

From the Laptop of Rev. Kharma ...

A Final Epistle

To all the faithful in Northern Virginia (and throughout the DC area) who are called to be Saints: Grace and Peace to you in the spirit of Christ and in the name of the God who is the source of life and strength for all.

I do not even know where to begin as I write this final laptop article as your Senior Pastor. However, I do know that you can never go wrong with gratitude, especially when it is as profound and sincere as that which I have for you. It has been my deepest joy to serve with you these past nine years. I was telling a colleague the other day that I feel like I've had a nine-year honeymoon period here. And, that is true! That doesn't mean there haven't been bumps on the road as we have journeyed together, but they have been few and—given the perspective afforded by time and compared with the many more numerous instances of easy travel—now seem insignificant and unworthy of mention. I want to thank you for taking a chance on me so long ago, when I was a recent seminary graduate eager to begin ministry in her first parish setting. I also want to thank you for the graciousness with which you have allowed me to learn and grow into what it means to be a pastor. I have felt constantly supported by so many of you throughout the years, and your encouragement has helped form me into the person I am today, as well as the one I am becoming as I take a new direction in ministry. I cannot imagine a better group of people to work with and learn from than you have been and your impact on my life and ministry will be enduring. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for your good humor, creativity, passion, vision, faithfulness, generosity, compassion, integrity, patience, and true commitment to Spirit, Community, and Action – Inside & “Out”!

Perhaps the most famous epistle-writer (Paul) took the liberty of offering the churches that he had nurtured and for which he had cared so deeply a little advice upon parting. I hope you won't find it presumptuous of me if I do the same. Following are a few suggestions I'd like to make as you move into the future.

1. *Stick around.* Sometimes in situations of change, which are by their very nature a little uncomfortable, people may be tempted to opt out. Don't do that. The best gift that you can give MCC NOVA (and me) is to renew your commitment to the life, health, and future of this congregation and the vital ministries it is doing in the world. Your gifts are needed here more than ever. And, even though things may be a little different than they once were and you may miss some things that have characterized our life together, if you show up and open yourself to the new thing God is doing in this community, I know you will be blessed!
2. *Don't forget to laugh.* As Anne Lamott said, “Laughter is carbonated holiness.” Laughter is healing and regenerative and can put things in our lives into perspective. Don't forget to nurture the joy that has been a hallmark of this community. Tell some

jokes. Find the reverence in irreverence. Take things a little less seriously if they are making you stressful, angry, or stuck. Smile a lot. And, if you should forget any of this, let the children teach you. They have this down.

3. Practice “the fragile art of forgiveness.” Not one of us is or ever has been perfect or immune from making mistakes. Most mistakes can be opportunities for learning and growth anyway. If someone says or does something that offends you, remember first and foremost that there can often be a gap between our Intent and the Impact it has on another. Go and talk with them about how you feel and work for reconciliation. Once you’ve worked it out, leave it in the past. As the Buddhist proverb teaches, “The past is over. Forgiveness means giving up all hope of a better past.” And of course, Jesus told us we have to do this over and over again—perhaps forgiving many different instances of offense, or perhaps trying to forgive one offense 70 x 7 times. Either way, he really meant it. Forgive each other. It is a source of healing and grace.
4. Love one another. This one seems self-explanatory, but it requires diligence, risk, and creativity. You can do it! And, it will make all the difference in the world.
5. Live the questions. The poet Rainer Maria Rilke gave this advice to a young poet, “Be patient towards all that is unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves.” One of the greatest strengths of this community is your core value of elastic theology. One thing this means is that you appreciate your diversity and want to make peace with the ambiguity that exists when you come to different conclusions than others. God is big enough for our unresolved questions, as well as contradiction. As Walt Whitman said, “Do I contradict myself? Very well, I contradict myself. I am large. I contain multitudes.” God is certainly large enough to contain multitudes, and unwavering certainty has been the cause of too much strife and devolution in the world. It’s also true that the space of uncertainty leaves room for faith, in addition to some really thought-provoking and spirit-enriching dialogue.
6. Don’t be afraid to try something new. Too many of us go around so worried that we’re going to make a mistake or appear foolish that we stop taking chances. This is a practice that will rob us of opportunity as well as joy. Take a risk. Do something you’ve never done before even if you don’t know how—you’ll learn, or you won’t. Either way, you’ll have had an adventure. Volunteer to do something that needs to be done—and do it your way. Dance. Perform. Lead. Sing loudly even if you don’t know the notes. You’d be surprised how gracious people can be—and even if they laugh, they’ll be secretly envious of your willingness to try. Remember that the work is God’s and we are simply instruments. Let the Spirit use your gifts!

I guess that’s it for now. Doubtlessly, I’ve missed an important point ... or 812. So, this will be point 7. Give your best and let it be. You won’t get it all right. Something will be left undone. Something could always have been improved upon with more time, more resources, more input from others, etc. So be it. Do your best and move on. *(And if you want to hear more about this one, come to church this Sunday!)*

Once again, thank you for the privilege of serving as your pastor these years. You have been a source of blessing and strength for me and I am both humbled and grateful. I am

already praying with you for the next leader(s) God will call to serve this community. I am certain you will give them the same love and support that you have so faithfully given me, and equally certain it will be received as the great (and unfortunately, too rare) gift that it is. Your future is so bright. God has amazing plans for you. Always know that you are in my prayers; and though you may not be able to see it, be confident that I will remain your most enthusiastic cheerleader as you progress on your journey. I love you deeply.

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. The grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

All my love and gratitude,

A handwritten signature in dark blue ink, reading "Kharma". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letter 'K' being particularly large and stylized.

Kharma R. Amos