



May 22, 2017

Black Mountain Presbyterian Church family,

I want to share some exciting and sad news with you. In late July, I will end my time as your Associate Pastor so that our family can pursue a dream that we have nurtured and planned over the years. Katie and I are purchasing a sailboat, moving out of our house, and spending a couple of years living on the boat as a family and cruising the East Coast, the Bahamas, and the Caribbean. We will be exploring other parts of the world, exposing Aubry and Will to various cultures, spending significant time together as a family, meeting people from all over the world, and soaking in the power of God's creation by living in the rhythm of the tides, sun, and moon. This adventure before us will no doubt hold times of absolute joy and jubilation, as well as times of difficulty and discomfort ... as is true in life no matter where we find ourselves. My final Sunday at BMPC will be July 23rd.

Katie and I have been praying over this decision for some time, and we feel clearly called to carve out space in our lives now to more fully invest in our children and in our dreams. Both of our families as well as our closest friends are in full support of this decision. While we are excited about what lies ahead, we are grieving the beautiful life that we must say goodbye to in order to pursue it. Black Mountain Presbyterian Church has been our beloved home for these past five and a half years, and y'all have helped raise our children.

We arrived in Black Mountain in late 2011 when Katie was newly pregnant with Aubry and you have baptized both Aubry and Will. You've also made good on your promises to love them and help raise them in the faith. You have welcomed our whole family into your lives and into your homes and into your community. You have allowed me to be fully myself, which I'm aware is no small feat. Our family has found a home here and you have nurtured Katie and I as we have nurtured our own children with your help. Over these past five-and-a-half years, you have watched me grow into my role as your pastor and preacher, and you have allowed me to blossom into the person and pastor I am today. You have invited me into your homes and hospital rooms, into your hopes and fears, and into your joys and grief. You have allowed me into your lives in a sacred way that I consider a deep privilege and honor.

The kind of ministry that you have allowed me to enjoy at Black Mountain Presbyterian Church has been a true gift and a blessing – a “call” in the full sense of the word. You called me to invest in the lives of our youth, to help coordinate our church family's outreach and mission efforts, and provide worship leadership and pastoral care. It has been my privilege to do that and so much more while being your pastor. As you all know first-hand, Black Mountain Presbyterian is a superb community and I have no doubt you will boldly and faithfully move forward into the future that God has laid out before you. You have a strong and wise Session comprised of individuals who care deeply about this community, and your gifted and dedicated staff and lay leadership will continue to provide solid leadership in the days ahead.

Mary Oliver closes her poem *The Summer Day* with a powerful question: “Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?” It feels appropriate both as I begin to reflect upon my time with you and as I look forward to the adventure ahead for our family. I am humbled and grateful to name these past five-and-a-half years as part of what I've done with this life and these gifts that I have been given by the Creator. And this chapter ahead feels worthy of the wild and precious life that has been gifted to us.

How can I ever thank God enough for you and the privilege to serve as your pastor? I cannot. And so I simply say: I thank God for you and will continue to do so in every season of my life. You have made me the pastor that I am, and for that I will remain ever grateful. I know the days ahead will include grief as we begin the process of this leave-taking together and find ways to bless and release each other. There will be more to say and more to listen to between now and then. And when the time comes, I trust that you will release me with your blessing, even in the midst of grief and unknowing. My heart is full of gratitude for our time together and the way God's light shined through our shared ministry.

In peace and deep gratitude,

BERRY



May 22, 2017

Dear Friends,

In this season of Easter, as we decipher how we will respond to God's resurrection and grace in our lives, we each find ourselves in a time of discernment on how we are called to follow Jesus and live out our lives as children of God. This year at Black Mountain Presbyterian Church we have also been invited to examine "call" on an even broader scale. Through Every Disciple Has a Call, we have been challenged on how we will Worship, Grow and Serve God in the coming year at BMPC. How will we live out our discipleship in response to the amazing grace we receive in Christ?

Today I write to share news of yet another way in which God's call is at work among us. Tonight, at our stated session meeting, Berry French, Associate Pastor for Youth and Mission, asked the session to dissolve his Pastoral Relationship with Black Mountain Presbyterian Church. Needless to say, it was a bittersweet moment for all of us as we have all grown to know and love Berry but we can't help but be excited for Berry, Katie, Aubry and Will in this next journey of their life as they set sail and head up and down the Atlantic Ocean.

Berry has been with us on our faith journey for over five years now, helping to shape our youth and outreach ministries in meaningful and lasting ways. He has touched many of us profoundly through his pastoral care and his resonating and challenging words from the pulpit. And I for one will really miss his energy and Woo-Hoos! We have truly been blessed in so many ways by his presence among us. And so we are sad to see Berry leave us. We will deeply miss him and all that he brings to our life together. But we also, out of our affection for Berry and his family, release him and are so very excited that they will have this wonderful new opportunity to grow in new and exciting ways as a family.

The Personnel Committee and I will be at work in the days ahead arranging for coverage of Berry's responsibilities after he leaves us. There will be a congregational meeting on Sunday, June 4, so that we, as a community, can take the formal action of dissolving our call relationship with Berry.

Berry's final Sunday at Black Mountain Presbyterian Church will be July 23, when he will preach during both worship services. We will also have special celebrations in Berry's honor that day, both following the 9:15 FirstLight Service and the 11:00 service.

In the days ahead, please join me in keeping Berry, Katie, Aubry and Will in prayer, and please plan to be with us on July 23, as we celebrate and give thanks for Berry's work at BMPC and wish them all Godspeed in this exciting next chapter in their life.

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Katherine". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mary Katherine Robinson
Pastor and Head of Staff