



Why We're Leaving

—by Pastor Dan

Before I explain some of the reasons behind our decision to accept a new call to Park CRC in Holland, MI, I want to be clear about factors that do NOT impact our decision. It is important for the congregation to know we are not angry or disappointed with Prairie Lane Church. We love the people in this church, and we also feel loved. The church supports and encourages our work. I am not leaving with a chip on my shoulder. I'm not shaking the dust off my sandals or thinking, "Good riddance". The congregation is generous. We love our house and neighborhood.

Our children are also happy at Prairie Lane. In fact, I am incredibly grateful for how our children are embraced here. This church has kept their baptismal vows in helping us to raise our children in the Lord. The Gems, Cadets, VBS, Christmas plays, and other programs—plus the care and friendliness of the adults to our kids have given them a strong foundation in their faith.

Also, I don't want people to think about this as a career move. Park Church happens to be a bit bigger, but I wasn't out intentionally looking for a bigger church. There were other churches we talked with also that were the same size of PLC. It's not that I was looking for some kind of "promotion" or for more salary.

So then ... why? Well, probably the best place to start is to say that when we came to Omaha, we never imagined it would be forever. We knew this day would come from the moment I started. In fact, from Rachel and I's perspective the bigger surprise is that we have stayed as long as we did. For a first call, I was advised by other pastors to stay for about 5 years. I

also told friends and family—and even my wife—that we'd probably stay about 5 years. I can also remember back in 2007 at the start of our building project when PLC came up with a 3 year pledge drive, that I figured I could help the church get through the pledge commitment and get settled into a new building, and then it would be a good time to move on. But, the pledge drive ended, and I knew there was more for us in Omaha. In fact, several more years passed, and I still hardly gave it a second thought. We had young children in our house, we were busy with ministry, and we liked Prairie Lane.

In 2014, Rachel and I wondered ... is now the time? We prayed and I talked with some people, and I felt like I had a clear answer from God. His answer was "No". I did not update my pastor profile or look anywhere else.

Then, a couple more years passed, and I started to think about it again. This time, I felt like the answer was "maybe". Last year, I talked with just a couple of churches, but the doors did not open. It was ok. There was not a feeling of urgency. But, as time went on, the pace picked up. There were more congregations looking at my profile. More e-mails. More interviews. Rachel and I were more willing to consider something new. We were feeling a bit worn out. I was also feeling guilty that I was no longer giving Prairie Lane my best.

We thought it might be nice to live in Michigan near family, but it wasn't a requirement. I kind of hoped that a church in Colorado might contact me (they didn't). A church in Anchorage did;

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but I said “No” to that one. But, one interesting possibility came up in Rochester, NY – just an hour from where I grew up. Another exciting one was northern MI, just an hour from where my mom and dad live. We had good reasons to pursue these opportunities, but in both of those cases, I ended up taking my name out of consideration. The churches just didn’t seem like a good fit. I wondered if I was supposed to stay in Omaha after all.

Well, Park Church first contacted me in November in an e-mail. Rachel and I said to each other, “Not Holland”. I looked at the profile, but I did not even follow-up; I thought that was one was off the list. In February, I was surprised that Park Church contacted me again asking for an interview. I said “No”.

But, guess what ... that week in church (Feb. 12) my sermon was called “God Speaks” from John 10. It was about the sheep listening to and recognizing the voice of the shepherd. And, God Spirit’s spoke. A few events that week made me reconsider. Even a trusted pastor friend encouraged me to follow-up with Park and said to me, “It’s often the ones you don’t expect.” So, I did a phone interview. Park was still not on the top of my list.

Well, to make a long story just a little bit shorter, I can say that surprisingly, God persistently led us to Park in Holland, MI. What they wanted in their next pastor seemed to line up with my strengths. And, Park Church has gone through turmoil over the last couple of years. They parted with their previous pastor under bad terms. They lost a lot of members. They lost staff. I have felt led toward Park not because it would be an easier job, but because it would be a harder one. But, then, even after I received a call, I continued my due diligence in prayer. Once again I felt I had a message from God, “You already know what the right answer is”. I did. I knew.

That does not make leaving Prairie Lane easier. We are sad. We are also thankful for a productive 12 years of ministry here. I am grateful to God for his work in our midst. I am thankful for the building project that is now completely paid for. I am thankful for the partnership with Westwood starting LIFEhouse. I am thankful for Stephen’s Ministry. I am thankful for every committed volunteer who makes Prairie Lane special.

I know in the short-term, things will be harder at PLC. I know that there will be challenging changes and transitions. And yet, as I think about this decision and God’s leading, I also really believe that in the long-term our call to another ministry will benefit Prairie Lane as well. I think the church is at a place now where it could benefit from some new energy and new ideas. The church is now in a good position to call someone new and to bring in a fresh voice and fresh perspectives. I don’t think PLC has taken me for granted, but I do wonder at times if we have gotten too comfortable with each other. This year in my sermons, I have talked about revival and I have talked about going into new spiritual territory. Those have been topics on my heart, and I have prayed for revival at PLC. Here, I think God is answering that prayer in an unexpected way. I believe that God knows that for Prairie Lane to take the next steps in faith and ministry, a new pastor will be necessary.

So, as Rachel and I look back and reflect on our journey and our decision, we certainly can see the hand of God in it. Most people have told us “We hate to see you go, but if God is leading you somewhere else, then you have to listen”. And, really that is the best answer to give. It is great that we are moving closer to family. It is nice to have a few old friends in the Holland area. There are good schools for our kids. There is Lake Michigan too! But, really those are not the parts of the story we want to emphasize. Because honestly, we did not want to go to Holland, MI. But, in 2005 we really didn’t want to live in Omaha either; that ended up working out quite well. We trust that God knows what he is doing.

—*Pastor Dan and Rachel*

** Also note: This transition is a slow one. It looks like we will be in Omaha until at least the end of July. In the next couple of months, I hope to work with the elders to help Prairie Lane find an interim pastor who can serve here for about a year, while a search begins for my full-time replacement.