

DEAR CHURCH FAMILY ~

Over the last few months God has been speaking to me about the unique gifts He has given me to shepherd God's church. I've had conversations with trusted leaders in my life who have prayed for me and given biblical counsel. Jen and I have prayed and have opened our hands before the Lord, asking Him to speak. God has been faithful to hear us and answer, providing confirmation through prayer and scripture. Often when God speaks, His timing is so different than ours. This doesn't seem like a good time for a big transition in our lives, but we surrender to God's perfect timing. We have discerned that our season of ministry in Tonasket is coming to an end. Typically, pastoral transitions in the Free Methodist Church take place in June. The timing of our transition is not yet set in stone. The process is complex, as it involves multiple churches and pastors in the midst of their own transitions.

When I was 12 years old I started to have a reoccurring dream. It began to happen soon after I heard God's voice call me into full-time ministry. Over the years, God reminds me of that call through this dream. In it I am still that 12-year-old boy on my knees, hands open, arms raised, and face gazing up at the Lord. Each time I see this picture in my dream I'm saying "Yes" to God's will for my life. Jen and I have always tried to live this way, trusting Him to lead us (Psalm 143:10). This kind of following after God has not always been without trouble, but it has led to God's blessing in our lives and in the lives of many others.

When I first came to Tonasket as a youth pastor from Tacoma 17 years ago, you embraced me as one of your own. We partnered together for the sake of Jesus "to draw in the net of Okanogan County." We began to serve locally and then globally by going on mission trips. In those formative years, you helped me become a better pastor, husband, father, and friend. Several years later when I explained that God was calling my family away to serve Him as missionaries in Malawi, you blessed us to go in the name of Jesus. For seven years you prayed, gave sacrificially, and even sent a team to visit and serve alongside us.

In 2014 God called us back "home." It's not often that a pastor has the opportunity to serve twice at the same church, but I am one of the blessed ones! I have loved serving Jesus with you. We have seen our church grow spiritually and numerically. We have been through a global pandemic together. We have been stressed and stretched to become more like Jesus in the way He so radically loved others.

God's Word tells us that it was "by faith" that when God called Abraham he went. Similarly, we are doing our best to follow the Lord's leading and working with our denominational leadership as we look to the future. Jen and I hope we are able to share more with you in the very near future, and we will as soon as it is appropriate to do so. I want you to know that this decision is not being made because of issues we have faced with COVID, or because of any trouble within the church. We are simply living with open hands before our Lord.

In a season like this, it is natural to have many questions. I want you to know that I am confident in the work of the Lord, our Lead Team, the church, and our Conference Superintendent - in that God will provide exactly what our church needs in this next season of ministry. You can be assured that the Lead Team will keep you updated in the process that lies ahead. They are doing a great job!

*I often say in closing, "Church, I love you!" - I really mean that. My love for this church will never change. I will continue to love you, care for you and preach God's Word to you until we finish our ministry with you here. You will always remain close to our hearts wherever we go. TFMC will continue to grow and be a blessing in the lives of many in the city of Tonasket and abroad as you continue to worship God, love people, and make disciples.*

I love you church,

Pastor Ryan

Dear Church Family,

It's been two generations since there has been a true pastoral search at Tonasket Free Methodist Church. So this is a new process to all of us. The Lead Team has already started the pastoral transition process, and now that Pastor Ryan has shared with the congregation that God has called him and his family elsewhere, we'll be able to keep you updated on how that is proceeding.

The Lead Team includes me, Jill Werner, Sam Godwin, Lara Owsley, Steve McCullough, Fay Aitcheson, Sawyer Werner, our youth pastor Mac Carroll, and our administrator Stephanie Hulse. I'm the "delegate," who was elected by all of you in January and takes the lead in situations like this.

The process involves the Lead Team working with our superintendent Mike Forney, and the conference's Ministerial Appointment Committee, all with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Lead Team has met with Superintendent Michael twice already and discussed what would make a good fit with both this body and our community. Right now we are all in a time of prayer, as well as walking with Ryan in his own transition.

There are a lot of details on how this works that you can access on the church website under the "Pastoral Transition" heading, including some easy-to-read resources that illustrate the process.

There are a couple of things about this process that stand out to me. First, it is collaborative, and a tremendous amount of weight is put on what we as a Lead Team share with the committee that vets the various candidates.

Second, Superintendent Forney reminded us that it's important to the appointments committee (as it is to us) that churches succeed, so this is never treated like a plug-'n'-play process. Pastors are never just sent to churches and left to figure out how to lead in a church or community that they may not be suited for.

Third, Superintendent Forney has lived in Tonasket, knows what life is like here, and feels a personal attachment to this community. That's been very apparent in our conversations with him.

June is usually the month that pastoral transitions take place in the Free Methodist Church. But the emphasis is on finding who God has prepared for this ministry, not meeting a deadline. The priority is finding the person the Holy Spirit leads us to.

There is some information that we can only share once the time is right. These transition processes are happening not only here, but in eight other FMC churches in the Pacific Northwest, and many more around the country. There are other pastors and their families who are ahead and behind us in this process and not all information can be made public right away. When Ryan can share where the Willsons' destination is, we'll share it with you. When we have news about what the next step here will be, we'll tell you.

So, what can you as part of our church family do?

First ... you can pray. Pray that God brings forward the right person for this important position in our body. Pray for wisdom and guidance for the Lead Team, for the Ministerial Appointment Committee, and for those who might be interested in coming to Tonasket.

Second ... keep showing up, keep engaging. Remember, Jesus is the head of the church. What we are called to as a body and as individuals doesn't change. Love God. Love each other. If you are a teacher, teach. If you are a leader, keep leading. If you are an evangelist, evangelize. And on and on. There are things that will change with the leadership of a new pastor, but who we are in Christ does not.

Third ... let's remember that while Ryan's calling here has been to be our pastor, he and Jen, Chisomo, Caleb, Kara and Curtis are a lot more than "the pastor's family." They are all our brothers and sisters, *our family, and they're being called to a different place. So pray for them, walk alongside them, be a support to them over these next few months. This isn't a matter of them wanting to leave; it's of responding to God's call in their lives in faith and obedience, and right now that means not even having all of the answers as to what that will look like.*

Please contact me or other members of the lead team with questions you may have. We will provide updates as we get them!

Thank you for your prayers during this time!

Brent Baker