

VICTORY

CHURCH

RECONCILED TO GOD AND EACH OTHER

LETTER FROM PASTOR PAUL

March 18, 2021

Dear Victory Church:

On March 7, I shared with you corporately that I accepted a position at The Pennsylvania State University, and that our family will be moving to State College, PA. I will teach in the Counselor Education program and conduct research on the college and career readiness of underrepresented students; the identity development of Black male student athletes; and the empowerment of anti-racist school counselors. Taylor will be teaching non-fiction creative writing part-time in the English department. For the past 10 years, I have served in a faculty role at the University of Virginia, bearing the image of God as best I can in the marketplace, while serving the Charlottesville community in various capacities. For the past 5 years, I have also lived and breathed a vision of seeing people in the city of Charlottesville reconciled to God and to each other through Victory



Church of Charlottesville. The privilege of establishing and pursuing this vision at no cost to you (I Corinthians 9:18) will forever be one of the greatest honors and joys of my life. We embody the Church to our community in ways I'd always envisioned it should be – **together**. We are a team-based, pastor-led church where my eyes-on didn't have to mean hands-on because we built together (Nehemiah 2:18).

Honestly, I almost missed this transition point for our family and church because I was so focused on what I *thought* our plan in Charlottesville would be. No matter the job challenges (e.g., public tenure case) or the hate mail and subsequent security measures my family was advised by local authorities to take, or various health situations we overcame with God's strength, we were committed to serving Victory Church and this community through it all until God compelled us otherwise. Thank God for His loving patience with us, as we resisted the first few nudges from Him to

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prayerfully consider what divine surprises God had for us. When we submitted, we realized that God was clearly present in this transition. This would not just be another job offer that I would leverage to garner more from my current institution, something common in academia. This would be an opportunity for Victory to build on the foundation laid in ways I never could and for our family to heal in the ways we need to heal as well as to put our hands to the plow in another vineyard (Luke 9:62). Just to be clear, this transition is not due to any disqualifying sin or otherwise immoral behavior unbecoming of a pastor. Thank God.

Similar to when we moved to Northern VA in 2016 to prepare to plant Victory Church in 2018, there is supernatural peace, both about our family's move from Charlottesville and the future of Victory Church. Clarity, though, does not preclude the emotions our family experiences at the thought of not being in physical proximity to you. I am both incredibly grateful and sad.

I am grateful because the Lord allowed us – Who are we that He would be mindful of us? (Psalm 8:4) – to steward this vision for a time, establishing a faith community. I am grateful for the humility and relentless pursuit of Jesus and authentic community you embody, and the collective fruit we've been able to bear in the time we've had together. I am



grateful because we are a community less concerned about our own comfort and more about that of our neighbor, and particularly neighbors who society has repeatedly told are not valued. I am grateful because I witnessed the declaration, from every occupational and neighborhood pulpit you occupy, that Jesus values all, and especially the “least of these” (Matthew 25:40) in Charlottesville. We make Jesus recognizable in ways that decrease the historical stumbling blocks related to race, in particular, that have made it difficult for many to find Jesus.

And I am sad because I am going to miss being around you. Hugging you. Checking in on you. Making jokes with you. Enjoying meals with you. Praying with you. Crying with you. Caring with and for you. Opening up the Word with you. These opportunities have filled

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me and our family in ways that seem far beyond what we may have given to you over these years. Our kids already miss you, and there are no words for how the dynamic of this pandemic only exacerbates our grief. Never did I envision leaving. And I certainly didn't envision leaving you in the middle of a pandemic...over Zoom. We love our church. We love you. We always will.

But thanks be to God who gives us the victory **through Jesus Christ** (I Corinthians 15:57). Jesus still reigns and his capacity to comfort, guide, empower, and sustain has not changed. The same God who gave us the vision and allowed us the privilege of starting something that did not previously exist, is the same God who is able to add to that foundation. Our church and hope are built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. So I have hope. I am confident that even greater is ahead for Victory Church. That the same way God provided what could not be seen with the natural eye before, will again provide what is needed, not only to sustain, but to catapult Victory into greater purpose and impact.

Over the next few months, we will continue hosting our regular 9:30am zoom meetings, providing updates and answering questions between 10 and 10:30am, and having a sermonic moment on FB live at 10:30am on Sundays. Our Victory groups and ministry teams will continue to connect and serve. I will also be convening a group of 5-8 individuals to serve on a transition team to work with me (and Pastor Brett Fuller, our sending pastor). With the leadership we have at Victory and the pastoral support we have, I am confident that you will be led well beyond my July 1 departure.

