



AN EXCITING NEW CHAPTER IN THE STORY OF
VINEYARD COLUMBUS

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BY RICH NATHAN

"There is no success without a successor."

Nearly 20 years ago, I read a classic book on leadership by Jim Collins titled *Good to Great*. The book was about how to build enduring greatness in companies and institutions. Collins wrote, "Great companies (churches) are led by level 5 leaders. The good to great leaders never wanted to become larger-than-life heroes. They never aspired to be put on a pedestal. Level 5 leadership is not just about humility and modesty. It is equally about ferocious resolve, an almost stoic determination to do whatever needs to be done to make the company (church) great.

Level 5 leaders are incredibly ambitious, but their ambition is first and foremost for the cause, for the organization and its purposes, not themselves."

When I read these comments by Jim Collins two decades ago, I said to the Lord, "That's what I want to be! I want to give my life to making Vineyard Columbus into a great church. I want Vineyard Columbus to endure way beyond me and my leadership of the church."

Experts say that the best succession planning is gradual, thoughtful, intentional and one with lots of information shared along the way. That's the kind of succession planning we want to have at Vineyard Columbus. That's why we're announcing the succession plan two years before my transition to another role on Vineyard Columbus' church staff. **I'M NOT RETIRING!** Let me say this in a different way: **I'M NOT GOING ANYWHERE AND I'M NOT RETIRING!!**

After my last congregational letter, when I mentioned transitioning to a new role, I had many people come up to me or write a note to me saying, "We're so sad that you are retiring!" Then they shared really kind stories of the impact that my

ministry had on their lives. I am incredibly grateful for people's encouragement. I responded to them the way I will respond to everyone over the next two years. **I'M NOT RETIRING!** The plan is that in January 2021, when I turn 65 I will hand the leadership of Vineyard Columbus over to my successors. But the plan is to have me continue to preach on a preaching team until I'm 70. I'm still fabulously energized by preaching and seeing people come to Christ and then be transformed by his love. That never gets old! **But I also know that only God is eternal.**

Here's what the prophet Isaiah said 2,700 years ago:

⁶ A voice says, "Cry out."

And I said, "What shall I cry?"

"All people are like grass,
and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.

⁷ The grass withers and the flowers fall,
because the breath of the Lord blows on them.
Surely the people are grass.

⁸ The grass withers and the flowers fall,
but the word of our God endures forever."

²⁸ Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.

Isaiah 40:6-8, 28 (NIV)

The Church Belongs to Jesus

In my last congregational letter, I spoke about the steps Vineyard Columbus took to choose my successors. The group charged with interviewing candidates and recommending a successor unanimously recommended Eric and Julia Pickerill

to jointly become Vineyard Columbus' new senior pastors in January 2021. Our Church Council (made up of lay leaders and pastors) as well as our Pastoral Advisory Team (comprised of eight pastors) unanimously agreed with the Selection Committee's recommendation.

Our process was not merely a human weighing of the pros and cons of various candidates. Over the course of our history, Vineyard Columbus has sought to live out the truth that Jesus is the head of the church! He gets to call the shots, not us! He initiates and we follow!

About a decade ago, I felt that Eric Pickerill might become my successor. I saw in him the kind of leadership qualities that would be necessary to lead a church as large as Vineyard Columbus. I respect his pastoral warmth, his heart for the lost, his intelligence, his commitment to Vineyard values and the way people respond to his leadership. I also respect the way that God used Eric to build Joshua House (our twenty-something ministry) into a thriving community of more than 800 young adults.

Eric and I spoke about the possibility of him succeeding me before he and Julia left for Amsterdam to lead Vineyard Columbus' church planting team. While in Amsterdam, Julia had an opportunity to lead alongside of Eric as co-senior pastors. The Amsterdam church planting team thrived under their co-leadership. But more than that, they were able to plant a healthy, flourishing church in one of the most secular cities on earth and then turn the church over to indigenous leadership after seven years.

The lessons that Eric and Julia learned while leading the church on their own, far from Vineyard Columbus, in a very secular environment, will serve Vineyard Columbus as we face an increasingly post-Christian environment in America. Living in Europe for seven years gave Eric and Julia the tools Vineyard Columbus will need as we learn to do church in a culture that does not support Christianity.

