Senior Pastor Announces
A Year-Long Leave of Absence

November 22, 2010

Dear Church Family and Friends,

The reality of the past eleven years is that God has blessed our efforts and ministry here in Grove City. The Lord’s hand has been upon us. The favor of the King has been evident to all. The church has survived the horrible bleeding we saw at the outset. Hundreds have been added to the church and to the Kingdom of God through your prayers and our efforts to faithfully preach, teach, and lead this flock with the integrity of our hearts.

The church is healthy. The congregation is still growing. The presence of the Lord is real. People are still sensing the presence of the Lord among us. God is still anointing our services. The altars are full. Ministries are effective and gaining strength, without my direct involvement. There is leadership in place that can guide the church into its next stage of development.

My reality is that I am not doing well. The burden of administration is again eating me up. I am still working 60-70 hours every week. I am tired, very tired. I do not have the energy I once did to manage this big “company”. I have lost my enthusiasm for the administrative battle. I still love the ministry side of teaching, preaching, and counseling God’s people, but there is a limit to my endurance. I feel like I have run out of gas. I need a significant break to reenergize. I can see the end of the race, but I do not have the stamina to make it to the finish line seven years from now.

Therefore, I have decided that I need to take a year off from pastoral ministry and rest my soul. I am graciously stepping aside before being forced to step down through burn out, physical and emotional exhaustion, or worse. It is a step to the side of the road to rest and catch my breath. I do not believe that I can ever step back into the saddle of heavy administration. Be assured that it is my intention and purpose to return as pastor for preaching and prayer.

Effective February 1, 2011, I will be stepping down from my role as Senior Pastor of Grove City Alliance Church. As for me and my house, we will delight in the Lord, as we step aside to rest awhile, soak in the Lord, and refresh our souls.

“Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord will provide.”
What will happen to Grove City Alliance Church?

I realize that a significant break for me may not be in the best interest of this church. Our District Superintendent will place an intentional interim pastor in my place for the period of one year as the church redefines its needs and desires for the future.

During this year of leave of absence, and under the direction of an interim pastor, the church will evaluate: 1) Where they have been; 2) Where they are currently; and 3) Where they are going from here. Those decisions and strategies may or may not result in inviting me back to be the pastor for preaching and prayer.

As for the church at large, life and ministries will go on. The building program will be put on hold for the time being. While I am gone the church will change. New people will come in and some will leave. However, the Lord’s purposes and plans do not change. Our heartfelt desire is to wait on Him and to walk in his ways, not our own. Let us all spend this year in fervent prayer, asking God to order our steps according to His Word.

Sincerely,

Pastor Dick LaFountain
Q & A Regarding Our Senior Pastor’s Leave of Absence

This is an exciting time, and also a very scary time, for most of us. We feel lost without a shepherd, confused by a change in plans, and insecure about our future. This document will attempt to address some of those concerns and fears.

1. Why are you taking the extended leave of absence?
Three years ago, I returned from a mini-sabbatical with an urgent mandate from the Lord to give myself continually to prayer, to the ministry of the Word, and to leave the servicing of tables (administration) to others. Yet, for the last three years, I have carried an ever-increasing load of administration. My work week continues unabated at 60-70 hours every week. My body is slowing down and cannot keep this pace. In recent months, the mounting stress is taking a toll on me physically and emotionally. I feel close to having a heart attack, stroke, or nervous breakdown. I must take significant time out to rest and restore myself to be able to continue in ministry for the long term.

2. Why are you stepping down as Senior Pastor?
I believe that the only way to truly fulfill my calling to prayer and preaching is to step down from the Senior Pastor role and allow the church to call someone else for that role. I would like to return as pastor for preaching and prayer, but not Senior or Lead Pastor.

3. Why not just continue preaching only?
I have considered a short break of a couple of months to rest and restore my energies, but would inevitably return to the same stresses in just a few months. Transitioning out of the Senior Pastor role is not easy. I have been the driving force behind vision and strategy for nearly ten years. It is extremely difficult for our staff, our leadership, our congregation, and even for me to change our expectations with a simple change of the job title. A significant time away, along with a major change in the way we handle administration, is in order.

4. Who will be in charge of the church during your absence?
According to our constitution and district mandates, in the absence of the Senior Pastor, the Head Elder becomes the head of the church. Our Head Elder, Glenn Neidergall, will supervise until an intentional interim pastor is appointed by our District Superintendent. The interim pastor then will preach and coach our church through this transition.

5. Who will preach during your absence?
Preaching will be the responsibility of the Intentional Interim Pastor appointed by our District Superintendent. Periodically, some of our own pastors with share the pulpit.

6. Will you come back in February 2012?
The conditions of my return are that I am able to return to a non-administrative role, that of pastor for preaching and prayer. During this year, the church leadership will decide whether or not that is in the best interest of the church.

7. How do we know this is God’s will and plan?
My wife and I have prayed and thought this through very carefully and have perfect peace that we are walking the path the Lord has set before us. Over a period of three months, I have consulted with my twelve closest friends, mentors and spiritual leaders regarding our decision. They have all affirmed that we are being directed by God, and that this year-long leave of absence is an important and necessary step.
8. **What happens to the vision Pastor Dick cast for this church?**
The vision that I cast for this church back in 1999, and affirmed every year since then, remains in place. I believe it to be the expression of God’s plan and purpose for Grove City Alliance Church. I am not the vision. I believe God can and will complete His vision with or without my presence.

9. **Are other pastors leaving?**
To our knowledge, no other pastor is leaving or planning to leave. That is entirely up to them and the leadership of this church. As far as we know, all ministries will go on as usual.

10. **What does the district office have to do with this?**
The District Superintendent of the Western Pennsylvania District is responsible for all 150 churches and their pastors. Whenever there is a pastoral change, the District must be involved. They have established their own strategy of putting an interim pastor in every church that is in pastoral transition. The goal is to provide for sound preaching and to guide the church through a successful process of reevaluating its priorities and direction.

11. **Is it possible that Pastor Dick will not return at all?**
Yes, that is a possibility. The church may decide not to invite Pastor Dick to return as pastor of preaching and prayer, or may decide to extend a call to another pastor to become Senior Pastor here. That decision will be made after much prayer and study of what is best for the church.

12. **Don’t you love us anymore?**
I have never loved a church family more than this one. God is doing great things in Grove City Alliance Church. This is by far the most joyful pastoral experience I have ever had. Every Sunday, I count it a privilege to preach to you God’s word and pray with you. I love being your shepherd. However, I do not love the administration of this ever growing church. My hope and prayer is that church leadership will find a solution to caring for the administration, so that I can return to the pulpit and spiritual oversight of the church I love.

13. **What will you do for a year?**
God has clearly directed and instructed me to take a full year to slow down and rest. I will be spending at least two months away in solitude with my wife to sleep, pray, rest and write. After that we return home to slow down our pace by working around the house, playing golf, visiting our grandchildren, traveling to see friends, and reading a lot. It is clear that the Lord says that I am not to do any preaching during this time. Writing will be my outlet, and we are hoping to get some of that work published.