our top two candidates.

The Candidate

A pastor for 27 years, the Rev. Dr. Richard D. Sweeney currently is senior pastor and head of a large staff in the 850-member congregation of the Mechanicsburg Presbyterian Church in Pennsylvania.

Rick is a gifted preacher, devoted teacher and caring pastor who also possesses the leadership and administrative skills required and honed in large churches. As importantly, Rick is personable, warm and loving with persons of all ages and stations in life. As he has told the PNC, "People want to know how much you care before they care about how much you know."

Rick's quick wit and wonderful sense of humor, signs of a strong intellect, infuse his sermons and conversation. His preaching is biblically based, engaging and relevant to issues we face as people of faith, individually and corporately. Rick considers himself to be both a theological moderate and a moderator who brings people of differing opinions and positions together in mutual respect so that each might grow in faith. In fact, Rick's first and now completed task in his current position was to rebuild trust among members and staff following difficult years of the previous pastorate. Membership in the Mechanicsburg church has increased during Rick's tenure, as has worship attendance.

Rick is committed to mission and social justice, having worked with his current church to once again make mission a priority there. The 126 people who left church barefoot after one of Rick's summer sermons, which exhorted them to donate their shoes to a homeless shelter, represent just one example of his persuasive powers!

Why Rick Feels Called to New Vernon

With the advent of an “empty nest” after raising seven children, Rick and his wife, Prudy, are free for the first time in many years to look for new opportunities outside a geographically prescribed area. With 12 years of experience in larger congregations, Rick’s recent search to discern God’s will for his life and next ministry was spurred by a strong desire to become involved once again in the life of a smaller church. He is eager to become more involved in hands-on ministry in the tasks of preaching, teaching and providing pastoral care. Both he and Prudy look forward to being an integral part of a loving, intimate faith community, as is easiest in a smaller church.

Beyond that, both the PNC and Rick believe with absolute confidence that God has guided us to one another. Our hearts and our heads tell us that this is the best possible match for the next phase of our life and ministry together.

The Reverend Dr. Richard D. Sweeney

The Reverend Dr. Richard D. Sweeney was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and grew up on that city’s North Side. His father, whose religious faith was the foundation for Rick’s own, was a steelworker; Rick himself worked in the steel mills for several summers while a student.

Rick graduated with a degree in secondary education from Indiana University of Pennsylvania in 1974. He taught middle school history for two years and was involved in an inner-city youth program through his home church before sensing a call to ordained ministry.

Rick has two degrees from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary: a Masters of Divinity (1980) and a Doctor of Ministry (1989). Among other topics, his continuing education has focused on homiletics (preaching), leadership in times of change and adult mourning. He also has taught philosophy at the college level as an adjunct professor.

All of Rick’s pastoral calls have been with Presbyterian churches in Pennsylvania, as follows:

- Pastor, First Presbyterian Church of Crafton Heights, 1979-86. 250 members in Pittsburgh;
- Pastor, First Presbyterian Church of Oil City, 1986-89. 500 members in a small town;
- Interim Pastor, New Wilmington Presbyterian Church, 1989-91. 700 members in a small town;
- Pastor, Elderton Presbyterian Church, 1991-2000. 400 members in a small town; and
- Pastor and Head of Staff, Mechanicsburg Presbyterian Church, 2000 to present. 850 members in a suburban setting outside of Harrisburg, the state capitol.

Rick’s involvement in the Presbyterian Church includes chairing Carlisle Presbytery’s Committee on Preparation for Ministry for the last six years, touring Honduras as a member of a pastor mission/study team and serving as a commissioner to the General Assembly of the PCUSA.

Rick is married to Prudy who is an educator and reading specialist. They have seven children and three grandchildren. Rick and Prudy enjoy movies, wood-working and being Steelers fans.

**PASTOR NOMINATING
COMMITTEE**

Fenton Chaney
Doug Coy, Treasurer
David Dietz
Bret Fischer, Co-Chair
Kerra French, Secretary
Barbara Gill
David Mitchell
Candace Weeks, Co-Chair
Ellen Wraith