The Lord spoke plainly to Eric and Julia while they were exploring church planting options upon their return to the US. The Lord said to them that they were to come back and serve at Vineyard Columbus! It was an unexpected word for them, especially since starting a new church is easier than taking over an existing church from a long-serving pastor. But God spoke—and that settled the matter for Eric and Julia. They feel called by the Lord to serve Vineyard Columbus!

Over the past year, I've had the opportunity to watch Julia up close as she served in the role of pastor to our staff. She has been exceptional in caring for people, in pointing us to Jesus, and in helping create a healthier work environment. The staff at Vineyard Columbus universally adores Julia. I've also found Julia to be an exceptional planner and extraordinary communicator.

While I was on sabbatical this past summer, I took a retreat at a monastery in order to pray about the succession decision. We did have other amazing candidates who were under consideration as my successor. Certainly, Dr. Charles Montgomery was never far from my thoughts. He's an extraordinary preacher and significant leader not only at Vineyard Columbus, but throughout the Vineyard movement. Charles will serve on our future core leadership team and as a Teacher-at-Large, releasing him to be more available for teaching at our campuses and within the larger Vineyard Movement, while he continues to serve as East Campus Pastor. But the Lord spoke to me while I was at the monastery and said that the decision regarding my successor would be a community decision. In other words, the Holy Spirit would confirm God's choice not just by my own sense of who my successor should be, but by a broad consensus of leaders at Vineyard Columbus.

We experienced an extraordinarily broad affirmation for Eric and Julia to succeed me via the unanimous support of our Selection Committee, the unanimous support of our Pastoral Advisory Team and the unanimous support of our Church Council. In addition, there was near unanimity of leaders at our church—young and old, male and female, black and white—who entirely on their own initiative selected Eric and Julia to succeed me. This communicated to me that Eric and Julia were indeed the Lord's choice for our future.

What You Should Expect

In January 2019, Eric and Julia will be appointed as Associate Pastors at Vineyard Columbus. They will work together with me and our broader leadership team to continue learning and developing so that they may successfully pastor our church in a couple of years. You'll be seeing more of Eric and Julia in our preaching rotation. But otherwise, you shouldn't notice any other big changes at our church. We continue to hold fast to the incredible deposits that God has given to us over our history. We will continue to be a church committed to biblical preaching, seeing lost people come into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, breaking down dividing walls between races, ministries of justice and mercy in our community, welcoming the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in our midst, healing the broken, passionate worship of the Triune God, global missions, and being the best friend our city has ever had!

While God has clearly blessed Vineyard Columbus in the past, I believe that our best days are ahead of us! I eagerly await the surprising gifts that the Lord has in store for us and for our city as we enter this new chapter in our story!



A Chat with the Pickerills

BY MAGGIE BAXTER

From life's milestones to times of crisis and everything in between, their pastoral hearts deeply minister to those the Lord's entrusted to them. They are both dreamers and doers, wise and daring, and always seeking the Holy Spirit.

This year the Pickerills will begin serving as co-associate pastors of our church. In January 2021, when Rich completes his transition out of the Senior Pastor role, they will take leadership of Vineyard Columbus.

Read on to get more of a glimpse of who they are and how God has prepared them for this role.

Tell us a story about one of your earliest experiences with the Vineyard.

Julia: Eric and I were just married when a dear friend invited us to visit Vineyard Columbus. Neither of us had heard of 'the vineyard' and wondered if she was bringing us to a wine tasting! Our first visit ended up (accidentally) being to an annual congregational business meeting, but it was very impactful for Eric and me! Even then - almost 25 years ago - the leaders talked about VC's emphasis on mission, preaching the gospel

and stewarding the church's resources so that Vineyard could be an outward-focused church.

Eric: Our second visit was to a Power Healing conference with John Wimber (the founding father of the Vineyard Movement). Being a term we'd never heard before, we expected some sort of inner-healing teaching. But instead, John invited the Holy Spirit to come and Julia and I experienced the power and presence of God in a way that was totally new; it turned our lives upside-down!

Of all Vineyard values, which speak most deeply to your heart? And how will you see to their flourishing in this next chapter for Vineyard Columbus?