In Victory,



Paul

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OUR PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Our Community

In the fall of 2016, Pastor Paul Harris moved from Charlottesville with his family to Northern Virginia to serve on staff at Grace Covenant Church and be trained and sent back to Charlottesville in 2018 to start a new church. In the summer of 2017, while Pastor Paul and his family were still living in Northern Virginia and commuting to Charlottesville for his job as an assistant professor at the University of Virginia, the city of Charlottesville witnessed horrific attacks as part of the Unite the Right Rally. The two days of violence ended in the death of one and serious injuries to many others. Rather than wait until 2018, Pastor Paul began to drive back and forth to Charlottesville not just for his professorial duties, but to cast vision for Victory Church. He began holding such vision casting meetings in both Chantilly (at Grace Covenant Church) and Charlottesville (at Eunoia, YMCA, and coffee shops all over town) simultaneously, sharing God's vision to see people reconciled to God and each other to anyone interested in listening. He and his family moved back to Charlottesville with a few congregants from Grace Covenant who also felt called to the vision. In September 2018, Victory Church held its first monthly service at the Boys and Girls Club.



In January 2019, Victory Church held its first weekly service, again at the Boys and Girls Club, hosting two services to accommodate attendees. One month later, the congregation moved to a much larger space in Walker Upper Elementary School, where it would settle in and hold one service each week, even building shed on site to

store church equipment.

During our first year, we established eight ministry teams (we are now at 12) and pursued the vision of seeing people receive Jesus into their heart and by extension see people receive each other into their lives. 2 Corinthians 5:18 is one of our anchor scriptures and we believe that as we make Jesus recognizable, people will be reconciled (to Jesus and to

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each other). Specifically, we saw our call in Charlottesville to be one of removing the historic stumbling blocks for the marginalized accessing the good news of Christ, and by extension seeing the walls of racial hostility demolished by the Holy Spirit. As a result, we are witnessing individuals various racial and ethnic groups worshipping and serving and fellowshiping together each week. In addition to our own discipleship process (which consists of participation in weekly services, serving on a ministry team, and leading or participating in a Victory group), we have partnered with and supported several local nonprofits toward this end as well. We also initiated Victorious Living, a ministry that purchases houses (we currently have 1), and leases them to a family in our community at below-market prices in order to support their progress in living on earth while encouraging their belief in even the greater Victory they can experience in Christ.



We unapologetically share the Gospel as part of this outreach endeavor.

In March of 2021, Pastor Paul accepted a position to serve as an Associate Professor at The Pennsylvania State University, where he will serve in the Counselor Education program. While the transition of a founding pastor is significant, Victory Church has been built on the Truth of God's Word. As such, we are poised and hopeful about this new season and the supernatural ways God will meet us at this point of transition.

Spiritual Family

Victory Church is affiliated with Every Nation, a family of churches whose vision is to plant Christ-centered, Spirit-empowered, socially responsible churches and campus ministries in every nation. Every Nation provided the week-long assessment that approved Pastor Paul to start Victory Church under their covering, and has since provided bootcamp training for church planters, pastoral coaching, and more to assist us in being all God called us to be for our city. We are also voluntarily and joyfully tethered to our sending church, Grace Covenant Church, where Brett Fuller is the senior pastor. Their support and guidance have been critical to whatever success we can claim, all while our being part of such spiritual family has not precluded us from growing into our own footprint as a church in Charlottesville. Such a balance of support, guidance, and freedom is a gift and will continue to be invaluable for our future success.

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Our Leadership

Victory Church is a team-based, pastor-led church with an all-volunteer staff, consisting of:

Andrea Smith – Director of Victory Kids
Kate Martin – Director of Finance and Operations
Tiffany Nguyen – Director of Victory Groups
Nathan Swanson – Coordinator of AV team
Shantal Savage – Director of Worship
Shelby Gibson – Assistant Director of Worship
Tyler Hutchinson – Director of Music
Chase Gibson – Assistant Director of Music
Rasheda Tripp – Director of Outreach
Troy Savage – Prayer team coordinator
Marcus Hawkins – Ushers team coordinator
Michele Johnson – Teens team coordinator
Joseph Williams - Set up and tear down team
Communications team
Hospitality team

Our Theology

We believe the Bible to be the inspired, reliable, authoritative Word of God. We believe there is one eternal, almighty, and perfect God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, and all the benefits therein being accessible to him/her who places his/her trust in Christ alone for salvation. We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His atoning death through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father and in His personal return in power and glory. Holding to the truth of God's revealed Word, we understand by both faith and experience that God's Spirit is active and present in the world today. We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful man, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is essential. We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit, by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life. We believe that we exist in Charlottesville to make God recognizable, especially to those on the margins. And we believe that as we steward a space within which our Charlottesville community stumbles less and less over racism in trying to find Jesus, that

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we can see racial reconciliation on this side of heaven. And so we pray (and participate in): Lord, let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Our Pastoral Desire

We pray for a pastor who embodies I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. We pray for a pastor who will truly shepherd God's flock. One whose motives are only to care well for those under their care. We pray for a pastor whose best sermon is their everyday life – how they care for those God has joined them to as family, how they live with integrity, how they treat their neighbor, and how they love well those that Charlottesville would consider “the least of these.” And as Victory Church is a very relational community, we pray for a pastor who will be accessible. A pastor who will be vulnerable. And a pastor whose transparency and genuineness is never in question. And as a church committed to racial reconciliation, we pray for a pastor who is committed to centering the Gospel and its transformative and restorative power for a community with deep and historic divides. We pray for a pastor whose vision of vertical and horizontal reconciliation includes a reliance on the Holy Spirit (and all the gifts, thereof), the relentless pursuit of justice, and the intentional focus on the needs of the marginalized such that it guides how we embody the church.

