



upper room

February 11, 2018

Dear Upper Room Community,

Four weeks ago, I informed our Board of Directors that I am stepping down from my position as lead pastor of Upper Room. This is a decision that was made after many months of prayerful discernment.

Nineteen years ago, I left a career in finance to pursue a job in ministry. Before then, I never thought about ministry. Working in the church was so far off my radar — I never considered it a possibility.

But then something incredible happened to me. A word of warning here: This may sound strange to some of you. It still sounds a bit strange (and amazing) to me when I think about it. But it was so out of the ordinary that I remember it clearly.

One Sunday morning during worship, I had what felt like a daydream, but I wasn't in control of the daydream. I was standing in front of a group of people, teaching. But it wasn't a classroom, or a conference room. And I was talking about Jesus. After a few seconds, this "God moment" (as I've come to call it) was finished. I began to cry. I couldn't talk.

When I tried to explain to Patty what happened, she said, "I thought you were crying because you were moved by the sermon." Nope. I couldn't tell you anything about that sermon.

But that experience changed my life. It changed my career. I started to ask a lot of questions. I started volunteering at church. I met Kurt Vickman. I started working at Christ Presbyterian Church, and together, with the help of a lot of amazing people, Kurt and I started Upper Room.

Since that Sunday, I haven't had an experience exactly like that one. Over the years, my relationship with Jesus, and my faith in Him, has grown. I have always tried to listen to God, to trust God, and to follow God.

Over the past several months, I have had a new kind of stirring in me. At first, I tried to ignore it. The feelings were uncomfortable. I've spent a lot of time in solitude praying. And I have been seeking counsel from others, too, trying to discern what God has in store for Upper Room and for me and my family.

I've realized that my time as lead pastor of this wonderful, amazing, and loving Upper Room Community is coming to an end.

You may be asking, "What's the real story here?" This is it. I am not running away from anything. And I don't have something that I am going to. It's just time.

It has been a great privilege and joy to serve God and this community for so many years. It has been an incredible journey: Walking with you through joyful times and through tough times; baptizing and dedicating your kids; celebrating marriages; grieving with you during times of loss; and gathering on Sundays to worship God with you.

It's truly hard to put into words how grateful I am, how honored I feel, how blessed my family and I have been. God has been so faithful through it all.

It's been an extremely difficult decision. We've shed a lot of tears and carry a sense of grief. We love Upper Room! But at the same time, there are feelings of peace and excitement, too.

So what's next?

The future of Upper Room is in very good hands. God will continue to lead and care for this community. Our staff, Board, and all of you, will boldly follow God's lead into the future that God has in store for Upper Room.

As for me, I do not have a "next" job as I write this. Patty and I are trusting God, knowing He is with us during this season of change. We know that God is good. And we have a loving network of great friends who have become our family — because of Upper Room.

I will remain in my position for a few more months. The staff and Board will continue to plan for the transition and for the future leadership of Upper Room. You'll be informed along the way as they work to discover what's next.

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen." (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joe McDonald". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Joe McDonald
Lead Pastor
Upper Room