Julia: There are two that stand out because they are values that I rarely see elsewhere. First, VC's commitment to the work of transforming the most segregated hour of the week (Sunday morning church) into the reconciled community of worshippers that we read about in the Apostle John's vision in Revelation 7. The Holy Spirit is doing a unique work in our midst; what many would call impossible work! And I love impossible things,

because it's in the impossible that we find our own weaknesses overwhelmed by the power of God. To see our community flourish, we must continue walking out this virtue of 'togetherness.' I'd like to initially focus on mirroring the diversity of our congregation in our leadership and staff communities.

The second value that stands out to me as a unique gift from God is Vineyard's kingdom theology: our ability to hold tensions! We believe in the now and the not yet, we're "both-and" Christians, we are missionary people and disciple-making people. We can't ever let go of these tensions. If we did, we'd lose the story of God, and we'd lose the ability to speak fully into people's lives in ways that are saving, healing and transformational.

How has your 20+ year friendship with Rich informed who you are and how you pastor and lead?

Eric: I've worked closely with Rich for 22 years. Even while we were abroad in Amsterdam, we spoke often. He has been a mentor, friend and much-needed voice of challenge. It's impossible to overstate his influence in our lives. Because of him we are better preachers, leaders and theologians. Our values and our views of the mission of the local church have been deeply informed by him. But like the saying goes, most things are more 'caught than taught.' We've caught so much: an insatiable commitment to listening for God's voice, and to following the call of God no matter what. Rich has always been bold and willing to enter into what many would call 'impossible places': whether that had to do with pursuing justice, being the best friend our city ever had, racial reconciliation and a commitment to diversity or preaching the gospel unabashedly. He's modeled integrity and a bold faith in what God can do when we say 'yes' and follow the Spirit. We've caught these things and more from him.

Julia: Rich opened a lot of doors for me as a woman with regard to my calling to preach and to pastor. A highlight was 13 years ago: when he invited me to teach at a main session at our Vineyard National Pastors' Conference. I've been platformed, taught, mentored, challenged and developed in really intentional ways. This catalyzed my own passion for raising up and releasing younger leaders. Rich being both my pastor and my friend has influenced my entire development, really.

What dreams, scriptures, prophetic words, etc. has God used to guide you toward this new role as co-Senior Pastors?

Eric: When we returned from Amsterdam in 2015, we weren't sure where God was leading us next. We had been changed by living on the front lines of one of the most secular cities in the world and reaching people who were totally disinterested in God or church. Initially, I struggled with the idea of settling back

into life as we once knew it and we even started planning to move to Boulder, Colorado (thinking that was one of the most secular places we could find in America) to church plant. We flew our whole family there to figure out housing, schools, etc... And it was precisely then that the Lord very clearly interrupted me and gave me a specific burden—not for Boulder—but for Columbus. He showed me what Vineyard Columbus could continue to be in the future. I saw a picture of one church in ten diverse congregations around the city that were living out the kingdom in different ways. My heart caught fire and I thought, 'This is just like God, allowing us to go to the place where we wanted to be so he could show us the place he wants us to be.'

Julia: Around the same time that the Lord spoke to Eric, God gave me a very clear and intersecting word – that he was constraining me to love and serve Vineyard Columbus. In that moment – I can recall where I was sitting when I heard God speak – our family's entire expectation of our future changed! And it didn't just shift logistically – something shifted in our souls. The peace and clarity we'd been looking for in our transition finally fell on us. We experienced much external confirmation of our internal leading as well.

Vineyard Columbus' mission is to develop a community of disciples who experience God, love one another, and partner with Christ to heal the world. How do you see us pursuing this mission in the future?

Eric: So much of our future is connected with what God has done in the past. He has not only developed one community of disciples, but five of them all around the city. We want to see that multiply: not just five campuses reaching our city, but ten. We want to see God do what he has already done over and over again in our lives. There are so many more people in our city that need to be reached with the life-changing power of Christ: those who are stuck, those who are lonely, the many who are unseen or marginalized, the forgotten and the lost. Through grace and by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we believe that Vineyard Columbus will broaden our call to love our city one person at a time, one family at a time, one neighborhood at a time.

Our church has gone from overwhelmingly white and native-born to incredibly diverse, both racially and ethnically. What's that been like for you?

Eric: When we moved to Amsterdam in 2008, Vineyard Columbus was just beginning to grow in diversity. We chose Amsterdam in part because it was the most diverse city in the world, and we wanted to learn how to plant and grow a diverse church, and also to learn how to lead with people who were very different from us. Our pastoral team and board were

incredibly diverse—not just Dutch and American, but included leaders from Zimbabwe, Taiwan, Finland, Spain and Lebanon. Those experiences were foundational for us and showed us the beautiful intent that God has in building his church out of the nations.

