

February 1, 2024

Hello members and friends of Washington Heights Baptist Church. I have an important question to ask...

WHAT'S NEXT?

Every leader is driven by the question "What's Next?" What does God have next for us to do? Where is He leading? How can we be ready? This is Paul's challenge when he says, "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13-14).

So, "What's Next" for Washington Heights Baptist Church in 2024? I believe it is time to start the process that will guide us to the person God will call as our "next" Lead Pastor. Just to be clear, this is not the time for Wendy and I to depart (not yet). But it is time to start the transition process and I want to share some thoughts on what that will be.

A "WHAT'S NEXT JOURNEY" AT WASHINGTON HEIGHTS.

In 2016, shortly after turning the magical age of 60, I began to ask the question "what's next in pastoral leadership for Washington Heights?" I had the notion that 70 might be a good target age for retirement and began to research the elements of a healthy transition: a transition that will protect the church and prepare the ministry for new leadership. A year later, in 2017, I asked then deacon chairman, John Burkard, who I knew had served on the two previous WHBC pastoral search committees, to join me in studying and preparing a healthy transition plan for our church. In 2019 we asked staff pastor, Justin Hoppe, to join us in developing that transition plan. We read articles and books, talked to key pastors who had managed successful transitions, reviewed our own history for things that worked well – or didn't – and we prayed.

Some common themes emerged. Change is always a challenge. It is important to maintain a strong and stable ministry in a potentially vulnerable time. Prayer is essential. Clear and open communication is required at every step. And patience, lots of patience is needed because a good transition can take more than a year to complete. Finally, a healthy transition is enhanced by a strong, stable, and committed staff. Of course, later in 2019 the Covid pandemic hit and everything else was put on hold as we managed that most unusual and stressful time in all of our lives.

It is now time to start that transition journey at Washington Heights. After looking at many models and transition plans, it was determined that a simple, straightforward timeline with clear communication and stable continuity in ministry, all supported by a strong staff, was the best and most effective transition plan possible. On January 13 & 14, Pastor Hoppe, John Burkard, and I presented a transition proposal at the annual Deacon's retreat. In response, the Deacons have approved a transition plan and appointed a Search Committee to begin our "what's next" pastoral journey .

THE TRANSITION PLAN.

Part One: The Deacons have appointed a Search Committee who will carry out the assignment to find a candidate whom they will present to the Church as our next lead pastor. This Search Committee will remain in regular, open, and transparent communication with the church family. The Search Committee will look to Scripture, listen to the congregation, consult with wise counselors, and seek God's leading in prayer in order to develop a candidate profile that will guide their search. ***The Search Committee will be introduced to our church family this Sunday morning, February 4, in a combined worship service at 10:30. All ABF's will meet this week at 9:00 a.m.***

Part Two: Pastor Kisner will continue as lead pastor, providing stability and continuity in ministry until a candidate has been identified and presented to the church.

Part Three: Our current staff pastors have committed to remain in place through the transition and into the term of a new lead pastor, in order to facilitate a stable and healthy succession.

Part Four: Once a candidate has been called, Pastor Kisner will "pass the baton" to the new lead pastor in a way that is agreed to by both pastors and the church and then Pastor Kisner will step away as the new lead pastor takes up his responsibilities.

WHY NOW?

First, last month I put 68 candles on the birthday cake. Age has its realities 😊
Second, this past year brought significant challenges to our extended family that will require greater personal attention from both Wendy and me. And finally, with Wendy's retirement, there is an opportunity for Wendy and me to spend some time focused on each other and on our family in a way that was not possible until now. To put it simply, the time is right.

SO GRATEFUL!

It is impossible to express how grateful Wendy and I are for the privilege to serve Christ by serving the "forever family" at The Heights! In 28 years, we have seen families grow, missionaries sent, buildings built, lives celebrated, failures restored and souls saved through the partnership in ministry we have at Washington Heights. This is where we lived our lives and served our Lord. And we're not done yet! Thank you for the love, support and joy that has sustained us along the way. And now, together, we will see what God has next.