

September 21, 2022

Dear HLBC Family,

In just a little over a month, at the end of October, I will be 'officially' retiring after nearly 17 years of being your Pastor. Truly, I can't begin to describe the range of emotions Cheryl and I are feeling as we approach this mile-marker in our lives. It has truly been a privilege for us to serve the Lord with you for all these years. Some of the most significant and memorable moments in ministry for us have been here at Harbour Lake. You have been so cooperative in following our leadership. Together we have seen the Lord do many special things in our church and in our hearts. Thank you for all those great moments we will remember for the rest of our lives!

I will be 68 on my birthday in November and while I have never considered age as a deciding factor for retiring from pastoral ministry, and still don't, it simply feels to Sweetie Pie and me like the right time for us to move into a new chapter of our lives. Someone once said: *"I can't expect God to write the next chapter in my life if I don't turn the page."* We are ready for that next chapter.

My decision to retire did not come suddenly. Actually, I am retiring later than I initially planned. I was going to tell you in early 2020 that I was retiring later, in the summer of that year. That, however, was *my* plan and not the Lord's. We knew very definitely, early on, that God was saying stay until the pandemic was over. God has said in **Isaiah 55:8-9**: *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. 9 "For as the heavens are*

higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.

Another verse of scripture I've been encouraged with knowing the day we'll leave you is quickly approaching, is this promise of God from the book of Jeremiah. *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart"* (**Jeremiah 29:11-13**). I hope that verse will encourage all of you as well. God is not done with me and He's not done with Harbour Lake church. He has plans for you. Plans to give *you* hope and a future. There's also a new chapter God is writing for HLBC. You too, must turn the page.

As I prepare to go, there is so much I want to say about the blessing you have been to us, but that would take so, so many pages. However, I want you all to know this. I am so proud of you pulling together during Covid. The pandemic did not and will not be the final chapter for our church. While I grieve immensely that thousands of churches permanently closed their doors during the pandemic, I am grateful that Harbour Lake was not one. Even while we could not meet and only streamed our services for seven months, you stayed faithful to watch online, look after one another, and continue to give your tithes and offerings. God blessed us during the pandemic, and we prospered.

Your Pastor Search Team has been working hard and I believe will be sharing some good news with you soon. They have prayerfully been seeking God's will in searching through resumes, listening to sermons online and zooming with prospective candidates to be your next Pastor. I want you to

know their work is time consuming and meticulous; even frustrating at times. But each of them is dedicated to finding God's man to present to you to prayerfully consider as your new Pastor. Therefore, I implore you to pray for the team. Ask for God's wisdom and discernment to flood their hearts minds.

May we all remember that "discernment is the ability to see things for what they really are and not for what you want them to be. The heart of spiritual discernment is being able to distinguish the voice of the world from the voice of God. Charles Spurgeon said; *"Discernment is not a matter of simply telling the difference between right and wrong; rather it is telling the difference between right and almost right."* David Jeremiah has said: *"This is a time when all of God's people need to keep their eyes and their Bibles wide open. We must ask God for discernment as never before."* Finally, I want to share a few things that you can do to prepare for your new Pastor.

First: Understand and accept, there *will* be changes when the new Pastor arrives. No one likes change for sure. We're always more comfortable with the familiar—the same routine. But let's pray relentlessly for an open mind and willingness to change.

Second: Commit to pray daily for your new Pastor and his family—starting today.

Third: When your new Pastor arrives, send him a warm welcome note or email. Don't make it lengthy and don't list your expectations or personal agenda. Just a brief note of welcome.

Fourth: Embrace the uniqueness of your new Pastor. Resist the temptation to compare him to any previous Pastor. Pastor Barry Howard has said; *“When the Spirit leads a church to a new pastor, the Spirit seldom leads a church or search team to a person just like the previous pastor or the beloved pastor from the church’s history. To compare your new pastor to any other is to disrespect the Spirit’s role in guiding you to your new pastor in the first place.”*

Fifth: Give your new Pastor permission to fail. No Pastor succeeds 100% of the time. Remember, he is an imperfect human just like you. He may sometimes disappoint you as a result. Encourage him during those times and love and support him as well. If we forgive one another as God has forgiven us, all will be well.

Sixth: Speak positively about your Pastor both publicly and privately. *With most pastors, it is easy to find something to criticize, because every minister has weaknesses. “He is too loud.” “He’s too soft-spoken.” “He uses big words I don’t understand.” “He’s not a people person.” However, every pastor has more strengths than weaknesses. A healthy pastoral tenure is nurtured when we magnify around our pastor’s strengths, and then minimize and compensate for our pastor’s weaknesses.*

Seventh & Last: Be prepared to follow your new Pastor. And don’t become a backseat driver. The Kingdom grows and HLBC will grow as you follow your Pastor’s lead and passionately embrace the work with enthusiasm. That makes perfect sense from this standpoint. If you are sure that God has answered your prayer and sent the very man whom *He* assigned to HLBC, why wouldn’t you follow his lead? Trust your Pastor to know the will of God and follow Him in that will. One of the most discouraging, disheartening and disappointing moments a Pastor ever faces, is when he discovers there is a group of people in the congregation who

want *their* way instead of *God's* way. That kind of pride and renegade spirit will destroy any fellowship. Guard against that. Avoid that divisive attitude at all costs.

Well, I hope you will take those suggestions to heart and be the member that every Pastor wants.

Some of you have asked me 'what will you do after you retire.' We believe the Lord is leading me into a singing ministry. I hope to go into churches and sing a concert of songs and give the Gospel to everyone who comes. Please pray that God will open doors for me in that ministry. Of course, I will preach when the opportunity arises. Perhaps an interim in the future. We're just letting God lead us.

If I could say any one or two things to you as I leave; things I hope you remember from our years together, it would be this: *Remember, the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. And the main thing is the great commission—evangelism—sharing the Gospel.*

Also, always love one another, forgive one another, and pray for one another every day.

Until All The Nets Are Full,

Jimmy

Pastor Jimmy Fuller