

Pastoral Succussion at Calvary Chapel Chelmsford
Personal Notes and Reflections

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Back in the day, our family had a pretty good routine: we worked hard during the school year, but August was our time to unwind and get ready for the fall church programs and new school year in September. We found a lovely, affordable spot at a Christian campground on Lake Winnepesaukee where we would spend the whole month together as a family. Our kids, Becky and Tim, loved the freedom to ride their bikes without worrying about traffic, hang out with their friends, enjoy the beach, participate in vacation bible school, and attend kids' church on Sundays. In the evenings, we relaxed with ice cream, minigolf, and roasting marshmallows over the campfire. We had such a great time, and when the kids moved out, got married, and started bringing us grandkids, Jan and I cherished the time even more.

During one of our long evening chats in August of 2016 Jan shocked me with the words. "Ed, I'm done leading women's ministry and counseling at the church. I want to spend more time with my grandkids!" Over the next week, we prayed and discussed who could take over the roles Jan was so good in. This wasn't too hard because Jan had a natural talent for helping and training people.

Things went smoothly as we transitioned the women's ministry, but Jan wasn't feeling her best. She was tired and generally felt unwell. Doctor visits didn't find any problems, so we thought she just needed to rest, which only reinforced the sense that it was time for her to leave staff ministry. That's when we started serious conversations about how I could change my schedule and think about who would take over for me.

Though Jan's health seemed to improve for a time it started to decline again in January 2017. On April 1st, I asked her to see her primary care doctor. That afternoon, I got a call that she was in the ER, a mass was found in her abdomen, and the tests revealed metastasized cancer. The ladies from church responded to this crisis with incredibly support. Jan and I spent three months together, talking about all the ups and downs of life. We gave each other grace and, where needed, forgiveness. Jan encouraged me to take care of the grandkids, keep serving the Lord, and to remarry when she went to heaven. She was such a remarkable, kind wife and full of wisdom. After many tears, prayers, and chemotherapy, Jan went home to heaven on Saturday, July 1, 2017, at 6:03 p.m. We loved each other through 38 years of marriage, two kids, three grandchildren, and shared ministry together for all those years.

The next morning, Becky, Tim, and I shared at both Sunday services, comforting everyone by letting them know that Jan was home with the Lord. My good friend Pastor Jim Warner, who was an associate pastor at an Arizona CC, came to our rescue during this time. With his lead pastor and church congregation's blessings, Jim was allowed to come to Chelmsford. He comforted all our hearts, officiated Jan's funeral, taught on Sundays, and pastored the church through August.

I spent July at Lake Winnepesaukee but through a variety of circumstances was needed to teach at our Manchester campus in the month August. It was starting to become clear that our church structure wasn't working, and we needed to make some changes.

I came back to Chelmsford in September with a strong determination to make the necessary changes. The leadership was very supportive, so with prayer and a lot of conversations, we reorganized our

leadership structure. We cut down the number of people reporting directly to me and handed over the responsibility of pastoral care to the small group leaders as being the first responders for the people. The church was grieving the loss of Jan and this change brought a new kind of grief - some didn't quite understand, and I shared my feelings with the congregation:

"The change in leadership structure has made some of us feel a bit lost, and others are worried about the church becoming less about relationships. It's been tough for some not to be able to get ideas through directly or have decisions made by me. I feel the same way about not being in the loop of every decision, but I don't feel any loss in our relationships. I've been able to be compassionate to the pastoral needs within our church. I've been able to provide some relational support to my family. I've been able to love and be loved by others. I've been able to fully engage in the weekend teaching process in a way that has been life-giving and joyful. These things wouldn't have been possible without the change in leadership structure. I believe that the benefits will bring glory to Christ and will result in our increased fruitfulness in Kingdom work and deep joy in our souls. I'm here to answer any questions, pray with you, or share my heart. Please come to me after one of our weekend services—I'm here for you!"

My family and close friends were my rock as we entered this new season. They helped me make tough choices and encouraged me to take steps forward. I gifted our camper at the lake to a wonderful family, spent quality time with my grandkids, sold my home, and moved into a friend's in-law apartment. Along the way, I met Nancy, a wonderful lady who felt like a kindred spirit. My children and friends reminded me that Jan had anticipated this and didn't want me to be alone. In May 2019, I married Nancy and moved to Salem on the coast.

