

A Letter to Our Great Commission Partners

After over 15 months of processing and praying, **God has transitioned the Conner family (Dustin, Jill, Kirk & Jane) into a new chapter of ministry** from Hope Hills Church in Calgary, Canada to Calvary Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, NC. This past July, we asked our Hope Hills Church family to send our family on to our next “Greater Work” that God had in mind for us. **We began our new ministry assignment at Calvary in August.** The transition happened very fast but God affirmed in so many ways it was the right timing and place to go to. We started sensing this past winter that a change was coming but did not feel like we should pursue anything, but instead pray and wait for God to bring us an opportunity in His timing. The decision to leave Calgary after 8 years was very hard for us to make and took over a year to decide. God brought several things together quickly and unexpectedly, but we are confident it's the right decision and timing for our family. We absolutely love Hope Hills Church and all the amazing people we developed relationships with and served Jesus with there these last 8 years! God allowed us to be a part of starting new ministries from scratch that we would have never dreamed of being a part of. We have formed lifelong friends, discipled new followers of Jesus, and raised up leaders to not just keep the ministry going but to multiply the work God allowed us to be a part of starting. God is good and faithful!

Thank you for praying for us so faithfully. Thank you for coming to serve our church, community and family with mission teams. Thank you for generously supporting us financially. The return on your investment is worth it and is still producing results for God's glory. Thank you for being in our corner and giving us the ability to keep going through the many highs and lows of church planting work in Calgary. You will forever be dear to us and we can't convey what an impact you have had on our family and for the city of Calgary. **We love you!**

The Apostle Paul puts in words so well what I'd like to say to you: *“I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.”* – **Philippians 1:3-8**

Dustin, Jill, Kirk & Jane Conner

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The Full Story for Your Leadership Team

This transition brings a lot of questions for you or your team that I am happy to sit down and discuss anytime. I'd love to schedule a conversation with you to go over the full story and answer any questions you have about sending mission teams and updating financial giving method. You can schedule that with me at calendly.com/dustinconner or call/text me at my new number **336-972-4720**. If you're near Winston-Salem, I'd love to come visit!

Why this transition now?

Our family needed an "off-season" from the work of Lead Pastoring

Nothing bad happened to prompt this transition...in fact, ministry was going really well! Hope Hills Church of Calgary was growing. Our disciple-making efforts were seeing fruit. Our Leadership Team was owning their roles and supporting me in amazing ways! So it was a little confusing at first when we felt like a transition was coming. To be honest, it felt very selfish to pray about stepping down as the Lead Pastor to pursue the potential of being in a leadership development role at Hope Hills Church and the Aspen Church Planting Network. Then it felt even more selfish when God clearly closed that door and gave us permission to pray about moving back to North Carolina. So we prayed and waited.

In winter 2024—right at the 7 year mark of ministry in Calgary—Jill and I started to realize that not just me (Dustin) but our whole family needed an "off-season" from being the Lead Pastor family at Hope Hills Church in order to rest and be refreshed so we could produce more ministry fruit going forward. We've discussed this need like a tree going dormant in the winter so it can be ready to produce fruit in the spring. The last 8 years of church planting, merging, replanting, pastoring, supporting other churches, disciple-making, content creation, and ministry starting simply has our family a bit depleted and in need of rejuvenation. I personally feel like I've been running on fumes the last 2 years and couldn't seem to get any refilling while serving in the role of Lead Pastor. We thought at first that we might find this "dormancy" by me stepping down as the Lead Pastor at Hope Hills Church but staying on staff there in a mobilization and multiplication role so we can raise up more disciple-makers, leaders, pastors, and church planters. But God never opened that door. So we shifted our prayers.

Early in 2024, I started feeling that God was clarifying my personal ministry calling to focus on serving and supporting other pastors and church planters. Andrew

Fuller was a British pastor who could not join William Carey's missionary team in the late 1700s and instead stayed in London to recruit prayer and financial partners for them. Carey told Fuller, "I'll go down the pit if you'll hold the rope." I get energized as I hold "ropes" for other pastors and church planters by supporting, coaching, encouraging, and mobilizing them for gospel multiplication. It was getting harder for me to be fully available as a Lead Pastor to our growing/multiplying church family and help with coaching and training other church planters in Calgary.

How did this transition develop?

We explored several options to help our family stay and thrive in Calgary but none worked out or felt like God's will. But God orchestrated our transition and my replacement seamlessly.

Jill and I explored taking a sabbatical, bringing on additional staff at Hope Hills, and met with an immigration lawyer last fall to begin the process of getting Permanent Residency status so I could be bi-vocational if needed. None of these options were feasible, leading us this past winter to intentionally pray for God's guidance and wait for him to clarify what our next chapter will look like.

A conversation with a friend in the U.S. this past January led to a series of conversations with the leadership at Calvary Baptist Church in Winston-Salem (our sending and lead supporting church) to join their staff as the Associate Campus Pastor at Calvary West in Advance, NC. I will lead their adult discipleship, next steps, and outreach ministries—three areas of ministry I love and led while in Calgary! This opportunity came to us and was a pleasant surprise! It puts us closer to family and provides the needed time for a "dormancy" from being a Lead Pastor while staying in ministry work. I'll also have some opportunities to stay involved in church planting by supporting and coaching a few aspiring church planters in both North Carolina and Calgary, Canada! I started the first week of August at Calvary.

