

February 10, 2019

Dear brothers and sisters at Heartland,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am writing this to you to let you know that I am beginning a two-year transition process that will end on December 31, 2020, when I will be stepping down as Senior Pastor of Heartland Community Church.

Why now?

I've been diligently praying over the last year and especially over the past several months that God would show me clearly when it was time to start this transition. I believe God has made it clear that now is the time. God has been so incredibly gracious to me to allow me to get back into doing almost everything I was doing before my cancer.

I have realized, though, that my "new normal" from my cancer and surgeries prevent me from doing all that I want and desire to do as a Senior Pastor. I am having to miss times where I just can't be with you because of physical limitations. I believe that Heartland needs a man who can be a "24/7" pastor.

As I get older, I realize that I don't have the same energy and vision I used to have. I believe Heartland, our session and deacons need a man with much more energy, possibly a new leadership style and a fresh vision of where God would have us go as a church.

Being a pastor is both an incredible joy and a great burden. I have realized that my emotional tank is just about empty. The stress of the pastorate is not good for my emotional or physical health. So God is showing me that I need to find some relief for the daily pressures that accompany being a pastor.

Heartland has grown beyond our small beginnings and I believe we are on the brink of great things. God is doing incredible things already and I can only believe that He will continue to grow us spiritually and numerically as we all become more conformed into the image of Jesus.

The Session has organized a Steering Committee that will help guide all the details of the transition. You will be hearing much more from them in the near future. I am excited to work with you in the next two years in this process for the good of Heartland, my good and to the Glory of God.

Why two years?

Several important factors are the reason for the timeframe.

First, Heartland has been blessed with two gifted associate pastors who are full of energy, ideas, and initiatives. I have had the continuing pleasure of mentoring them and being available to talk about life and ministry. If I was to leave with no transition, the mentoring would cease, the new initiatives of community groups, assimilation, men's ministry, and missions, evangelism, and outreach would have to take a backseat to simply cover the responsibilities that I would be leaving behind. That would be unfair to both of them to take away their opportunity to implement all that they have been working on so diligently over the last year. It's going to take most of 2019 to establish new initiatives.

Secondly, it will give the session an opportunity to do the difficult but necessary work of guiding a transition plan. Statistics say that the pastor who follows a long-tenured pastor has a typical longevity of less than two years. But with a strong and well-planned transition, he could become a new long-tenured Pastor. Our denomination has procedures that need to be followed and meetings that need to take place not only at Heartland but also with Presbytery. The average search can take 1 ½ to 2 years.

Third, it takes time to prepare the congregation for my transition and the arrival of a new man to lead the church. The congregation has the ultimate responsibility to elect both the search team and the new senior pastor. The congregation will give input on what needs, ministries and type of man we are looking for through different meetings, surveys, and conversations. This also takes time.

Fourth, it will give Vic and I an opportunity to prayerfully consider and discern how God might use me here or give me the opportunity to look into other ministries where God may direct. I know God is not done with me yet. It is a question of where that might be and what I might do.

Finally, it may take that long to clean out my office. :-)

There will naturally be grief about this change. This is extremely hard for Vic and I. Heartland is our home. But I want you to know that I am absolutely convinced that this is what God wants and am excited for our future and the future of Heartland. But there will still be tears.

It has been a blessing beyond words to have been the founding pastor, solo pastor, and senior pastor of Heartland Community Church for the past 26 years. I will be eternally grateful to our Father for the incredible opportunities in ministry that I have had with you here.

There will be plenty more to say and many more details to follow, but I felt it important to let you know now so that you can begin thinking, praying, and working towards the future that God has for us as a church. I am including an attachment that answers the question of what should the congregation be doing during this transition.

“Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.” ([Ephesians 3:20-21](#))

I thank you and I love you in Christ,  
George