

Pastor

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bubble" of ministers who are retiring. Whatever else the Vietnam era produced it was not ministers.

"It's more difficult to find an interim pastor than one would think," Johnke says, so when he heard about civil war in Cheyenne, Wyo. he responded.

There Presbyterians in "deep levels of conflict" needed two interim pastors and two and one half years to bounce back from a brawl involving departed ministers and warring camps.

Here it should be two years or less before the 350 or so members — Johnke's most diverse congregation yet — welcome their next full-time pastor.

So far so good, but it's been no walk in the park.

"You hit the road running," Johnke says, "and get right to the areas that need attention."

One rung up the hierarchy, his peers and elected laypersons in presbytery are following the progress. Presbyterians wouldn't be Presbyterians without their paperwork, so Johnke files quarterly on the questions at hand:

"The church needs to clarify its mission. What do they feel God is calling them to in the next chapter of its life? It would be nice to be all things to all people, but what is it we want to do exceptionally well?"

"He understands your time is valuable and he wants his time to be valuable to you. He's humorous and easy going, but there's definitely the feeling that time is valuable."

**—Dave Hedgepeth
education director**

What do we feel God is calling us to do that maybe would not get done if we were not here?

"They need to determine the skills they are looking for in the next pastor. Do they want a powerful preacher, a powerful counselor, someone who can raise money ...?"

"The development and training of a leadership pool is critical." Also the church is seeking to "recreate its close bond" with its sister congregation in Preston.

"And there's the nitty gritty involved in addressing areas of conflict and bringing about healing, so there's a sense of unity and a sense of affirmation and acceptance among members."

Conflict resolution is part of the formal education of an interim pastor. Johnke spent 20 days training in San Francisco

Johnke a "tremendous faith in congregations. I figure, hey, I don't have to bring all the pieces to the party, they're already there."

What Johnke brings is a feeling for what he calls "inclusivity."

"He's good at making everyone feel that they really are an important part of decision-making," Hedgepeth says. "No voice is unheard."

It's the same feeling that brought Johnke to the Presbyterians. He had nothing against his mother's Catholic church. Nothing against his father's Lutheran Church. But at age 13 after being driven 13 miles in from the farm, Johnke had the parents leave him off at the Presbyterian Church on the way to their own services.

"Our family was very tolerant," he says. When his parents passed away, they were Presbyterians.

Presbyterian church doors then had been grandly flung wide — women were being ordained and communion given to non-members who accepted Jesus. "It was an exciting time in the life of the church" and darned if the farm boy intending to be veterinarian didn't feel "God leading or calling me towards parish ministry."

That's what happened of course, and Frank and Karen Johnke and their six children have lived happily ever after in Fort Dodge, Iowa, Omaha, Neb. and Bloomington.

The Midwest is not the Mideast, however. Johnke never did get to go on an archeological dig in the Holy Land that he had thought would launch a teaching career.

"One of the gifts God has given me," Johnke says, "is the ability to listen." Hedgepeth seconds that — "He understands your time is valuable and he wants his time to be valuable to you. He's humorous and easy going, but there's definitely the feeling that time is valuable."

The ticking of the clock and can be relaxing, or not. Johnke knows he is at his best in a "non-anxious" mode. He speaks likewise of a church's being less "uptight" and recognizing that it "belongs to Jesus Christ, and that we can let go of some of our anxiety."

"Healthy self-care for me was a difficult thing," he continues. "Learning to step back and trust that God would take care of some things and Frank wouldn't have to take care of them was a big step for me."

"I've discovered in healthy self-care how much I can receive from the folks around me. It's awesome to recognize from the youngest to the oldest members of the congregation there is so much wisdom, so much joy, so much love that others have to extend."

Expressions of this feeling can be heard at the end of services when members ask each other "Can we keep him?" The answer is, God knows.