Everything was going great until the public health officials closed in-person gatherings on the second Sunday of March, 2020, due to the COVID pandemic. Our insurance company warned us that they wouldn't cover any legal suits if we continued in-person meetings. We quickly switched to an online format with outdoor meetings when the weather got warmer. Sadly, during this time, a beloved elder passed away from COVID. It was a difficult loss, but we knew Stephen was with the Lord. The political and social upheaval was beyond comprehension with strong conflict with some in our congregation for not continuing our in-person gatherings, even though we were meeting outdoors.

I was determined not to let the COVID shutdown defeat me, and once the restrictions were lifted, I was committed to working as hard and as long as needed to help the church not only survive but thrive again. I was also resolved that once I had overcome this challenge, I would step down as lead pastor. I felt I had done everything I could with the resources I had. I coached soccer for 20 years, and I would tell my players, "As a team, we can't control the outcome of all our matches, but we can be determined to leave all we have on the field of play regardless of the score." I can say, I gave everything (spiritual, emotional, physical, financial) to the Lord's work, and I can rest in the outcome.

I began asking the Lord who could replace me as lead pastor. I consulted with a few people who advised me that if I posted a job opening for a mid-size church with a competitive compensation package I would receive at least one hundred applicants. I wasn't opposed to someone coming from outside our fellowship, but I did know, based on the experience of other local churches, that it could easily result in an unintentional interim pastor or worse, someone who used church assets for personal gain.

My internal search for a new pastor yielded one couple, Chris and Cara. They began attending CC Chelmsford in 2019. As singles, they served in Sunday School and youth ministry and participated in a

home fellowship group. As a couple, they made a positive impact on the Sunday school and youth; people appreciated their heart for the Lord and friendship. I got to know them on a personal level, officiated at their wedding in 2021, and dedicated their firstborn, Isaac Peter, in 2024.

Back in December 2021, Chris was in the sanctuary, and I felt a Holy Spirit nudge me to explore the idea of vocational ministry with him. I mentioned, “I think you’ve got a calling to be a pastor; would you consider going to seminary?” Chris was excited but wanted to talk with Cara first. After that chat, we spent a lot of time talking about “call to ministry.” I told both Chris and Cara that, at the end of the day, all you’ll have is each other and “the call.” If you and Cara don’t feel God’s call to ministry, please enjoy family life and your engineering work. But if God has called you, He has a wonderful plan for your life, and you’ll find a joy and purpose for your lives that’s unmatched.

Chris and Cara spent time in prayer and processed the decision with family, friends, and church leaders. Their response was an unqualified yes to vocational ministry. I agreed and with the board and elders, started a formal process in 2023. We approached it carefully and prayerfully, working together and at a steady pace, keeping in line with the church’s biblical beliefs and our ministry philosophy. You can find more about our leadership process in the attached Leadership Training Manual, and historical details in the attached outline of events.

Nancy and I soon realized that the church budget couldn’t support two full-time pastors. It was clear to us and to Chris that to be actively mentored, finish seminary and grow in his skills he would have to leave his engineering job and devote all his attention to becoming a pastor. We carefully looked at our finances, talked with our financial planner, prayed, and decided to sell our home and move to Florida to be close to family. We moved in November 2025 and continue to support Pastor Chris and CC Chelmsford with monthly visits, mentoring, and governance.

The past three years have been a whirlwind, and everything has turned out better than we could have imagined. CC Chelmsford now has a new, younger pastoral couple, and the church is well into a generational transition. Nancy and I have landed in a wonderful place with family close by for the next part of our journey with the Lord. I’m deeply grateful for the years God allowed me to serve this church, for the people who served alongside me, and for His faithfulness through every season—both the joyful ones and the difficult ones. My prayer has always been that CC Chelmsford would belong to Christ, not to any one pastor or generation. I believe the church is in good hands, and I look forward with gratitude and confidence to seeing what the Lord does in the years ahead.