

Important Announcement from the Hood Family

Please take some time to read the following letter from Jason, followed by a communication from the Ruling Elders.

From Jason

Dear Friends,

With a full heart and deep affection, I'm writing to share some personal news: I've made the decision to step down from my role as Senior Pastor of North Shore Fellowship.

Emily and I love this congregation dearly. It is not in any way an exaggeration to say that serving as one of your pastors these past seven years, and as senior pastor now for more than four years, has been one of the greatest privileges of my life. I'm immensely grateful for your love and support as I've walked through these seven years at NSF. They've been full of amazing moments, and I want to be clear that the burdens that you and I have pondered and prayed about together did not push me to leave. It's been a privilege to walk alongside many of you in your journeys. I've learned so many true and beautiful things about walking with Jesus in honesty and faithfulness from watching you all, even in your hardest moments. Senior pastor is not an easy job, but even the darkest weeks on the job have been punctuated by truth, beauty, and goodness, and I don't regret saying yes to the search committee's invitation to pursue the position back in the winter of 2020-2021. Looking back, Emily and I have been amazed that regardless of what's going on at church or in our lives, it's always been a rich blessing to worship the Lord with you all, every single Sunday. Our hope and prayer is that you all know deep in your hearts that Jesus loves being present with all of you.

The decision to leave is my decision, not the session's. It's a decision that Emily and I have not taken lightly, and we've relied on the best input we could find as we pondered and prayed. As I've navigated the realities of senior leadership over the last few years, it's become increasingly clear that this role, while deeply meaningful, is not sustainable for me in this season. I've often said that 85% of this job is incredible, and it truly is. I'd do most of my tasks for free, and that includes spending time with you to hear and bear your burdens and ponder together the paradoxes of the Lord's work in your lives. The remaining 15% can take a tremendous toll. This decision to step down creates the opportunity for a better balance in my life and in the life of my family. The Session and I will share more details about the transition in the coming weeks, and we'll walk this journey together in prayer and unity.

Because this church is so vibrant, I can step away with peace and confidence. There's so much to celebrate about where NSF is today. John continues to sacrificially pour himself out pastoring and shepherding with wisdom and steadiness. Emily and I have already been so impressed with Nathaniel's gifting and heart. Interviews are currently underway to secure new executive leadership to strengthen administration and ministry at NSF. Michael Smith and his incredible

team are massive gifts to us all. Our staff is amazing, our finances are strong, and our ministries to Chattanooga and beyond are flourishing.

If those pieces weren't in place, I wouldn't feel good about departing. But I'm convinced that NSF has an incredibly bright future, and for me and Emily, that makes this transition not just possible, but hopeful. We are genuinely so very optimistic about the future of this amazing congregation. It will not be hard to recruit a wonderful senior pastor to guide NSF into the next season. Conversely, I'm excited that some godly, gifted pastor will be able to step into and experience the blessing and benefit of serving at NSF. I recall going to my pastorate in Tanzania and reaching out to those who've served there previously. One of the former pastors said, "How blessed you are to be heading there! Know that you are going to a place that wants to love you all, that will really appreciate you." That was true in Tanzania, and it has been and will be wonderfully true at North Shore Fellowship.

I also would tell anyone planning to come serve NSF that being here will make them a better Christian. There are so many godly examples in the pews, and so many people in touch with the gospel and the grace and mercy of the Lord Jesus. I've seen so many people sanctified even in their hardships. There are so many facets to the diamond of the bride of Christ that make me marvel at Jesus's own handiwork (Ephesians 2:10). I've had a front row seat, watching Jesus at work by the Spirit to "present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:27). Many of those stories can't be shared, but it's easier to keep them secret because I know that someday we shall all get to hear them.

I have sometimes said both in conversation and from the pulpit (borrowing of course from Calvin) that God has two books: Scripture and Nature, both of which speak of his glory and greatness and goodness. But for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, Jesus's Church is like this third book. Although we are far from perfect, the Church reflects that same greatness and glory and goodness. Not even your sins and mine can fully obscure that reflection.

More details will be shared over the coming weeks. At our congregational meeting on July 13, you all will be asked to vote to release me from my call as pastor at NSF; you all will also be electing a new class of elders and deacons to help lead NSF during this transitional season. The Session will be providing details about what comes next for NSF. I don't have specific vocational plans that I can share at the moment, but I can say that we do intend to be in Chattanooga for a while. (And I can confidently say that, Lord willing, my weight, my overall health, and my garden will all improve in the coming months.) Please pray for us in this season of transition.

One important element for you all to know regarding this transition is that it is widely considered a "best practice" for former senior pastors not to stick around at a church after they step away. There are a number of reasons for this, none of which have to do with any hesitation on our part about the leadership or church culture. Rather, it's more a matter of making space for new leadership and not creating problems down the line.

As I've prayed for the staff and congregation of NSF through the years, I have often prayed, and will continue to pray, in the spirit of Proverbs 30:8-9, that the Lord will provide glimpses of fruit and success in laboring for his glory, but not so much that we would be full of ourselves and too full of pride. For the difficulties and burdens and sorrows, I have prayed and will continue to pray in the spirit of Joel 2 that the Lord will restore the years the locusts have eaten. And I pray with Paul in Ephesians 1, wanting you to know that "I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe." The same power that God used when he raised Jesus from the dead and enthroned him over all things is still very much at work in you all now (Ephesians 1:20-23)!

And I just want to say—thank you. Thank you for allowing me the privilege of serving you. As you continue to bend the knee to King Jesus and lead others to do the same, to be and make disciples, I'll be cheering you all on. I remain your brother in Christ. Know that Emily and I will always, always carry this congregation in our hearts.

With love and gratitude,

Jason

From the Ruling Elders

Dear NSF Family,

So there is no ambiguity, we want to confirm to you all that Jason was not asked to leave by the Session. There has been no immorality or financial impropriety. The decision for Jason to resign is his alone.

As Jason said, there is so much to be grateful for in the work that God has done and is continuing to do at North Shore Fellowship. We are thankful for his seven years of service, and we send him and his family off with our blessings. We will miss him greatly. It was with a heavy heart that the Session received his resignation. He mentioned the wisdom and gifts of the staff of NSF; and we want to affirm that we see Jason as one of the best preachers and teachers in the PCA. We will miss his ministry to us.

Jason has also been approachable by members and non-members alike, always offering to meet, to listen, and to care for people. We've come to see him not just as a pastor, but as a friend. It is hard to see a friend step away. He also mentioned the toll this job has taken on him and his family, and we are sorry for that. We haven't supported him as well as we should have in some important ways. We know that we're still growing up as a church. We want the

congregation to know that finding ways to reduce the stress on the Senior Pastor and improving our support is something the Session will be looking at more closely as we move forward, and we welcome Jason's advice on how we can do this—as well as his prayers.

We recognize that there has been significant staff turnover over the past year, and we want to acknowledge the impact this has had on both the staff and the congregation. The Session has not done a good job of communicating, but we are committed to keeping you better informed in the future. In this regard, John and Nathaniel's roles will not change for the time being, and information regarding the search for new senior leadership will be communicated soon.

The Ruling Elders want to be available to answer questions or to help you process Jason's departure. The list of ruling elders and their phone numbers has been printed and is available in the foyer at church, and a PDF version is attached below.

In Christ,

The Ruling Elders of North Shore Fellowship