

Beloved Megachurch Pastor Steps Down From Senior Role

Beloved megachurch pastor Joel Hunter announced he was stepping down from the senior pastor role at Northland, A Church Distributed, based in Orlando, Florida.

"Becky and I are going to continue serving our community by focusing on the poor and marginalized. We are grateful for the last season of ministry and looking forward to the next!" Hunter tells *Charisma News*. "My call to the pastoral role in the church is fulfilled."

Hunter stepped up as senior pastor in 1985, according to the Northland website. Under his leadership, the church expanded from 200 to more than 20,000, including online viewers.

Hunter is no stranger to the spotlight away from the pulpit.

He has been featured in national publications including *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. Three times, *Orlando Magazine* named Hunter one of Central Florida's "50 Most Powerful" citizens, and he has been interviewed on NPR and featured on programs such as *The Early Show*, CNN's *American Morning*, PBS' *Religion and Ethics* and *Anderson Cooper 360*.

"All of the issues in which I advocate that we take a moral responsibility are biblical admonitions," Hunter says. "As believers involved in compassion issues, we have our motivation from God via His holy Scriptures."

Hunter recently came under fire for hosting a seminar about how the church and the LGBT community can better dialogue with each other.

Some conservatives felt Hunter had fallen into a trap, which

Hunter firmly denies.

Church leaders say they are praying about what will come next.

In a letter to the congregation, lead pastor Vernon Rainwater writes:

On behalf of Northland's leadership, I want to let you know that Pastor Joel has expressed his intention to transition from his role as senior pastor of Northland Church. Our governing elders received this information today after he returned from his annual sabbatical. They have asked me to communicate this to you, the congregation.

It's been my great pleasure to serve alongside Pastor Joel and Becky for 32 years, 27 of those years as a pastor. Having worked closely with him, I know him to be a man of integrity, full of compassion for others and infectious love for Jesus Christ. No doubt you join me in gratitude for all that he has taught us about who God is and what He has done. His life and ministry have been a catalyst for worship and service throughout this city and around the world.

Pastor Joel made it clear to us that he is not finished serving God and this community; however, he has completed his pastoral call. Our elder board affirms him in this, and we look forward to hearing more from him in the coming weeks.

So what's next for Northland? Our governing elders are praying and seeking God for direction. What we do know is we will continue to be a community that includes the uninvited, the marginalized and gathers to worship God for who He is and what He has done. From its inception in 1972, Northland has been unwavering in its purpose: To bring people to maturity in Christ.