**Thanksgiving to God**

**First Baptist Church, Albemarle**

**November 18, 2018**

Most scholars believe that 1st Thessalonians is among the earliest of Paul’s writings. The letter is addressed to the Gentile Christians of Thessalonica, who had turned from pagan gods to worship the God of Jesus Christ. Paul was especially close to the Christians in the church. 1st Thessalonians is an intimate letter full of love, prayer, thanksgiving and images of a Christian family. His purpose of writing the letter was to encourage them to remain faithful to Christ and to the community of faith under difficult circumstances. He encouraged the community to continue to love one another and to work in strengthening the body of Christ.

These words of Paul reflect my heart for you. I am filled with gratitude. I regretfully tender my resignation as the pastor of this wonderful congregation effective Dec. 25th. Amy and I give thanks to God and to our church family for the last 4+ years. It has been a privilege and honor to walk with you in this journey of faith.

About four months ago, Larry Hovis, the Executive Director of Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina, a mission partner of our church where I have been highly involved over the past four years, came to see me to begin a conversation of becoming the Associate Executive Coordinator of CBFNC, a position that did not exist at the time. As we prayerfully considered what God had in store for CBFNC, I felt a stirring in my heart. Since that day, I have pondered God’s call and the gifts God has given me to serve his kingdom. I have prayerfully sought clarity of God’s voice and certainty of this decision. I believe I have heard his call. This decision was affirmed a few days ago by the Coordinating Council of CBFNC.

My job initially will be two-fold. First, I will serve as “Chief of Staff” for the organization. I will help coordinate the ministries of CBFNC and take on much of the administrative duties of senior leadership in order to free up Larry to be the face of the ministry. I will help ensure the ministry accomplishes its stated goals and initiatives to help strengthen the 300+ churches in the fellowship.

Second, I will have the task of being the initial coordinator of the *Helping Pastors Thrive* program, a $1 million grant received by CBFNC from the Lilly Foundation for their *Thriving in Ministry Initiative*. The grant will fund programs to support young pastors with mentoring from those with more experience; to assist early career pastors in established congregations to navigate some of the unique challenges; and to encourage pastors in their last decade of ministry to finish well.

The work will be challenging, yet it will be exciting to help churches and pastors all across the state. The work of CBFNC is to bring together Baptists across North Carolina for Christ-centered ministry. My prayer is that I can be used to help bring about God’s kingdom throughout our state through the work of CBFNC.

Amy and I will remain in Albemarle through the end of the school year. In the summer, we will relocate to a town somewhere between Winston-Salem and Gray Stone. She will remain as a teacher at Gray Stone. For the health of First Baptist, Amy and I will find our place in another faithful congregation after the Christmas Eve service to not be in the way and to help the church move forward. In the meantime, I will do all I can to best prepare the church for the upcoming transition. However, if the deacons and I decide it would be better for the church to have me step aside earlier, I will do what is best for the congregation.

Though Amy and I are filled with mixed emotions, we give thanks to God for the work he has done in us and through us in our time together. We have strengthened the bond within our body of Christ while having a renewed vigor in loving our community and beyond. We have celebrated the lives of the saints who have gone to be with the Lord and we have welcomed new people into our fellowship, young and old. Together, we have gone on mission to places like Lumberton, Asheville, Puerto Rico and Peru. We have learned to engage our young people well and have prioritized them everywhere. I have seen our experienced leaders pass on leadership to those who are younger, and we have become a teaching church where young people can cut their teeth in ministry in a loving and caring fellowship to better understand God’s call for their lives. We have sacrificed our own financial resources to renovate our buildings, rehabilitate our organ and to have a final place of rest for those who wish to be in our soon-to-be-built Memory Garden and Columbarium. For all of these things and more, we give thanks to our Lord.

I am forever grateful for the way you have allowed me to lead as I have felt the Spirit guide. Thank you for allowing a first-time Senior Pastor to learn on the job. Thank you for allowing me make mistakes along the way while learning from those experiences. Thank you for your patience and kindness you’ve shown to me and Amy. We could not have asked for a better place of ministry than First Baptist of Albemarle with people whom we deeply love. We will always remember fondly of the last four years and give thanks to our God.

I am reminded that God is able to do immeasurably more than we can even imagine. I am mindful of God’s sovereignty and God’s reign over all things. I am thankful for God’s call on my life and for God’s call on the person God is preparing even now to be your next pastor. God is in control. I firmly believe this. Let us continue to place our faith and trust in the one who is able.

It is appropriate for us to share in the Lord’s Supper together today as a reminder of God’s love for us through Jesus and as an assurance of his faithfulness in uncertain times. It is a reminder that we will always be connected to one another because of our love for Jesus and because of Christ’s love for his people. Thanks be to God.