

Our Dear Congregation, the People of First Baptist Church, Rochester,

In the next several months, Brenda will be undergoing chemotherapy treatments. Likely, the effects of the chemotherapy will become apparent, both in Brenda's appearance and in her energy levels. We ask you neither to be alarmed nor to react with any energy other than the supportive, prayerful energy with which you have so generously shared our path. To the youth group, especially, we invite your questions. Brenda wants to talk with you about your concerns and fears; she wants you to look upon her and see a person of faith dealing faithfully with a significant challenge. As always, she wants you to learn discipleship from her.

Equally, we ask that members of the church make no assumptions about Ken's ability to respond to you pastorally, as a counselor, or as a part of the administrative staff of the church. He will serve you with the same dedication that he has always offered. You have every right, even in the present distracting circumstance, to hold Ken accountable for all of his responsibilities. For the health of the church and the strength of our common life, all of us must carry on with the ministries to which we have committed ourselves. Ken will be honest when he needs to step away from responsibilities; you need to be honest, as well, about your expectations for leadership and service from your pastor.

Together, as pastor and spouse, we believe deeply in the mission of this congregation. We firmly believe it is possible to live with cancer and also to achieve the lofty goals this congregation feels called to achieve. With God's help, we may find our congregation healthier and stronger because of our common walk with Brenda's cancer.

Language matters. Applying words to a challenge or adversity also determines how you will deal with the circumstance. It is often said that people "battle" cancer, or that they "struggle" with disease. These words assume that cancer is a fearsome adversary in a "winner take all" contest. Cancer is certainly real; it is certainly a threat. However, as persons of faith we do not choose to look upon cancer as a militaristic, evil enemy, but as a reality of our lives. It has become an opportunity to witness to our walk with Christ. It is a part of our journey now, a journey of life and of faith. We choose, then, to refer to our encounter with cancer as an "adventure." It will take us to places we'd rather not go, surely, but it will also open us to experiences that will feed our faith, and place us in relationship to people who will inspire and encourage us. Indeed, it already has.

We trust God. We love this congregation. This love and trust is stronger than our fear. We are grateful for our marriage and for our family. This gratitude is greater than any apprehension or anxiety. We pray that this assurance be true for our entire church, and for all others who deal with chronic and threatening disease.

"...if our minds are ruled by the Spirit, we will have life and peace...God raised Jesus to life! God's Spirit now lives in you, and he will raise you to life by his Spirit." (Romans 8:7b, 11, CEV)

We are not alone, and fear does not have the final word. Thanks be to God.

Ken and Brenda Williams
March 9, 2008