I heard recently of this bulletin blooper. The pastor will preach his farewell message, after which the choir will sing, "Break Forth Into Joy." I am pleased that no such error was found in this morning’s bulletin and the choir will actually be singing a “Blessing” after the message.

What does one say to his congregation after 28 years of ministry? What a privilege it has been to be your pastor.

I have put on many hats throughout my ministry and I have been blessed by so many unique, faithful and loving servants of God. There are so many things I could say to you this morning. I have chosen just a few truths what God has made so clear to me over my years of ministry. The first is

1. **THIS IS GOD’S CHURCH** NOT DON COLLAR’S CHURCH

Jesus said, "I will build My church" Matthew 16: 18

I was reminded again and again that Bilberry was never my church. It has always been and always will be Christ’s church. God gets all the glory for anything good that has come out of here. He is the One who has been forever faithful. He is the one who has transformed lives through His Word not me. It has been a joy to see people come to know God intimately and walk with them in their struggles discovering that God is able to meet their every need. I have been humbled to watch people grow in faith and become victorious in their daily walk.

Yes, God is the One who promises to preserve the people who will glorify His name. And that song of praise has resounded from the first day I got here.

Secondly, I have learned that

2. **GOD ANSWERS PRAYER**

“Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.' Jeremiah 33:3

I have seen God answer prayers for resources we did not have. We were meeting in Our Lady of Wisdom School and we desperately needed a parcel of land that to build the church. We prayed and land became available
on Innes Road. However, it was not zoned institutional and we still needed to acquire land in a growing community that had not zone any sites particularly for churches. So we prayed some more and at just the right time, God brought a Christian real estate agent to Bilberry. He worked tirelessly, believing that God had brought him to us for such a time. He negotiated a land swap for Cote House in exchange for the land we are on today which had been zoned for institutional purposes. Having obtained the lot, we ran into another dilemma. We needed $40,000 worth of fill to bring it up to a level suitable to build on. But we had no money. So we prayed! Shortly after, a contractor contacted the church seeking permission to dump clean fill on our lot. He would give the fill for free and grad it as well. God was teaching us to pray and He provided for us again and again

I’ve been blessed throughout my ministry to watch God perform the miraculous. God has time and time again miraculously intervened in peoples lives to provide physical heal when all medical avenues were exhausted. Some of you here this morning are a living testimony to that. God does answer prayer in His time and in His way. In my years of ministry, I am more and more convinced that

3. GOD WORKS IN AND THROUGH WEAKNESS

God said to Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” 2 Corinthians 12:9

I was called to Bilberry in spite of my weaknesses. I was a young 34 year old pastor who knew nothing about church planting and who fit few of the criteria that the search committee were looking for in a pastor. I didn’t have a Master’s of Theology degree. I was not bilingual. I had not pastored a suburban congregation before. I had never planted a church. My gifts were neither evangelism nor administration. Yet, God moved in both the hearts of the committee and my heart and I accepted God’s call to pastor this congregation.

In February, 1985 Cathy, 4 year old Bradley and myself started on God’s excellent adventure for our lives. From day one, God knew that I could not do this alone and that I needed a group of gifted believers to come along side me in my weakness if Bilberry was to thrive. God did just that. It was almost uncanny. At just the right time, God sent special people with just the right
gift mix, at just the right time, to make up this unique, diverse community of believers with a vision to reach Orleans for Christ. God delighted in our weaknesses and we rejoiced in His strength. God has taught me so much during my ministry here both through His word and through His people.

As your pastor, I want to ask you to do some vital things as you face the exciting days that God has ahead for you. I pray that you will

1. REJOICE IN GOD’S GRACE AND FAVOUR

Psalm 90, the oldest of the Psalms and the only Psalm we have that is written by Moses in the form of a prayer song. It was at the end of his life, at the end of the wilderness wanderings of forty years. In verse 17 he prays: “May the favour of the Lord our God rest on us; establish the work of our hands for us—yes, establish the work of our hands. Psalm 90:17

This was my prayer for Bilberry 28 years ago and this is my prayer for you today that you would rejoice in God’s grace and favour.

As I look back, I have seen that the favour of the Lord has rested on us and He has established the work of our hands.”

Friends, recognize it, name it, celebrate it and thank God for it. It has been His doing, and it will continue to be His doing! Since being planted in 1984, Bilberry has grown and ministered. In all of these years, there has been no financial scandal, no moral failure of a leader or any church split, but there has been an unusual harmony and grace! We have seen God at work among us changing our lives through the ups and downs. As far as I am concerned, that is God’s favour!! And I pray that Bilberry keeps praising God and recognizing Him at work in your midst. Secondly, I would ask that you would

2. RESPOND TO CHANGE IN THE RIGHT WAY

Solomon wisely wrote, “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...” Ecclesiastes 3:1

I promise you that there is one thing that will stay the same at Bilberry in the months that lie ahead regardless of anything else. What is it? CHANGE!

