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April 10, 2018

Dear beloved members and friends of Westminster Presbyterian Church,

This letter will come as a surprise to most of you. After much discernment in prayer together with my family and longtime friends in ministry, I'm writing to announce my retirement. My last Sunday with you will be June 24, 2018.

I am deeply content with my time as your senior pastor. You are such a healthy church. When I tell people about you, I say, "They simply don't know how to turn a molehill into a mountain." You constantly look toward the future. You truly care about the world beyond the church. You show up. I cherish worship with you, surrounded by your singing. And I've personally experienced the grace and compassion you offer when, with great kindness, you saw me through the loss of my parents.

Although many of you have been through changes in pastoral leadership before, some of you have not. I remind you that the church is its people and not its pastors. There is no rogues' gallery of former pastors on the walls of Westminster. This is a congregation who understands that pastors serve with their particular gifts, and then they move on. Jack Stewart, Bill Evertsberg, Riley Jensen—our most recent senior pastors—were great leaders of the church. They all moved on and Westminster has thrived. It will happen again.

I always wondered if I would know when to retire from congregational ministry. I know of preachers who died in the pulpit. That's not me. Though quite recovered from my stroke in 2016, my brush with mortality inspired me to reflect on my next chapter of life. I'm curious and confident about a new pace and a new life. Karen and I plan to stay here in Grand Rapids near the kids, and I plan to do more singing and playing. I also look forward to continuing my work with CREDO, mentoring early- and mid-career pastors in intensives around the country.

I have loved serving as your senior pastor. I am deeply grateful for what you've invited me to be a part of here for ten years. Although I didn't expect to feel such clarity at this point in my life, I feel a sense of closure and completeness about my ministry. I am, as ever, excited about Westminster's future and feel clearly that it's a good time, the right time, to invite new leadership to head this amazing team.

With special gratitude to the members of the Pastoral Nominating Committee who invited me to Westminster and to all of you for affirming my call to the most rewarding season of my 35 years in ordained ministry: *Thank you.*

And now, as the earliest of letters in the Church always concluded, I say, Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chandler".

Rev. Chandler Stokes, Senior Pastor and Head of Staff