

Dear Highland Baptist Church,

With every new season comes change, and this winter is no different. Surrounded by winter's unique landscape, Highland's search committee presents a candidate from a process that began when spring flowers were just bursting through the ground. Over the past year, you have been on my mind in ways you could not have known. When I stepped away in 2021, I told you I felt God calling me to a new chapter of stillness and discernment. True to that promise, God has shaped and renewed me as I have practiced informal ministry outside the church, even as my passion for congregational ministry has remained. Much to my surprise, God began nudging me last year to consider returning to ministry at Highland, which leads me to this moment.

Today, I write to you as the candidate for Highland's next senior pastor. God has rekindled my passion for the church, and I offer an enthusiastic willingness to come alongside your gifted pastors and staff in the shared work of equipping us all to be doers of the Word.

As this search process invites us to a call weekend, God calls each of us to join in prayerful discernment about the future of this thinking, feeling, and healing community of faith. While a call weekend shines a spotlight on the candidate, meaningful ministry is done as one community of faith - as the priesthood of all believers walking hand in hand through a Good Friday world, with our sights and hearts set on Easter morning. Together, God calls us to be voices of hope in the public square, messengers of the good news, caretakers of wounds, stewards of God's gifts, and followers of our Christ. In a cultural era of widespread distrust of leaders, institutions, and pastors (for good reasons), perhaps answering God's call, "Here I am; send me," is asking for trouble or being revealed as a fool. And yet, I believe the trouble we could stir up could be *Good*, and that, together, we could be *God's kind* of fools, as we read in 1 Corinthians.

News of a specific senior pastor candidate might spark a mix of excitement and anxiety. It's normal to wonder: *Will this new pastor care about what I care about? Will I matter to them?* My being a unique candidate will inevitably shape these questions, whether I'm new to you or we've known each other for years. The call weekend will offer us time and space to work through these questions together. Should the call weekend end with an affirmative vote, we would enter a season of introductions (*what a joy to meet all the new people!*) and re-introductions (*not just of me, but of you, as a lot can change in four years!*). While this transition would be unique given my past with Highland, I trust that with God leading us, the challenges we face are not insurmountable as we practice patience and grace toward one another.

I give thanks for the search committee you called forth. You have lifted them up through prayer and encouragement as they have sacrificially and generously given their whole selves. Their thorough search and countless hours are a testament to their deep devotion to God and love for you, their beloved community.

For the rest of this month, I will abide by Baptist traditions by continuing to keep my distance, as if I lived elsewhere, as I have since this search process began. Know that you are on my mind during these in-between days. I ask you to join me in prayer as we approach the call weekend,

leaning on God's steady leadership and on Jesus' example of love for one another, lived out with bold hope for the future.

May Christ's peace be with us as we journey toward the cross, "swift of foot and brave of soul."

Carol