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July 14, 2019

Dear First Baptist Family,

This past Monday, July 8th, I shared with the Leadership Council my resignation as Senior Pastor effective August 30, 2019. This past Spring, I began a conversation with the Center for Healthy Churches and after months of conversation, prayer, and discernment, I have accepted a position as the Assistant Director of that organization.

It is almost seven years to the week that my family and I got on a plane and flew to this beautiful city to pursue God's call. Wilmington is an amazing mixture of southern charm, coastal fun, and historic legacy that has been a delight to call home. But of course, what has really made this home for us is being a part of a church filled with such wonderful people and with such a rich heritage of mission and ministry.

I count it a privilege to have served as Senior Pastor to this church. In the months that led up to my accepting a call to serve as Pastor and continuing up until this very moment, I have continually expressed my amazement at the breadth of ministry in which our church is engaged. I had never been a part of a church that was able to literally live out the words of Matthew 25 about feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, welcoming the stranger, and visiting those in prison until our family was invited to be a part of First Baptist. Nor have I been a part of a church that seeks to offer care for its membership in such comprehensive ways.

I'd like to believe that we have built upon that legacy in the past seven years and that the foundation of our church is strong. Much of what I have focused on as pastor was living out the mandate that was given to me when I accepted the call to serve as your pastor. If it is true that to whom much is given, much is required then God has very high expectations of First Baptist, because He has blessed our church immeasurably more than we could ask or imagine. Preserving a legacy is a good thing, but building on it is a **great** thing and my own hopes and prayers for First Baptist (that will carry on long after August 30th) are that our church will relentlessly follow God's call, whatever it requires, not just so First Baptist can continue to be a great church but even more important that we can be part of building God's kingdom.

The task of discerning what that looks like, however, must pass to a different person that God will call in future days to serve as your pastor. There have been wonderful days for me as your pastor where joy was in abundance, and there have also been hard days for me as your pastor when difficulties and challenges were also in abundance. That is all part of what it means to be a minister. ***In the end, however, it is neither the joys nor the challenges that sustain us in ministry, it is the call of God.*** I believe that God called us here seven years ago, and I believe that God is now calling me to a new and different season of ministry with the Center for Healthy Churches.

My work with the Center will focus on helping churches across the country ask and answer what God is calling them to be and do for them to follow God's call. The Center also maintains a partnership with Belmont University and one new and interesting part of my life will be the opportunity to teach aspiring ministers (online) in Belmont's College of Theology and Christian Ministry.

Another aspect of my work with the Center is that my job is portable. With that in mind, Allyson and I have thought long and hard about not only what God is calling us to do, but where He is calling us to be. It probably will not surprise you, but given the stage of life in which both sets of our parents are now entering, and also given the fact that we have not only spent the last seven but really the last fifteen years at a distance from our immediate family, we have decided that moving close to family in Texas is the right choice for us. Of course, that choice hasn't been easy, given the friendships we have made in this place, and if our kids have any say in the matter we'll be vacationing at least annually on Wrightsville Beach.

We will forever be grateful to those of you who have loved us, blessed us, invited us into your homes, and shared your lives with us. Both of our children made professions of faith through the ministry of this church and have made deep friendships that have shaped their lives. And those are just a few of the blessings for which we are most grateful during our years in Wilmington. Please know that we will be praying for you and this church in the days to come and will look forward to the remaining time we have left to share with you before we head west.

First Baptist has been, continues to be, and can be in the future exactly what God wants it to be to further His kingdom. That depends, however, not on the leadership of any one person, but on the power of God revealed in the faithfulness of all His people. ***May that legacy of faithfulness continue for generations to come through each of you!***

Grace and Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt Cook". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Matt Cook
Senior Pastor