

Re: [External] McKnight Lead Minister Decision

From: Ethan Laster (ethan.laster@slu.edu)

To: bret_blackford@yahoo.com

Date: Thursday, July 11, 2024 at 10:30 AM CDT

Hello Bret,

Thank you for this email, and for the understanding. I am praying for McKnight as you all move forward.

And, happily, we are no longer awaiting baby Miriam—she was born yesterday morning around 7:30 am. She and Sarah are both doing great!

Thanks very much for your prayer, and for our game of catch :-)

All the best,
Ethan

On Jul 10, 2024, at 2:46 PM, M Bret Blackford <bret_blackford@yahoo.com> wrote:

This Message Is From an External Sender

Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe. When in doubt, please report the email to by clicking on the Report Suspicious button

Report Suspicious

Hi Ethan,

While I haven't consulted the other MX shepherds, I feel comfortable expressing our collective sentiments. Yes, we are disappointed that you won't be working with us next year, but we fully understand your decision.

Please know that we continue to pray for you and Sarah, and we firmly believe that God has a plan for you, even if it's not at McKnight.

You are a learned man, soon to be a PhD, and a gifted speaker with wisdom beyond your years. These qualities are exceptional, but what truly captured our attention was your desire to serve God and work with His body. We believe you have a calling that extends beyond academia, and my prayer is that after you finish your PhD, you will be open to using your gifts to serve and minister somewhere.

We are excited for you and Sarah as you eagerly await baby Miriam. You may be surprised at how much a child can deepen your love and understanding of our Father.

Please continue to pray for McKnight as we trust God to guide us in our next steps. This is His plan. I may not always understand it (or like it), but I trust it will lead to a greater good, even if I never see it.

---- Bret

On Tuesday, July 9, 2024 at 10:24:11 AM CDT, Ethan Laster <ethan.laster@slu.edu> wrote:

Dear McKnight Shepherds,

I know that this may come as a disappointment, but I am writing to let you know that I will be declining the offer to become the next lead minister at MX. I just got off the phone with Jeff informing him of the decision, and I also wanted to reach out to all of you directly.

As Sarah and I prayed about and discerned this offer over the last few weeks, we found, somewhat to our surprise, that the answer kept returning to "no." There was much about this job that made sense for us—a loving church in a city we love is a rare and wonderful thing. But the more we discussed how we wanted our lives to look, and how to best live into our values given the the current demands and pressures placed on us, we came to realize that saying "no" was the right choice.

The biggest factor for us was probably the time and attention I would be able to give Sarah and Miriam. By declining this offer, I have the opportunity to spend consistent time being with, and caring for, Miriam for the first 1-2 years of her life in a way that few fathers get. The closer we have gotten to Sarah's due date, the more we have realized how much we would need to sacrifice to make full-time ministry and dissertation writing work—both financially and attentionally—and it was family life that always suffered in that calculus. I also kept hearing from my family that they wanted me to prioritize my degree as much as possible, given the time and effort already invested. Programs like mine are extremely hard on families, and I wanted to honor their request to see it through.

This decision was especially hard for us, but we feel like it is the right one. I still think that ministry is in my future—it is such a wonderful calling—but after reviewing the offer, and taking the time to discern, I don't think that now is the right time.

We were so grateful for the warm welcome we received at McKnight, and we loved getting to know all of you, your wives, and the congregation you lead a little better. I hope you will understand, even if there is frustration and disappointment at my choice.

On a final note, I do want to say that I will still be around St. Louis for the time being, and while we will remain at Lafayette, I would be happy to fill in as the occasional preacher or teacher, should you be interested and have need.

Thank you, again, for your wonderful hospitality—I pray God's blessings over all of you and over your community.

All the best,
Ethan