

To FBC Cedarville,

First of all, I want you to know how deeply grateful Mallorie and I are for each and every one of you. It has been an absolute joy to walk with you and to learn (sometimes in real time) what it means to pastor this church over the last year. (Truth be told, I'm still figuring some of that out as you read this.)

For those who were present last Sunday, during our Church Business Meeting the church voted to bring me on full time, fully supported by our own church budget. It's my understanding this is the first time in over 20 years the church has had a full time pastor. Over the past year, First Baptist Alma graciously supplemented my income so that I could serve full time during my first year here. They generously contributed \$16,500, and I am deeply thankful for their support and partnership in ministry.

When I came to Cedarville, there was never any assumption or pressure that our church would be able to continue that level of support beyond the first year. I fully expected that by March I would become bivocational. In fact, I had already begun subbing in local schools and reaching out to friends about part-time work so I could continue serving faithfully as your pastor.

However, through the diligent leadership of our Budget Committee (Gary Widner, Terry Bibbs, Ruth Laming, and Teresa Robinson) they carefully reviewed our finances, evaluated our giving trends, and prayerfully concluded that we could move forward with me serving full time. Giving had increased some toward the end of 2025, and we were also able to account for insurance expenses we won't incur for a couple of years due to prior claims. I am honestly blown away not just that this was considered, but that the church voted in favor of it.

Please know that if there ever comes a time when giving declines and it becomes necessary for me to go bivocational, I would do so without hesitation in order to continue serving here. But I am profoundly grateful that you see value in me being able to give my full attention to our church, to preaching and teaching, hospital and home visits, discipleship, planning, praying, and shepherding the people God has entrusted to us.

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I'm writing this because I knew I wouldn't be able to fully express everything I needed to say in the moment if I tried to from the pulpit - I'd end up emotional and forget half of this. This decision has been incredibly encouraging to me and to my family. It has strengthened my resolve and deepened my love for the church. I am praying with great expectation that the Lord will continue to bless FBC Cedarville in ways we can't even imagine yet.

My hope and prayer for this new year is that we continue to see growth, numerical growth, yes, but even more so spiritual growth. That our people would boldly share their faith, feel equipped to do so, and rejoice as we see lives changed by the Gospel. That we would celebrate baptisms through new believers and students coming to faith, and watch the Lord display His glory right here in Cedarville, Arkansas as only He can.

Thank you, from the bottom of my heart, to every member and attender who faithfully gives, prays, and serves. Thank you for allowing me to play a small part in what God is doing in this community.

Let's get after it.

With deep gratitude,
JD & Mallorie Finley