

# Bellingham Covenant Church

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Dear Bellingham Covenant family,

This letter is to inform you of a decision that I've made to transition from my role as Lead Pastor in our congregation. I shared this decision with our Leadership Team and with our staff on Monday, July 9, and now want to communicate it with you.

I have been so blessed to be a pastor at BCC over the past 16 years. The call to this congregation came at a pivotal time in my ministry life, as God was giving me a new vision as a leader that hopefully would benefit a mid-sized church. *That's what makes this a difficult decision. I love all that has happened over these years to train and release our various staff, interns, Lead Team members, and congregation. This has also been a season of deep personal joy as I've observed our trajectory toward becoming a more mission-focused congregation.*

Over the past few years, I have been praying and reflecting on a variety of factors that would help answer the question, *"When would be the best time for me to step aside from my role as Lead Pastor?"* To give you further context, I need to take you back to 2014. At that time, I introduced the *Vitality Pathway* to our leadership and then our congregation. One of my main motivations in this was that I wanted to do all I could to help build a sustainable, missional DNA for our church that would carry on past my tenure. Over the past 5 years I've been thrilled with our growth in each of the biblical missional markers and am encouraged that we have built a solid framework for future health and focus.

**Here are 3 key factors that have influenced my decision at this time:**

- 1. I've always wanted to finish well at BCC, while I'm still healthy and capable of full engagement as your lead pastor.**
  - *I've never wanted to overstay my effectiveness as a leader, teacher, shepherd, and participant in our church family. I know what is required to lead a church our size and it's becoming more of a physical, emotional, and spiritual challenge for me to do so.*
  - *My 6-week ministry renewal leave last summer was a good barometer for my energy level. I was rested when I re-engaged with the church in September and was energized by our plans for the new school-year schedule. However, by the winter months I began to feel that my physical and emotional energy was waning. I have been dealing with ongoing fatigue for a while and this is a current reality for me.*
- 2. I've always had the goal to mentor and train leaders to help prepare our church for an even brighter future.**
  - *Especially over the past 5 years, I have done my best to invest in our next generation of leaders. These aren't just those under age 40 but include those who are newer to our church of all ages. I have also enjoyed seeing our current staff grow in their areas of passion and giftedness.*
  - *I believe our church is ready for someone with new gifts, energy, and ideas. I know every pastor has a voice for a season and feel that mine is coming to an end. I am certain that God will bring someone who will continue leading on the Vitality Pathway we're on, but with new passion and perspective.*

**3. This is an opportune season in the life of our church for this transition.**

- *I am recommending that I complete my ministry at the end of January 2019. I'm excited to continue in my role through the fall and will be preaching through the book of Ephesians. My desire is to leave the truths of this letter as a reminder of the high calling we have in Christ's church.*
- *This timeline will allow the Lead Team time to develop a prayerful and thoughtful transition plan. This will also give adequate time to prepare a new budget, reflecting the necessary costs for a pastoral search and transition.*
- *This timing will also allow the Lead Team to continue to receive input from the congregation and engage in healthy conversation about the future. The Lead Team has been reviewing the responses from the PULSE 2 assessment and is planning ways to present and discuss this information with you in the fall.*

Despite this major transition in my life, my passion for the gospel and my call as a leader has not changed. *That's why I'm not using the term "retirement"—this is a transition in ministry focus and responsibility for me.* However, I don't know what lies ahead in this regard and I've made no commitments at this time.

Kappy and I are planning to remain in Bellingham for this next season of our lives. I am blessed to have served two very special congregations during our 33 years in Whatcom County. This is a rarity for any pastor and I look forward to growing deeper in long-time friendships and in praying about local ministry opportunities. During my years in this community, I have worked hard to be collaborative with all area churches and ministries that place Christ at the center of their mission. I'm praying that God will continue to use me in this broader tapestry of His Kingdom work.

Lastly, I'm sure you can understand that this has been a difficult and emotional decision for me. *Pastoral ministry has always been a calling for me, not a job. I am not defined by my calling as pastor but need to let you that I have loved being a shepherd in this wonderful flock!* I wish I had the energy that I had even 7 years ago but, at this time, I need to heed my physical, emotional, and leadership limitations.

Most of all, I trust God's timing as I believe I have heard Him release me from this call as your pastor. I also want you to know that I've received counsel and confirmation of this decision through discussion and prayer with Kappy, our conference denominational leaders, and other trusted friends.

I will always cherish this season of my life at Bellingham Covenant. I will have a variety of opportunities in my final months to reflect on this with you, but for now, please know of my deep appreciation for the gift you've given me to be called your pastor and friend.

*"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:12–14)*

*Pastor Paul*