



Report from the Senior Pastor Search Team

December 2023

To our Gateway Family,

It is with great enthusiasm and a spirit of hopefulness that we present to you **Dylan Harper** for consideration as our next Senior Pastor.

Dylan, along with his wife Jessica and daughter Brooklyn, will be candidating with us at Gateway **January 12-17**. Dylan will be delivering the sermon on January 14th. Following the 10:00am service, we will have an extended open house and guided Q&A time in the main sanctuary where you will be able to get to know the Harpers on a deeper level. We invite you to make this Sunday a priority, joining us in worship and this time with our candidate. In addition, we've provided several resources here on the web for you to hear Dylan speak in other church contexts.

Please join our team, the church Council of Elders and Deacons, the church staff, and the Harpers in seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance in discerning His will for our church.

If you have any questions or input related to this search and the decision now before us, please do not hesitate to contact our Search Team co-leaders or any member of our team. We deeply value the trust you as a church family have placed in us throughout this search and now eagerly await the Lord's lead for our future.

On behalf of the Senior Pastor Search Team,

Spence Boelter (spenceboelter@mac.com)

Paul Singer (p.singer22@comcast.net)

Co-leaders of the Senior Pastor Search Team

Following is more detailed description of the steps taken by our team over the last year, and the reasoning we now positively present Dylan Harper to you for prayerful consideration. After sharing our story below, the decision making process is clarified.



Our Journey of Faith and Discovery ...

It was in November of 2022 that Pastor Al Schaap announced his retirement, to be effective in November of 2024. At that time, elders Spence Boelter and Paul Singer were asked by our Council to form and lead the Senior Pastor Search Team. A team of 16, including Pastors Al Schaap and Mark Humphrey, was built and we had our first "Summit" in January 2023. Over the course of the next year, our team stepped out in faith, prayerfully seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we ...

- Clarified the Senior Pastor Job Description
- Identified the key attributes we would be looking for in a candidate (see below for further details)
- Worked carefully with our denomination, the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), to determine the denominational requirements for the position
- Posted the job opening with the CRC and the RCA (Reformed Church of America), conducting what resulted in an international search
- Evaluated multiple resumes and applicants through online interviews, reference checks, sermon evaluations, individual conversations, and significant prayer
- Invited two candidates to visit Gateway in Merced, during which time extensive interviews were conducted and the candidates had opportunity to interact with our team, Gateway staff and Council
- Completed background checks and researched relocation and immigration issues (given Dylan's Canadian citizenship, this was necessary)
- Concluded that Dylan Harper is a viable candidate to present to the congregation for consideration.

Through this process, our team has diligently sought the Lord together through prayer, fasting, and deepening community. We've grown to trust one another, speak truthfully in love, and engage in vulnerable and honest conversation. We haven't always agreed, which has led to healthy debate and tearful reflection ... and a lot of hard work. Through it all, we celebrate both the Lord's goodness and His sovereignty in leading us. We now stand united in positively presenting Dylan Harper for consideration. If Dylan should prove to be God's choice for our next Senior Pastor, praise be to Him and Him alone. If not, our team will also give praise to God, being ready and willing to continue the search and move forward together.

As we engaged in this search process, three criteria rose to the top in helping us discern if an applicant was indeed the type of person we would want to consider as our next senior pastor. These three criteria have been ***character, chemistry, and competence***.

Character: We have sought, as our first priority, a man of God who deeply loves Jesus and prayerfully seeks the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We have looked for a man with personal integrity, a healthy marriage and family, and a track record of spiritual, emotional, and physical



health in his previous life and ministry experiences. A love for God's Word, a humble and submissive spirit, an eagerness for growth and personal development, and a high level of self-awareness and healthy acknowledgment of personal sin ... these are all aspects of character that we believe are necessary in our future senior leader.

Chemistry: We humbly believe God is doing an amazing work at Gateway Church. We see incredible health and spiritual depth in our pastoral and ministry staff. Our leadership consistently seeks the Lord and, as a result, God has led us into a wonderful season of ministry together as a church family. Our Search Team therefore has made it our priority to find a senior pastor who shares our church "DNA" and desires to join us in the movement God has already started. We have not been looking for a "new thing" but rather someone who can join us in following the Lord into what He has next for Gateway. A clearly positive fit with our church staff and an ability to both lead and partner with them going forward has been a top priority for us.

