



WILLOW CREEK
COMMUNITY CHURCH

January 30, 2020

Dear Willow Family,

In our December update, we shared that the final two senior pastor candidates were presented to the full Elder Board. While both candidates have strong qualities as pastors, we released both from candidacy. Our consensus was that neither candidate is the long-term leader of Willow Creek; therefore, the search process has continued. We have provided updates throughout the process, and one of the consequences is that in our last communication, we set an expectation that we are not able to meet.

As an Elder Board, we started this process committed to being unified in the decision for selecting the senior pastor. This commitment helps safeguard our decision. While we acknowledge that no person is perfect, we trust the Holy Spirit to bring us collective clarity and wisdom. We have operated with full agreement on past decisions of great importance, and we are united in moving forward in the next phase of the senior pastor search.

This news is hard and disappointing to share, given the investment of time and anticipation for the next season in the life of our church. However, the candidates and the Elders have prayerfully approached this as a process of discernment. Our Willow church family and Christian family at large have prayed that God will give wisdom and guide this decision. We trust that God heard our prayers and that the Holy Spirit is at work in this determination.

Once we decided we would not move forward with the previous candidates, we immediately began two processes. The first was to continue our search with [Vanderbloemen](#), pursuing new candidates. We have had initial interviews with six strong candidates this week.

Filling this pastoral role is the top priority of the Elder Board. Through the interview process, various listening sessions, emails that were received, and meetings with staff and congregants, we have gained more clarity and alignment on the pastoral and leadership qualities ideal for the next chapter at Willow Creek. While we desire to complete this process soon, we do not want to rush and choose out of fear or pressure. We look forward to seeing what God will do as we continue this process.

The second process was to re-engage with Steve Gillen on continuing in his role as interim senior pastor, which we began in early January and finalized last week.

Steve Gillen has faithfully served the Willow Creek family for 23 years in a variety of critical leadership capacities. As you know, 18 months ago, Steve graciously accepted the request to step in and lead our church on an interim basis during a very difficult time of crisis and change. He did so without hesitation and with a humble heart. Over the last year and a half, he has served as a steadfast, compassionate, and dedicated leader to the entire Willow Creek family.

Before starting the external senior pastor search, we asked Steve to continue in his interim role on contract to provide much needed leadership to the Willow staff and congregation. Given that the search process has taken longer than anticipated, Steve agreed to serve on staff until March 17, 2020. Steve will no longer be interim senior pastor after March 17, but he may stay engaged past that date to support the transition to a new interim senior pastor. He determined that now is an appropriate time for him and his family to seek out what God has in store for them in their next chapter.

We have the utmost respect for Steve as he chooses what is best for him and his family moving forward, and we will miss him. We are incredibly grateful for his leadership, pastoring, and teaching, which has most

certainly blessed our church in countless ways. We ask for your prayers for Steve and his family in this time of transition.

In our commitment to keep the congregation informed, we are sharing this news while working through the details for future leadership. We are exploring candidates to help lead Willow through the gap from Steve's last day until the announcement of a new senior pastor, and Steve is committed to transitioning well. We will provide an update in the coming weeks regarding next steps, and we also will share ways in which we can celebrate Steve and his family.

This news is challenging given all that has taken place in the past couple of years. We feel the pressure of delay and a sense of loss. In the waiting, we have also seen God's grace. With every step, God has faithfully provided for our church. We are resolved to lean into God's direction for each step. We move forward remembering that the mission of Willow Creek has not changed. We believe that lost people matter to God, and they matter to the church. We continue the work of sharing the gospel with our friends and neighbors. We allow the good news of Jesus Christ to lead us to greater depths of worship, discipleship, and service. We do this work in community because this is what it means to be the church.

We close this update with a prayer of benediction from Paul:

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

2 Thessalonians 2:16–17

In His service,

Willow Creek Elder Board

Shoji Boldt

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