I'd like to emphasize two things about this decision:

1) It was not due to any wrong done to us or by us. Things were really good in Calgary and Hope Hills Church was always so kind and loving to me and the family! No moral or personal failure. No toxic environments.

2) The decision to leave Calgary was harder than the decision to go there. We planted roots, built lifelong friendships, and did a lot of work in Calgary for which we praise God for! We miss our friends and co-laborers dearly but will visit and check-in as often as we can.

We were able to call my replacement a month before we moved. **Jamie Hunka** was a member and leader at Hope Hills and has aspired to pastor a church for several years. While God was preparing the Conners to move, He was preparing the Hunkas to stay. He's from Calgary, has family there, and has been active in church leadership for over a decade. I trust him fully in this new role and he fully intends on not maintaining the ministry but multiplying it! He owned our vision and has faithfully lived out our mission. He has taken up the mantle to lead Hope Hills into her next chapter of making a gospel difference in NW Calgary and beyond. Jamie is going to take Hope Hills further than I ever could and I am so excited to watch and champion him from a distance! *I'd love for you and your church/org. to continue supporting Jamie and Hope Hills church by praying, coming, giving, and taking!*

- **Keep praying for them regularly!** Our community doubled in size while we lived there from about 30,000 people to around 70,000 people and Hope Hills is just one of now 3 evangelical churches in that area.
- **Consider continuing your financial support.** The one thing I was not able to get the church to was being fully self-supported financially. Covid reset our timeline and progress, but by God's grace, we left the church with it being almost 70% supported from the inside and that number has been trending in the right direction. They'll need external partnership support for at least the next 2-3 years.
- **Send mission teams every summer.** The kids camps and outreach events work to help meet new families and start new gospel relationships. Plus, Hope Hills Church has become one of the leaders in community outreach in Calgary and have started helping several other church plants begin effective and creative outreach camps, events, and initiatives.
- **Keep taking back ideas you learn through partnering in Calgary.** One thing I'm excited about in coming back to North Carolina is that we get to be a lot closer to our partner churches. I'd love to be a resource to you and your church. There are things we learned about disciple-making and church planting in Calgary that I think could be a benefit to your church/org.
 - We developed 5 simple discipleship tools to help not-yet and new believers along a pathway of finding and following Christ that I'd be happy to share and do trainings with.
 - We saw Discovery Bible Studies help non-believers from various religious and ethnic backgrounds come to Christ and I have a workshop based on that I can come do.
 - We created a simple discipleship pathway that starts with non-believers and integrates creative outreach, effective evangelism, and clear discipleship steps to help people know how to find and follow Jesus and help others do the same.

- I was privileged to be a part of directing the North American Mission Board's Church Planting Assessment Centre for Western Canada, serve as a church planting coach, and do some church planting training.
- I'm happy to share resources and host training workshops for your people if you believe it could help your church make disciples and plant churches in your community.

What does this mean for our partner churches?

Please consider continuing your partnership with Hope Hills Church and their ministry to a city that is 95% unchurched

I know this transition brings a lot of questions about partnership that I'm happy to discuss with you and your leadership team anytime. But the work in Calgary is far from finished!

- Calgary added 96,000 new people in the 12 months before we left
- Calgary is still estimated to be about 95% unchurched
- Calgary still needs more disciples made and new churches planted
- Hope Hills Church is still committed to helping our lost neighbours *connect with God, connect with others, and connect others with God.*
- The Aspen Church Planting Network we helped start in 2018 has grown from 1 to 13 churches in 8 years and has over a dozen potential church planters being developed! That's a movement in the making that you can still resource!

I'd love for you, your church, or your network to still consider investing in the work God is doing in Calgary. Hope Hills Church is not yet financially self-sustaining but is moving in that direction at a healthy pace. The Aspen Network is multiplying mission team needs every summer with all the new plants entering and engaging in new communities!

- **Keep praying** for Hope Hills Church and the 95% still unchurched in Calgary
- **Send** your people on mission teams...I'll be leading them from Calgary!
- **Consider partnering financially** with Hope Hills or the Aspen Network

Financial giving can now be given through the Aspen Network instead of the Conner's NAMB account. Scan the QR code or visit www.hopehills.church/partner.



We're a mix of emotions right now! Grateful, sad, and expectant! Most of all, we want to follow God in what he is doing with us and where he is leading us. And as I shared with Hope Hills Church on my last Sunday, ***"I am not resigning as your pastor, but I am requesting that you, our Hope Hills family, send me and my family on to our next "Greater Work" assignment that God has in mind for us."***

The last 2 months have been a whirlwind of transitioning leadership at Hope Hills, wrapping up ministry responsibilities in Calgary, selling a house and car, packing and driving a Uhaul (again) across the country. I apologize this letter came after our move. I simply had very little capacity with such a quick, big transition. But I would love to meet with you in-person or via video call soon to answer any questions and discuss next steps for you and/or your congregation.

With great love, affection, and appreciation,

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