Julia: I came home from Amsterdam to a gift: a church that looks like the nations! Eric and I are deeply committed to stewarding that gift and seeing it thrive. It's all too easy for diversity to be a value instead of a virtue. A value is something we believe and are motivated by, but a virtue is something we practice. Our congregation, campuses, volunteers, leaders and staff, have much more practicing ahead of us. We must continue building cross-cultural bridges in our community, being intentional about the ways we worship and communicate, and being diligent in platforming and releasing a diverse cohort of people at all levels in our community.

As you transition into this new role, what are you most excited about?

Julia: Right now, I'm very excited and grateful for this process of transition itself! It feels exceptional and healthy to have our founding leadership be so intentional and open-handed to the Lord's voice about their own season of transition. In 1 Corinthians 9 the Apostle Paul exhorts us to run life's races with perseverance, and with our eyes set on Jesus. The founding generation of Vineyard Columbus has, by God's grace, been a shining example of that! I'm really excited that we get to shape this transition period together, that Rich and Marlene aren't going anywhere after the transition, and that at the same time there's freedom and encouragement to follow God's leading into our future.

Eric: I feel tremendously full of faith when I look at the younger leaders on staff, around the church, and in VC Twenty. And not only that: so many wise elders in our midst are ready to bless and pour into the lives of the younger generation! This church has been given so much and is full of people who are ready to invest their lives into the kingdom. What the return of that might look like ten years down the line? I think it'll be beyond what we could ask for or imagine!

Picture Jesus gazing at you twenty years from now. When he looks at you, what do you want him to see? When he looks at our church, what do you want him to see?

Julia: Wow. What a thing to imagine! First, I want Vineyard Columbus to gaze back at Christ with love, to lean toward him with steadfastness, to look like he looks and to shepherd his lost sheep like he shepherds them. But when I think of Jesus looking toward me, that reminds me of something I wrote when I was in my late 20s – my own core mission statement. Initially

several pages long, it was very perfectionistic and idealistic, and all about how I wanted to be an amazing mom and wife and pastor and leader and friend. I showed it to a few older women who wisely helped me to discern the Lord's voice in the midst of my own striving. At the end of my editing, only one sentence was left in my 'mission statement:' "to live the kind of life now, so that when I'm 65 years old, I have a sublime relationship with Jesus Christ." As a poet, I love how the word 'sublime' represents something that is so beautiful or pure or lovely that it's almost untouchable, almost unreachable. But, by grace and in faith, that is what I want: in twenty years, I want Jesus looking back at me – having loved and served and led his church with all my strength, all my heart, all my soul and all my mind – and I'd want him to see between us a sublime friendship.

Eric: I am a dreamer, and as much as I love dreaming about what Vineyard Columbus will continue to do, the thing that I want more than anything is to rest in Jesus' love and goodness. That is ultimately what we all want and need. In twenty years, when Jesus looks upon us, I hope that he finds pastors and a church not only working with all our heart, soul, and mind to partner with him in bringing his kingdom, but pastors and churches who know the deep peace of his presence, and who are witnesses to that peace all over our city. There would be no greater gift.

How can the congregation pray for you during this time?

Julia: We'd appreciate your prayers for our kids (Connor is 20, a sophomore at OSU and a leader in VC Twenty; Lucas is just about 16 and is an avid techie; Gloria is 13, is in the 7th grade and a cheerleader) – they've walked through a lot of kingdom adventure with us. And as is true for every adventure – there have been both highs and lows. Please pray that Jesus continues to cover them with his protection and grace, and that they remain aware of His love for them. You could also pray for clarity, wisdom, and God's protection over the Nathans, us and the entire church as we enter into this process together.

Eric: Please also pray for the gift of wisdom for the next two years of transition, for unity of spirit for the leadership at Vineyard Columbus, for the Lord's grace to cover over all the areas that will feel the weight of change, and for God's vision and provision and protection in the lives of all who call this church home. And for Julia and me, that the Lord would give us everything we need to faithfully follow him as we begin to lead our church. It is a high calling and an honor!

