

October 7, 2007

Special Announcement from Rev. Lea Brown

Dear Friends,

I am sending this message to you at 11 a.m. on Sunday, October 7th, the same time I will be reading the announcement below at our worship service today. This announcement, along with one from Rev. Elder Lillie Brock, can also be found on the WFMCC website.

Please know that I will be holding you and our entire congregation in my prayers during the weeks ahead. I will be available by phone or email Wednesday through Sunday for questions or more information.



To the Congregation of Wichita Falls Metropolitan Community Church:

In January of 2005 I first became aware of my calling to serve, for the first time in my life, as the senior pastor of an MCC congregation. I did not know yet at that time which church God had planned for me, but I did know that I had to follow this calling wholeheartedly as I have done with every other calling I have felt in my life.

Within a few months, as I began my search for the congregation God wanted me to serve, I felt a growing understanding in my heart that Wichita Falls MCC was the place God wanted me to be. I submitted my application to serve as the senior pastor of this church, and I never looked back, even when I received word about the fire that destroyed the building one week after I had sent in my application. Once I truly

felt that God was calling me to Wichita Falls, there was nothing that was going to stop me from making myself available to this congregation - not even the fire. As the Pastoral Search Committee and I journeyed together through the application process, my calling to this church was affirmed again and again, and it was with great joy that I accepted the position of senior pastor when you voted during my candidacy two years ago this month.

This is how the spiritual power of calling has always been present and real for me. There has never been a time that I can remember when I was not always seeking and following God's will, and I truly hope that as your pastor I have led the way in providing an example of giving one's life wholeheartedly to God.

It is this very same sense of calling that I am following now as I share this news with you: the Pastoral Search Committee of MCC San Francisco has invited me to candidate for the position of senior pastor there, and I have accepted their invitation. I realize this news may be painfully shocking to many, and so I would like to share with you the details of how this has all come about.

In September of 2006 the Rev. Dr. Penny Nixon, senior pastor of MCC San Francisco, resigned her position after 11 years of faithful service. I had no idea when I left San Francisco to move to Wichita Falls in November of 2005 that she was going to leave MCC San Francisco when she did; however, when I received the news I knew that it would be an issue in my life. I had served as a volunteer clergyperson on staff at that church for 10 years, and had always felt a strong sense of connection with that congregation. I want you to know that I did not immediately feel a sense of calling to apply for the position of senior pastor, but I did know that there was a possibility that I might be asked to do so in the future. Because of this, I began praying for guidance and wisdom. For the past year my prayer has been this: "God, if the time comes that I am asked to apply for the position of senior pastor of MCC San Francisco, please help me to know what to do. I will stay in Wichita Falls for as long as you want me to, I will go to San Francisco if that is what you want, or I will do anything else you have planned. But please, help me to know what it is that you want me to do." During this year, even as I have prayed, I have also given to this church every ounce of energy, commitment, faithfulness, vision, hard work, and love that I possibly had to give, and I truly hope that this has been evident in everything we have achieved together.

In July of this year the Pastoral Search Committee of MCC San Francisco did approach me, along with more than a dozen other people, about the possibility of applying. After a few more weeks of prayer, I knew in a very deep and peaceful way that what God wanted me to do was to make myself available for the position. I submitted my application on September 1st. The Search committee had narrowed the list of prospective candidates and I was interviewed on September 11th. Ironically enough, quite a few of the people on the search committee told me that I was actually at the bottom of their list, because they were committed to hiring someone who was fresh and new for the position, and that was a qualification I couldn't meet. However, by the time we finished the application process they had changed their mind and last week the Pastoral Search Committee invited me to be the final candidate. From October 29th through November 4th I will go to San Francisco for my candidacy week, and the congregation will vote on November 4th. If they choose me, I will more than likely continue to serve here until the end of this year, and will do all that I can to support this congregation in its search for the best interim pastor possible.

While I don't want to apologize for following what I believe to be God's will for my life, I do feel deeply sorry for whatever pain, anger or grief my decision will cause. I never intended to stay in Wichita Falls for this short amount of time. In the past I have always served in different positions for anywhere from three to 8 years, and I had sincere reason to believe that such would be the case for my time with you as well. But I have learned through this that God's timing is not always my timing, and I am trusting that if God has called me to serve in San Francisco, then God is also already raising up the next person who will be the best pastor for this wonderful congregation.

I want you to know that I am very sorry for the rushed nature of sharing this news with you. I wish that I could have given you and our Board of Trustees much more notice about this announcement. I wish that I could have met with each and every one of you individually to tell you about all of this. I wish that Rev. Elder Lillie Brock could have planned to be with us here today. Unfortunately, though, the word leaked out through circumstances beyond my control and that of the MCC San Francisco Search Committee, and I have been very worried that someone in the congregation was going to hear about this second-hand. That was the last thing in the world I wanted to happen, because I wanted the one person you heard this from to be me.

Because of the short notice about this announcement, Rev. Elder Lillie Brock was not able to change her schedule to be here today, but I will be talking with her soon about plans to come here as soon as possible.

I know that this may cause some challenging feelings for us as individuals and as a congregation. I want you to know that whatever your feelings are, I hope you will share them with me if that is something you want to do. It has been my great privilege to serve as your pastor, and it would be my privilege still to walk with you through the feelings we may experience. I will certainly understand if you don't want to talk with me about this, but please know that whatever your choice is I will never stop loving you, and I will never stop feeling profoundly grateful for having the opportunity to be in ministry with you over the past two years. You have blessed me, changed me, challenged me to grow, and celebrated with me all that God has called us to be. If indeed MCC San Francisco does choose me as its next senior pastor, I will be able to say that I am the most blessed person I know, because God gave me the chance to serve the two most wonderful congregations that I know of in the world. And if for whatever reason MCC San Francisco changes its mind, I would be truly happy to remain here in Wichita Falls to serve this congregation if you would still have me. This has never been for me about leaving Wichita Falls, but about doing what I believe God wants me to do.

Finally, I know that it may be easy to think that the reason I am returning to California is so that I can live in San Francisco again. However, in the end, there is just one, true, and singular reason I applied for this position: because I believe with all my heart that it is what God wants me to do, just as I felt nearly three years ago God's calling to come to Wichita Falls. Had I chosen at that time to stay in San Francisco, I know that nothing in my life would have been as it should, because that is what happens when we are out of alignment with God's will for our lives. I know the same would be true if I chose at this point to stay in Wichita Falls and ignore this calling to serve in San Francisco, and I hope that eventually this will be an understanding that we all can share.

I don't really know how to end this announcement, except to speak one more truth, which is that I love you more than I can say. I am so grateful to have the opportunity to serve as your pastor, and I am so thankful for all of the innumerable blessings you have brought into my life. I will continue to be grateful to serve as

your pastor for as long as I am here, and I look forward to every day that we still have together in ministry as we serve the God we love, and as we celebrate all of who God has created us to be.

*With gratitude,
Lea*

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