

North Roanoke Baptist Church,

It was almost four years ago that I had the privilege of being hired to serve as the Student Pastor at North Roanoke Baptist Church. You hired a kid in his early twenties who looked like he was in his mid-teens. I have grown over the last few years, both spiritually and in my family. It has been some of the best years of my life. You have loved me well, for which I am grateful, and I have done my best to serve the students well. I am humbled by how God has moved and continues to move in this ministry. I know I have not been perfect, but I have done my best.

The ministry team is wonderful. I have been challenged more over the last few years than at any other point in my life. They genuinely love God, one another, and this church. We are so blessed to have them. I certainly do not take it for granted. The leaders around me in the student ministry are spectacular. They have been a blessing to my soul. Their encouragement and support are always above-and-beyond what I could wish. They really love the students and want to see them grow.

It is with a heavy heart that I must announce that I will be resigning my position at the end of July. I have always felt called to teach and study, and God has provided me the opportunity to pursue a Doctor of Philosophy in Theology degree at Liberty University. I begin my classes in the fall and know I will be unable to provide my best in both school and ministry. This is why I feel it is best to resign.

One wonderful aspect of attending Liberty is that my family and I will remain members at North Roanoke. We love the community and mission of this church. We see God moving and want to be a part of it. We love the leaders and support them wholeheartedly. This is the church where we want our daughter to grow up, at least for the foreseeable future. This means that, even though I will be resigning in July, we will be worshiping alongside you in August.

You may wonder why I am announcing so far in advance. The answer is that I want to do everything I can to ensure a smooth transition for my successor. I want to provide the search committee ample time to locate the person whom God has chosen for this position. I want to be transparent with the students and help encourage them through this process. I do not doubt that God will continue to move in the student ministry, and I am praying that revival is what they experience in the fall.

I am both excited and thankful for the opportunity to pursue this degree, but this letter, and the announcement to students that comes alongside, is the hardest part. It is what I have been dreading. Words cannot adequately express my affection for these students, their families, and the church as a whole. These are moments and memories I will cherish forever.

God is good. This did not catch him by surprise. My prayer is that He will be glorified in the work He has called me to do and that I would be faithful in it. My hope for this student ministry is a continued commitment to follow Christ, growth in grace and knowledge of the Word of God, and a heart that treasures Jesus above all else.

I look forward to serving in this role for the next few months and to worshiping with you come August.

In Christ,
Ethan Smith