Competency: We have held several points here in healthy tension. We have sought someone who, Lord willing, can serve in the Senior Pastor role for 20 or even 30 years, following the example of our beloved leader, Pastor Al. This has meant that we have looked primarily at applicants in the 38-45 year old range. We have also sought someone who, by the grace of God, is able to bring a high level of professionalism, spiritual wisdom, and leadership ability to an outstanding and highly competent staff and growing, diverse congregation. This is a high bar, but we set it believing God has been developing just such a person to step into this role at Gateway. This person would be a proven leader, an excellent expositor of the Scriptures, a role model of financial health, a capable relational shepherd, and a person who has the potential to grow as Gateway grows. We recognized that we would not and could not find another Pastor Al, but we have been ever hopeful that the person we do find could follow in Pastor Al's footsteps and in fact lead our church to even greater works than these. We believe Gateway's best days are ahead of us, and so we have sought an individual we believe competent and with the potential to lead us there.

We believe we see these attributes of character, chemistry, and competency in our candidate, Dylan Harper. We have seen these through our interactions with Dylan, our extensive conversations, his writing and answers to our questions, the sermons he has delivered in other venues, and through our conversations with those who know him, have worked with him, and have been a part of his development. Dylan attended Calvin Seminary in Grand Rapids, MI, and comes highly recommended by school faculty. He is spoken of as a standout student of the Word, a theologically sound thinker, and a strong and gifted communicator. Dylan and his wife Jessica have been serving the past few years in a church very similar to Gateway, Encounter Church (visit their website [here](#)). Both receive the highest possible praise from their supervisors and co-leaders. His leadership ability, his passion and



ability to speak to those outside the church, and his preaching ability, were frequently mentioned by those who know him. Our team first learned of Dylan as Pastor Al made connections with like-minded church leaders across the country and was told, “you need to take a look at Dylan.” We did, and we immediately were curious by what we saw. As we’ve gotten to know him, his wisdom balanced with humility, his passion balanced with discernment, and his listening spirit balanced with vision spoke to us, and spoke to our church staff as well. There was strong chemistry from the outset between Dylan, Jessica and our Gateway staff. Therefore we present Dylan to the church with both the positive assessment of our search team and our church staff. Together, we believe he is a viable candidate.

Located on our church website (Senior Pastor Search Update page ... click [here](#)) you will find four different sermons delivered by Dylan over the past year. We invite you to give these a listen ... both to get a sense of who Dylan is and how he communicates, and to be challenged in your faith and grow in your relationship with Jesus. We believe you’ll be positively encouraged by his messages. But as a search team, we would encourage all of us to look beyond Dylan’s messages as we seek the Lord’s guidance for our future. We are not hiring a preacher ... we are seeking our future Senior Pastor. His message to our church family on January 14th will be a critical factor in our decision making process, but it is not by any means the only factor. Our search team understands that there is no way the entire church can get to know Dylan, or any candidate, to the level that we have and so we have sought to communicate as best we can what has brought us to this point. There is considerable trust required in a process like this one, and we do not take that trust for granted. As you listen to Dylan, meet him and his family, and prayerfully seek the Lord, we invite your feedback, questions, and suggestions. Here is the process going forward ...

- Sunday, Jan 14 - Dylan preaches in the 10am service, followed by a Q/A open house
- Tuesday, Jan 16 - Dylan will lead our church staff in a mini-retreat
- Tuesday, Jan 16, 6pm - the Search Team will meet and make a recommendation to Council. If positive, then ...
- Wednesday, Jan 17, 6pm - the Gateway Council (Elders & Deacons) will meet and make a recommendation to the church membership. If positive, then ...
- Sunday, Jan 21 Congregational meeting following the church service - Church membership will vote to extend a call to Dylan
- Future - If Dylan accepts the call, our denominational Classis will affirm him as a Minister of the Word.