

Sam's Transition Announcement

June 11th & 12th, 2016

It's hard to put into words how incredibly blessed Cathy and I feel as we look back over the thirty years that, like a vapor, just whooshed away. When we arrived at this church in 1986, we followed a decade of rapid turnover among pastors and staff. Leaders joked with us in those early years that, if we returned from a vacation and resigned to go somewhere else, they would slit our tires! Because we knew the value of staying put, we told those leaders that we would commit to five years by the grace of God. After about ten years, I told the church that we would like to spend the rest of our lives here. Here we are, very aware of the great blessing you are to us, and thankful that we are traveling on this journey together.

That said, there are some things we need to acknowledge. One of them is the ticking of my biological clock, along with the awareness that, just like with Elijah, I KNOW that I am not indispensable. I will be 65 soon and each of the last few years has contained challenges which serve to remind me that the cumulative weight of leadership begins feeling heavier as the years go by.

It is the awareness of my age and our dream for the future of this great church that caused our core leaders to begin talking about our own "Big Deal" a few years ago. I am the one who brought the subject up. I have read extensively about the transition of leadership when a pastor has been in the church for a long time. It is clear that we must begin the process of finding our own "Elisha" while we have time to adequately prepare and train him to take over the lead pastor role here at Stone Ridge.

I brought this subject to our Elders in early 2015. We had talked about it before that, but I sensed that it was time to think and pray about a timetable. In January of this year, we talked about it again. I asked our Elders to pray, after which we came up with a transition timetable that included this announcement to you today. Honestly, we all fell back for more prayer once the seriousness of the subject began to hit us. At one point, the Elders graciously asked if I might want to delay another year. Cathy and I prayed about that idea for a number of weeks, and we concluded that it was better to begin this process this year, rather than wait.

Let me pause here and clarify something to you. This is not my resignation letter. I am not going anywhere right away, although Cathy and I are going to get away for an month-long vacation at the end of this week. We do not have a clear idea of how long this whole process of finding the next pastor and transitioning to his leadership will take. It is safe to say that I will be continuing to lead and

pastor Stone Ridge for another year or two, by God's gracious provision. As this process unfolds, the day will come when we will find our "Elisha" and unveil a plan for him to take over the leadership role.

I have pondered this and listened during some quiet behind-the-scenes conversations with Elders and Staff. There are some questions which, I think, need answers to help you know what to expect as we walk through this transition.

1. Who will the next pastor be? None of us knows for sure, but God knows and we will seek Him constantly until that answer is clear.

2. How will we decide upon the next pastor? Our by-laws are very clear on this: the church must vote to call the pastor. As you can imagine, though, it takes a clear process to help a pretty good-sized church make such a decision. Our elders will lead that process. I will continue to lead the church as normal on other matters, but I have asked our elders to organize and lead the church through the process of finding and calling the next pastor.

3. What will Cathy and I do when the transition is complete? We aren't sure yet. We have been a part of God's work here for three decades and it's not in our hearts to simply walk away. According to our research, it is best in some cases for the outgoing pastor to go away, at least for a while. The final answer to this question will be largely based on what we consider best for the church.

4. During this season of transition, what can the church family do? Pray! Pray for Cathy and me. Pray for the Elders. As other Stone Ridge members are identified as serving in this process, pray for them. Pray for the future pastor and his family. God loves it when His people pray.

Let me close by saying that my heart leaps toward the idea of an "Elisha" — a double-portion pastor taking up the Stone Ridge leadership role. When we bought this land many years ago, our vision was very large. We have been blessed to see many wonderful things happen, but the vision is bigger yet. Nothing would give me greater joy than to see Stone Ridge have some of its greatest years in the decades after I step down. This is God's kingdom, not mine. This is about the thousands of people who live within a ten-mile radius who don't know Jesus and who need to be reached. This is about the ongoing work throughout the Desert Southwest. What joy if God will send us a leader who has the capacity to help us dream bigger and go further than we could have imagined. That's my hope. That's my dream. That's my prayer.