



Dear Oakland family,

In April I will celebrate four years of being Pastor at Oakland Baptist Church! While there have been challenges, I've thoroughly enjoyed the past four years and I'm looking forward to what God has in store for our future. This past Sunday, January 31<sup>st</sup>, I laid out the plan for a year of visioning for our future. To listen to my entire sermon, visit our YouTube page by [CLICKING HERE](#).

In my sermon, I informed you that our Deacon Chairperson, per our constitution, has called for the creation of a Vision Team. Our Nominating Committee has worked hard to form this team and I am very pleased with the proposed slate of people who will serve on this team in the year ahead. To view the slate, click the button below. On Sunday, February 14<sup>th</sup>, the congregation will vote to approve this slate.

Perhaps you are asking yourself: "Why this year? Why start such a big undertaking when we are still dealing with COVID and many people do not feel comfortable being in the church building?" Those are good questions! My answer is: 1) We are church that seeks to be the presence of Christ at the crossroads of life. Certainly, the past year has proven to be one of the longest and widest crossroads any of us will ever face; yet some of our most difficult experiences provide fertile ground for God to do a great work. If our only desire is to return to the building, then we are missing out on a Spirit-led renewal of what it means to be the church. 2) We must still be about the work of the church. Just because we've faced some setbacks doesn't mean we can put everything on hold. In fact, we haven't put anything on hold. Ministry has continued even during the pandemic; and we must make plans for ministry to continue in the days ahead. 3) We've been handed a gift of space and emotional bandwidth in this year to consider what matters most—such as friendship and interaction—and what we can do without—such as more meetings and red tape. How can we build on these things? How can we discern what a post-COVID church will look like? The time is now for these conversations to take place.

With approval from our Deacons and Finance Committee, we are partnering with The Center for Healthy Churches to answer those questions. We've been assigned a coach, Jayne Davis, to guide us in these conversations. Jayne is the Associate Pastor for Discipleship at First Baptist Wilmington, NC. She's worked with a number of churches in the visioning process and she's written a book titled *Hopeful Imagination: Traditional Churches Finding God's Way in a Changing World*. I've personally vetted Jayne and I trust her to successfully guide us in the year ahead.

Together, Jayne and I have established four goals for the year ahead, as well as a timeline for achieving these goals. You may view the goals and our timeline by clicking on the button below. I encourage you to mark your calendars now for each of the congregational meetings in the coming months. I realize these meetings may have to be on a virtual format, but, whether in-person or virtual, it is vital we have full congregational attendance.

We have also created a tab on our website where you can find important dates, survey results, and updates on our progress as we walk through this year together. I want to be as transparent as possible throughout this journey. You can find our Visioning page on our website by [CLICKING HERE](#).

I pray you will join with me, our staff, and our Visioning Team in the year ahead. I also pray you will have an open mind and willing heart to seek out God's specific purpose for our church. Give this opportunity a chance! Join with me! Join with our team! And, most importantly, join with God! We must have God in the mix. It is God who gives us the vision. It is God who equips us to carry out the vision. As always, it is a privilege to serve as your Pastor. May God continue to use Oakland Baptist Church in the days and years ahead!

Grace and peace, Pastor Jeff