

June 1, 2008

Dear Church Family,

This point in our church history clearly evidences God's favor upon us! Jason is leading and serving us all with grace and wisdom, Randy and Kathy are now here, and my dream of serving together with a pastoral team has been realized. Our relationship together as pastors has been blessed by God. And I'm very thankful to God for answering years of prayers. I have great faith for His future grace and work among us.

Now that God has graciously provided leadership and pastoral care for our future, He has also called me to an extended pastoral ministry within our city as an extension of Covenant of Grace Church. Not only is my ministry being extended far beyond our walls, but there are new ministry opportunities for you as well. A few weeks ago when Jason announced Randy's coming, he told you that I'm not leaving. That's entirely true! Let me assure you that Marcia are here to serve you the best we can, motivated by our love for you individually.

Long before I ever met Jason or Randy, God was stirring my heart toward one day serving as a hospital chaplain. Over the years, hospital ministry, especially to the dying, has been of great significance to me. Having personally experienced four surgeries within a year and a half, and caring for Marcia as she had her four surgeries in the space of one year, we've both become increasingly aware of the needs and concerns of patients and their families.

A hospital chaplain not only ministers to patients, but is also there for family members, and the hospital medical staff. Our daughter, Anne, who has worked as an intensive care nurse for years, has told me how much the chaplains have helped her through many difficult situations. Our son Tim, a doctor, emphasized how important it is to be there for people. During his residency he was called at 3 a.m. to the bedside of a young woman who was dying of cancer. She didn't want to be alone and he held her hand as she died.

Daily, there are opportunities to pray with Christian patients and their family members. Patients who once made a commitment to Christ and have since been in a backslidden state are often very open to the gospel during a medical crisis. And those patients and family members who have never heard the gospel have an opportunity to receive the love and forgiveness of Christ if they so desire.

Lately, I've had an increasing desire to serve in this way. I submitted a resume the last day of March to Summa hospitals and left it in God's hands. At that time there were no openings. But the very hour that Randy and Kathy's van arrived at their new home, I received a call from Summa's head chaplain. A resident chaplain position was open and an interview followed two days later.

I sought the counsel and affirmation of my wife Marcia, my pastor Jason, my co-pastor Randy, Mark Prater, the men on the leadership team, my own physician, Lakshman Negi, Bert Turner, and

our children. All the lights were green. On Monday I met again with the head chaplain. There was another candidate yet to be interviewed, but later that day I was offered the position. Interestingly, the resident salary is the same as I now receive from the church. Now that Jason and Randy are in place, it was possible that I could accept the position, and with Jason and Randy's blessing, I did! It's amazing to me that they wanted the recently recovered old guy!

I'll begin full time tomorrow. As a resident, I will be attending a clinical pastoral education course at Walsh University one day a week with 5 other resident and intern chaplains. I'll receive 9 credits toward a Master of Divinity degree.....and it's for free because I'm a senior citizen! Not only that, but I get free parking and free meals!! And best of all, you will have the opportunity to serve with me as a trained volunteer.

God has been so wonderfully gracious to provide confirmation after confirmation to assure me that this is His will. Marcia and I both sense the same clear call of God that we did when we came to Akron to serve this church in 1996. For 24 years, I've had the wonderful privilege to serve you and many others as a pastor.

I could never have done this without the continual support, prayers, and encouragement of Marcia. She knows that her call remains to serve the women of this congregation, and to greet each of you as you walk through these doors each Sunday. She has always been willing to sacrifice her own desires for the sake of the gospel. In this season, she is willing to sacrifice much of the time that we've been able to spend together to enable me go back to school and be on call at the hospitals. It is my joy to honor her as a loving wife who has always been willing to lay down her own life to serve the Lord and her husband.

I'm confident that God has called us to this new season of ministry, one in which we have opportunity to expand our borders and bear new fruit for His glory. This call is an extension of Covenant of Grace Church. Marcia and I will continue to care for you and are thankful that this new ministry field will not take us away from you.

Please pray for us, and for Jason and Randy and their families, as we all make this transition in serving God!

Jim Walter