



January 28, 2025

Dear Church Family,

It was thirty-five years ago when I first began my ministry here on January 15, 1990. For those of you who remember, we were known as the Fallbrook Presbyterian Church back in those days!

I will never forget the day I walked into our sanctuary for the very first time, and I gazed up at the beautiful stained glass window of our Lord Jesus. Instantly, I felt the warm embrace of the Holy Spirit, and an almost tangible sense of familiarity. It was like the Lord himself was telling me: “Welcome home, Jerome! This is where you belong. But now you better take off your shoes. And not just because this is Holy Ground, but because you’re gonna be here for a while! So you might as well make yourself comfortable.”

My friends, I want you to know: That is how I felt *then*. That is how I feel *now*. And that is how I will *always* feel about SonRise Christian Fellowship. This church will always be home for me and my family. It was here in Fallbrook where Terri and I raised all four of our children. Three of them were born here, and they were all dedicated and baptized here. They all attended preschool here, and youth group. They all had Mr. Fox as their Jr. High science teacher. And they all grew up and matured in their own personal faith right here at this precious church.

I truly believe with all my heart that it is largely because of you and this loving, caring Body of Christ that all four of my children grew up loving church, instead of hating it. We have all heard the sad “horror stories” about “P.K.’s,” or Pastor’s Kids, who end up rebelling against the church and their faith because all they ever witnessed growing up was hypocrisy, backbiting, and a legalistic spirit. But, thank God, that is not their testimony, and that is not what they experienced here. In fact, it was the exact opposite. And for that I will never be able to thank all of you enough! Thank you for loving me and my family for 35 years – through thick and thin, through every joy and every sorrow, and through every victory and every one of my own personal failures. This is truly the most loving and most Christ-like church I have ever known in my entire life. And for that, I will always be eternally grateful.

But for over a year now, I have been standing at the crossroads of a very important decision. I have been diligently praying, and asking our elders to pray with me, about exactly when I should retire, and pass on the shepherd’s staff to the next pastor. After much preliminary planning, discussion, and seeking the Lord, we are sensing that *this* is the year: 2025.

However, I am not leaving next week, or next month. We are not moving, or leaving Fallbrook. In fact, the plan right now is for me to continue on as your pastor for however long it takes for the Lord to raise up a new shepherd for you. Our goal is by the end of this year. But, again, however long it takes! If it takes until Easter, that is fine. But if it takes until Christmas, or even next year, that is great as well. Our only desire now is to travel at “God Speed” throughout this entire time of transition, and to do this as prayerfully, sensitively, and gracefully as possible.

The most important thing, as far as the elders and I are concerned, is that we let you in on this matter right now, at the very beginning of our search. We want to be totally transparent throughout this entire time of transition because all of you are going to play a vital role in this process. We are asking all of you, as the Body of Christ here at SonRise, to stand together in unity as active participants and as faithful prayer partners as we embark on this exciting journey together. We are asking you to devote yourself to focused prayer in the days ahead, and to be open and receptive to the new thing God wants to do among us. To Him be all the glory!

I am truly thankful and excited about the very wise and godly Search Committee the Lord has assembled for this new venture. They are: Beth Deutsch (chairperson), Jenny Anderson, Art Blodgett, Greg Johnson, Mike Lee, Kirk Sandvig, Bob Schaar, and Cathy Smelser. In the days ahead, please feel free to ask me or any one of these committee members any question you may have about the search process, or any other matters of concern. We are all in this together!

In the meantime, here are some preliminary matters of interest you should be aware of:

1. The Search Committee will conduct a full search of pastoral candidates from both within our church and outside of it. Our desire is to let the Holy Spirit guide us, and not just our own personal wishes, desires, or emotions.
2. Our Search Committee will be providing regular updates to our session and to our congregation on a monthly basis, so you will know exactly what is going on and where we are in the process.
3. Under our church polity here at SonRise, the members of our congregation have the final vote when it comes to approving and confirming the call of a new senior pastor. When the time comes, all those who are members of our church will have the opportunity to vote. The Search Committee's role is to gather resumes, interview various candidates, and then prayerfully present the candidate to you for your final prayerful approval.
4. There will be a formal time set aside to answer any questions you may have at our upcoming annual congregational meeting on February 23, immediately after our service.
5. For all those who are interested, our Search Committee has prepared a print-out of the process they will be following for your perusal. It will be available in the church office.

My dear friends, I still remember my very first sermon series when I became your pastor. It was called: "Following the Voice of the Good Shepherd." We have always agreed that Jesus Himself is the True Shepherd and Pastor of this flock. It is his voice alone that we must cherish, heed, and obey. For 35 years now, that is what our entire staff, our elders, and our deacons have tried to model every step along the way of this amazing journey we have traveled together. And I am absolutely confident now that this is the way forward as we place our trust in the Lord with all our hearts and lean not on our own understanding. I could not be more excited and grateful.

*"Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way. Walk in it!'" Amen.*

Grace and Peace to you all!

  
Pastor Jerome