

**Service of Installation: Rev. Elizabeth J. “Betsy” Stow  
First Presbyterian Church, Franklin, NC  
Charge to the Minister by Keith Grogg  
February 2, 2025 at 3:00 P.M.**

Sister in Christ, respected colleague, my new neighbor in this presbytery, and a truly good friend from when you were such a total pro and a compassionate helper throughout your time at Columbia Seminary:

It is an honor to be invited to this task, for you and for the inspiring and phenomenal congregation of First Presbyterian Church.

To say that your installation occurs at an interesting time would be the understatement of the year—not only for these strange times in world history and particularly U.S. history, but for all of us everyday people here in Western North Carolina who have spent the last decade reeling from one unprecedented crisis to another.

Betsy, like Esther in the Biblical book that bears her name, it was for just such a time as this that God has called you to be the pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Franklin, North Carolina.

I am happy to tell you that your ministry and your pastoral identity will always continue to grow, and your insightful mind for God and heart for ministry will continually evolve and develop,

**but you do not need to be anybody other than exactly who you are.**

You are already the specific person whom God called into ministry and whom the Spirit has appointed to this special congregation for this specific time.

I can tell you what you already know: that for all pastors, our task involves comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable. This church seems ready and grateful to be supporting you in giving them the loving and mature leadership they deserve.

And by “mature,” I mean that sometimes we all—I mean all church people and all people—sometimes we *think* we want candy for dinner, and cake for dessert.

And sometimes the Holy Spirit will convict your heart with not the candy cane of a message that everybody *thinks* they want. Sometimes we all have to eat our vegetables and take our medicine.

In Christendom right now there are some who want to feel justified for their appallingly inhumane politics, who think that urgent, Biblical, fundamental Christian concepts like mercy and compassion are just woke liberalism;

and there are at least that many on the other side of the room who are more comfortable replacing awestruck language for the ineffable majesty of God with banal platitudes about community.

I was told during preparation for ministry, back in the late Bronze Age, that in practically any church-pastor relationship, a few people are not going to be happy, no matter what you say or do; and some are always going to have you high up on a pedestal, no matter what you say or do.

The trap clergy can fall into, they said, is to end up spending 90% of your professional time and energy pleasing people on either, or both, of those extremes—which ends up leaving you with barely 10% of your time and energy left for the 90% who are just trying to live their lives and do the best they can to follow Jesus and be the People of God.

Betsy, you have a rich interior life, and I hope you will guard the boundaries around that interior life, not ferociously or spitefully, but firmly and graciously.

And so I commend to you whatever spiritual practices will allow you to take some deep pauses—some centering, restful breaths: the kind of prayer life that gets us through the week, the day, the hour, the next meeting, the next conversation.

Betsy, this excellent and faithful congregation is trusting you to be a pastoral presence, to preach the truth, to continually seek knowledge and enlightenment, to lead in your ministry as a spiritual leader, and to provide worship for the nurture of their hungry spirits and aching souls.

And guess what: you can do all of that. And it will be a joy for them to be part of it with you; and I wish *you* a joy, so deep that it does not depend on any momentary happiness for you to *feel* that joy, in living out all of those aspects of ministry with them.

Take your vacation time, and your study leave time. And when they tell you to be thinking about the ways you might like to spend your sabbatical, in or before 2031, take them up on it.

(And, friends here at First Presbyterian, my colleague Tom will offer the charge to the congregation momentarily, so this is not that—but I hope that, if you ever had a pastoral log book or record of days “worked” and days “off,” you will throw it out immediately. It’s ridiculous to count the pastor’s so-called vacation days and study leave hours. You already know that both Betsy and the church operate out of a deep integrity. If she spent 90 minutes on a day off thinking about the next Sunday’s sermon, who writes that down? You know she’s doing the work—and she needs to know that if she needs another hour or another day or another *two* days in order to be a spiritually, mentally, physically and emotionally healthy and productive minister, nobody needs to be inputting the hours and the days or the weeks. Taking the necessary time to care for herself so that she can do the job *is* the job.

Trying to categorize and log the hours and days is a practice that comes from the business and corporate worlds that are the reason people come in here dragging the shreds of our lives.

But anyway, Tom’s got the charge to the congregation, so just do whatever he says.)

Betsy, God called you, specifically, to be here, and to be you.

Servant of God, Sister in Christ, Subject of the Holy Spirit; pastor, preacher, channel of divine music, spiritual leader, worship provider:

We who are called by God into the Ministry of Word and Sacrament through the voice of our congregations are farmers, tilling soil whether it be rich and fruitful, or sandy and unyielding.

We are miners, digging deep, exploring, making educated guesses, and seeing what we can come up with that will do some good in a world in desperate need of the precious gems deep in the rich soil of the Word of God.

We are oceanographers, joyfully acknowledging that for all the data we have collected, the depth of our field of study is unimaginable, and carries within it, in both its minute specifics and its overwhelming grandeur, unfathomable mysteries that hundreds of human lifetimes will still not fully apprehend.

We are astronauts, sent up and out into the dark, eternal, terrifying vastness of the cosmos, charged with bringing back something, anything, to expand the perspective of our earthbound species.

Betsy—Elizabeth—God dreamed you into existence before the beginning of time, and has always known this day would come. And here we are.

Betsy Stow, called by God, empowered by the Holy Spirit, duly installed emissary of the risen Christ: On behalf of the Presbytery of Western North Carolina, I charge you:

to accept God's call, as issued through the discernment of the Pastor Nominating Committee and the voice of this congregation;

to be the pastoral, spiritual leader of First Presbyterian Church of Franklin;

to love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength;

to love your neighbor as yourself—and that means both;

to respect your own boundaries;

to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God;

and to remember that God has brought you here for just such a time as this, and says:

“Do not fear; I have called you by name; you are mine.” §

Keith Grogg  
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