We imagine that our next pastor will:

- Be ordained, or in position to be
- Have pastoral experience
- Lead our volunteer staff
- Build on the team-based, pastor-led community
- Establish processes in concert with volunteer staff to create additional avenues for leadership development for all
- Build on church governance structure
- Build pastoral relationships within our church, offering spiritual direction and guidance.
- Lead with humility and hope
- Connect with, submit as appropriate to, and receive support from Grace Covenant Church and Every Nation
- Be a teacher who can communicate to diverse audiences



VICTORY TRANSITION TEAM

Members

Joe Coleman, Chair

Shelby Gibson, Assistant Chair (Pastoral Search Liaison)

Kate Martin, Assistant Chair (Operations)

Chris Kidd and Tiffany Nguyen, Assistant Chairs (Congregational Care)

Andrea Smith, Secretary

Rasheda Tripp

Marcus Hawkins

Mark Menafee

Purpose

The goal of the transition team is to serve the vision of Victory Church by overseeing the Pastoral Search process and ensuring operational duties along with congregational care are maintained during this interim period in accordance with the Transition Team Covenant (see below), in concert with the Directors and Coordinators at Victory Church, and Victory's Board of Directors (Pastor Paul Harris, Pastor Brett Fuller, and Pastor Jim Critcher).

Responsibilities

- Pastoral Search Process
 - Create avenues to solicit input from and communicate updates with the Victory community
 - Partner with Victory Directors and Coordinators and the Board of Directors in identifying broad and diverse networks to engage in proactive outreach and networking.
 - Develop interview questions and facilitate interview process of potential candidates
 - Develop timelines for candidate selection process
 - Determine compensation and benefits package for position
- Operations and Congregational Care

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- Set interim sermon schedule in collaboration with Victory Board of Directors
- Facilitate monthly meetings with ministry team directors and coordinators
- Set discipleship moment agendas & speakers
- Coordinate return to in-person services following the COVID-19 pandemic
- Regularly communicate key announcements to the Victory community
- Maintain Victory website and social media outlets
- Sustain all avenues for congregational care

VICTORY TRANSITION TEAM COVENANT

Unity

“That they may be one as we are one....” (John 17:22)

“[Be] like-minded, having the same love [as Christ has for you], being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others.” (Philippians 2:2-4).

We covenant to seek the unity that Christ exhorted us to have with one another, a unity that reflects the unity of the Godhead; a unity that is indeed empowered by God’s very life with and in us.

This will mean:

- Seeking to be of like mind with one another
- Loving one another with the love of Christ
- Being one in spirit and purpose
- Prizing humility with one another, not seeking merely our own interests, but the interest of others and the common good of our community
- Submitting to the pastoral authority as unto the Lord.

Resolving Conflict

“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you...If they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ (Matthew 18:15-16)

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“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that our brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them, then come and offer your gift.” (Matthew 5:23-34).

We covenant to resolve conflict in ways that honor God and our identity as his people during this pastoral search process.

This will mean:

- Taking the initiative to deal with wrongs that either we have done to another, or that another has done to us, with the aim of being reconciled.
- Addressing conflict with humility and tenderness

Trust

“But as for me, I trust in you.” (Psalm 55:23)

“Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord.” (Psalm 31:24)

We covenant to trust God with the future of our community, and to communicate with our community in ways that embody this confidence in God’s goodness and faithfulness toward us.

This will mean:

- Wrestling with our own doubts and fears before God
- Being honest about our emotions with one another along the way.
- Leaning on one another from day to day, borrowing faith from one another in times when we doubt.

Prayer

“...But I am a man of prayer.” (Psalm 109:4)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7)

We covenant to see God in prayer, both corporately and individually, for the good of our community and this pastoral transition process.

This will mean:

- Praying together as a matter of first importance when we meet.
- Seeking God in our daily lives for wisdom and renewal

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- Inviting our prayer team, congregation, and others as appropriate to intercede for our community during this process.

Communication & Confidentiality

We covenant to maintain the integrity of the transition process through clear and confidential communication throughout.

This will mean:

- The transition team will communicate regularly with congregation regarding updates related to the transition and soliciting input, as appropriate.
- Formal transition team engagement with pastoral candidates and subsequent deliberation will be limited to the transition team and their spouses, as appropriate, and to the pastors involved, until the time comes for the candidate to be presented to the congregation.

VICTORY TRANSITION TIMELINE

Spring 2021

Transition team establishes processes for successful transition

Summer

Interim pastor appointed

Official send off for Ps Paul and family

Interviews begin

Candidates meet with transition team/preach before congregation

Fall/Winter 2021/2022

Candidate list narrowed

Spring 2022

Expected start for next pastor

****Questions? Please send an email to transition@victorycville.org***