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I've been serving as pastor of LoveJoy United Presbyterian Church in the St. Louis area for about three months now. This congregation is a fairly recent merger between two congregations in the area. Beginning with my interviews, I've been thinking of this merger in terms of a marriage. Each of the predecessor congregations had its own identity, values, and history—in many respects quite different ones at that. Fortunately, compatibility is enhanced by a difference in gifts rather than likeness. One community brought a strong sense of social justice and community action, while the other brought a strong youth ministry and a culture of congregational care. One of my more immediate goals is to begin a process in which we will start to articulate the emerging identity of this new community, and live into those values fully and faithfully.

My time at First Pres—it seems like I just left!—has been a tremendous benefit, particularly in the way it exposed me to a range of situations, experiences, and challenges within the context the support of mentors and peers. I am certainly in a new, considerably different context, but many of the situations I am encountering here I first learned to navigate at First Pres. As the only pastor of the congregation (besides several wonderful retired pastors!), I have responsibilities in all areas of the church's life and ministry. Even though First Pres is considerably larger than LoveJoy United, I feel my residency experience helped me live into a much more well-rounded pastoral identity. I'm also so appreciating the colleagues I have now in Angela, Emily, and all of the First Pres staff.