Do not fall for the trap of simply DOING church (going through the motions) rather than BEING the church. Being the church daily for the sake of the world is what matters most!
Do not become overly attached to what BCBC did in the past or even what it is doing today. Rather, look up and pray that God will help you in becoming all that you are to be for Jesus tomorrow! Remember, the message of the gospel never changes, but the methods and approaches must change as we seek to grow and win the lost for Jesus of this generation!! God has some exciting things He wants to do in and through you if you will follow His lead and not buck a change of direction.

Next, I would urge you all as you face this period of adjustment and change to

3. RISE UP IN THE RIGHT WAY!

Paul writes “I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” Ephesians 4:1-3

Friends, this is not the time to act selfishly and push for your own agenda in the life of the church. This is the time to rise up and become the Body of Christ like never before as Paul described to us in Ephesians 4.

This is a time to show yourselves and the world what knowing Christ is all about. Orleans desperately needs the people of God living and acting in a way that brings the warm light and flavour of God’s love to the city.

Jesus said, “By this shall all everyone know that you are my disciples if you love one another.” John 13:35 This is not the time to act up or walk off. It is the time to step up in love, grace and service like never before.

Finally, I have something to say to you as you prepare for the Pastor God has in mind for Bilberry. I want you to

4. RECOGNIZE AND REJOICE IN YOUR NEW PASTOR

However, you will only be able to do this as you

a. TRUST AND WAIT ON GOD’S LEADING

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding. In all you ways acknowledge Him, and he will direct your path.” Proverbs 3:5,6 Trust God. He has the very best in mind for you.
As Jeremiah 29:11 says “For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Do you believe God?

Do not rush ahead of God trying to fill the lead pastor’s position. Take your time! Wait for God’s person in God time. Petition God not the search committee for the person God has for you. Prayerfully wait for spiritual discernment in choosing the leader God has in mind for Bilberry.

b. PRAY FOR YOUR NEW PASTOR AND FAMILY, NOW

Start praying your pastor NOW! Do not wait until you have a face. He has one. I promise. Remember this: the first six months the new pastor is here may be really hard for him and his family. They will be adjusting and trying to build new relationships. There will be days when they may wonder what they have done! “

“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6,7 NLT

God encourages, answers prayers, and gives peace. So pray!

c. TRUST AND RESPECT YOUR NEW PASTOR

New pastors like old pastors make mistakes, regardless of how considerate they are of congregational habits, good and bad. He will be the least knowledgeable person about how the church operates. It short, he is vulnerable, especially susceptible to criticism; and it is unconscionable for anyone to subvert a new pastor by balking at every new initiative or slightest suggestion that –gasp- you might need to change something.

Listen to what God’s word says, “Dear brothers and sisters, honour those who are your leaders in the Lord’s work. They work hard among you and give you spiritual guidance. Show them great respect and wholehearted love because of their work. And live peacefully with each other.” 1 Thes. 5:12,13 NLT

The first two years will be spent building your trust and your friendship. The sooner you offer it to him, the more confidence and anointing he will lead you
with. You CAN hold him back if you do not encourage and accept him as God’s leader called to serve you! Also, please know that he is not the hired hand that does all the work! You are the ones who do the work of the ministry. God’s Word says, “God gave pastors to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.” Ephesians 4:12 The pastor leads the work as equipper…let him equip! You minister! Finally, 

d. REMEMBER, THE NEW PASTOR WILL NOT DON COLLAR

God made us all unique. When he made you, when he made me, God smashed the mould. Don’t compare any new pastor to me either quietly or publicly. Some of you will want to thank God that he is not me! Others may be ticked off at God that he is not me. Remember that I was called out of here, a new pastor will be called in, and you are called to trust God and pray for your pastor.

I pray that you will give a new pastor the same honour and respect that you have given me. Some words from Paul’s message to the Philippians are my parting words to you. Paul tells his beloved church to simply keep on doing what they’ve been doing, readily and cheerfully. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

“Go out into the world uncorrupted, a breath of fresh air in this squalid and polluted society. Provide people with a glimpse of good living and of the living God. Carry the light-giving Message into the night so I’ll have good cause to be proud of you...You’ll be living proof that I didn’t go to all this work for nothing.” Philippians 2:15-16 MSG

“My dear, dear friends! I love you so much. I do want the very best for you. You make me feel such joy, fill me with such pride. Don’t waver. Stay on track, steady in God.” Philippians 4:1 MSG

“Don’t fret or worry about the future. Instead pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God’s wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down.” Philippians 4:6 MSG

Summing it all up, friends, “Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honourable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you have learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing and the God of peace will be with you.” Philippians 4:8,9 NLT
Thank you Paul, for those beautiful words which express my hearts desire for all of you. And thank you BC Church for all the memories. I leave you all in the good hands of Pastor Bob and the deacons. You will be well taken care of. You all will remain in my prayers. Please keep me in yours as I seek God’s direction for the next part of my journey. I know God has exciting, amazing days in store for all of us if we will remain loving and faithful to our call.

With Paul, I can say to you with hope and optimism, “There has never been the slightest doubt in my mind that the God who started this great work in you would keep at it and bring it to a flourishing finish on the very day Christ Jesus appears.” Philippians 1:6