

*And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." Matthew 4:19*

Dear Friends,

It has been a joy to celebrate another Christmas at Salem. The music has been heavenly, worship moved us to awe, our fellowships loving, and the spirit of wonderment in our little children has given wing to our own sense of marvel over this great gift of Jesus in Bethlehem. We are blessed to rejoice as we do. It is because of the Christmas message of God's peace and favor for us, and indeed for every person in our world.

Our broken human condition can make it hard to believe in a God who really does smile so prodigally upon us. Yet this is the Christmas announcement delivered by the angels to the shepherds, and then was acted for us in Jesus. God's gracious favor is the secret to the peace we know in our souls. And it is the always-surprising treasure we believers bear to the world.

For more than a year now it has been my privilege to join you in this holy mission. Initially we had thought my call to you would last about nine months. I am glad it needed to be extended. But now as I try to read what God brings to focus before my eyes I realize that my time with you is advancing to an end. I must therefore announce that my work with you will terminate on February 15, or sooner pending developments with your Call Committee.

My primary work among you was really finished last summer. My extended stay has been mostly to give you continuity. Together we have seen anger dissipate, conflict managed, hurt given opportunity for healing, and a gradual turning away from inward focus toward energy again engaged in outreach for mission. The reason for this movement is simple. It is because Jesus Christ is alive among you. Our focus has been on him. In him is always our healing path of joy.

Personally I am full of hope for you. You are a people so generously equipped for bearing witness to the gospel of God's favor. Near and far people look to you for comfort, strength and challenge. Your great power is the Spirit of Christ alive in your midst. And your wisdom is in your humility and willingness to follow him.

I thank you again for my privilege of walking with you. And I am grateful for our weeks yet ahead to do so.

*Yours Sincerely, Pastor Marcus*