Maggie Baxter is a long time member of Vineyard Columbus. She is a contributor to the MIX and primary weekend bible study writer and editor.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE TRANSITION

What's going to happen to Rich and Marlene? Are they retiring?

Rich and Marlene aren't going anywhere! Rich said for years that he felt God tell him to give Senior leadership of the church over when he turns 65. Both he and Marlene consider Vineyard Columbus their church home. They love Columbus, their family and dearest friends are here, and they very much desire to stay a vibrant and visible part of Vineyard Columbus after their transition. Rich will serve as Pastor-at-Large after his transition, stepping off all leadership teams and releasing the church to Eric and Julia's leadership. He will continue to serve the church by preaching at weekend services, training and releasing diverse, young leaders as a part of our Residency Program, and maintaining relationships with city and national leaders.

What's the timeline for these changes?

Rich will continue in his role as Senior Pastor until January, 2021. Starting in January, 2019, Eric and Julia will begin to serve the church as co-Associate Pastors. Over the course of the next two years, they'll work closely with Rich and the leadership teams to prepare for the transition. In January 2021, Julia and Eric will become co-Senior Pastors of Vineyard Columbus.

How was this decision made?

Years of planning and prayer have led us to this decision. Starting in 2016, Rich and a few of our key leaders went on a retreat to pray about the future of the church. The church brought in a consultant in 2017 to advise us on how to move forward. In early 2018, a Selection Committee was appointed to nominate our next senior pastor(s). Several key staff and lay leaders were consulted and asked for prayer and input. At the end of 2018, the Selection Committee made the recommendation that Eric and Julia become co-Senior pastors. The Church Council and Pastoral Advisory Team unanimously agreed.

Is Vineyard Columbus going to change?

In the most important ways, No! The Pickerills have a twenty-five year familiarity with and love for the church that God has built, and a deep commitment to our core values—like preaching the Word of God, holding a high view of Scripture, welcoming the ministry of the Holy Spirit, pursuing kingdom diversity and racial reconciliation, and seeing people come into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Eric and Julia are committed to build the future on the strong foundation that is the church today.

What does co-pastoring mean?

Upon their transition to co-Senior Pastors, the Pickerills will together carry overall leadership authority and responsibility for the people, mission, preaching, worship, staff, finance, and buildings under the care of Vineyard Columbus. However,

each will have their own particular job description and areas of oversight. We believe Julia and Eric are uniquely called and gifted to lead together. They co-Pastored at Vineyard Amsterdam for seven years and have served together in different ways over their entire 25 years of marriage.

Will we continue our commitment to kingdom diversity, not just in words, but in action?

Absolutely. At Vineyard Columbus, deepening and broadening diversity in our congregation, staff and pastoral leadership is one of our non-negotiables. The Pickerills have a track record of demonstrating a commitment to diversity, having raised up and released a multi-ethnic leadership team for the church in Amsterdam, and leading diverse teams at Vineyard Columbus. They are committed to our value of kingdom diversity.

What about other significant leaders in the church?

As Rich and other first-generation pastors transition, there will be opportunities for the Pickerills to build a team with our exceptional next generation of leaders. As we continue to reach our city by launching campuses, our campus pastors will continue to take significant leadership roles in the church. We are pleased to announce that Dr. Charles Montgomery will not only continue as East Campus pastor, but also will transition into a broader role of Teacher-at-Large at Vineyard Columbus, releasing him to be more available to teach at our various campuses as well as within the larger Vineyard Movement.

What happens now?

Over the next year, Eric and Julia will engage more broadly at each of our campuses, and you'll have the chance to get to know them more as pastors, preachers, and leaders. Rich will work closely with the Pickerills over the next two years and will remain front and center during the transition. You won't notice much of a difference as we continue to set our hands to the work of becoming the church God has called us to be.

How can I be praying?

It is a good thing to pray for the church, and to pray for your leaders! You might consider fasting one meal each week and taking that time to pray for the Lord's blessing over Vineyard Columbus in this season! Pray that the Holy Spirit continues to speak to and empower our church! Pray that God our Father continues to draw His children into our community and for the gift of repentance and salvation. Pray for those who lead in thousands of different ways around the city each week. Pray for continued favor as we seek to be a friend to our city. Pray for our mercy and justice ministries and all who we touch who are in need. And please do continue to pray for Rich and Marlene and Eric and Julia as they obey God in this season of their lives.