

Dear Church,

It is with a conflicted heart that I announce my resignation as Worship Leader of Riverside Fellowship effective May 6<sup>th</sup>. I have decided to prepare a statement rather than let my emotions get the best of me and not properly acknowledge my love and appreciation to all of you for three very special years. As most of you know, I have been maintaining leadership roles for over a year now in both my home church of 22 years and here. It has been a lot to juggle, and my schedule is crammed every week of the year. Randy and I have precious little time together and it doesn't seem sustainable. As we have talked and prayed about it, we know that God will provide exactly who is needed in this role - someone who will not be dividing their time between churches and calendars. We are excited about Riverside's future because we have seen firsthand how God has been working from the very beginning of this faith family.

I received a text out of the blue in the middle of March 2021. It read "Hi, my name is Kathy. Would you be available to play for a church service this Sunday?" I remember thinking, "What church? Where?" But I said YES to Kathy Heard, and on the morning of March 21<sup>st</sup>, Randy and I took a drive to new countryside and met a small group of people at Millview pool hooking up a keyboard and setting up banners on a breezy brisk morning. From the first day, Randy and I were immediately welcomed. I remember the elated expression on Marilyn Crothers' face after the service when she approached me to ask, "And you sing too?!"

What no one could have known, is that I had been asking God to give me a place to serve. My home church, Forest Hills Baptist Church, had their bases covered in the music ministry, so I was rarely utilized. I had done some subbing in various churches for a couple years – in fact, that's how I had an Epworth connection. Anyway, when the need was expressed for a Worship Leader for this brand- new congregation, I knew in my heart it was a direct answer to prayer.

The second Sunday I joined you was Easter of '21 – the first week at Christ Family Church south of Nolensville. My son Tate and I sang a duet and I led congregational hymns from the keyboard. Before long, Randy was assisting Doug Crothers and lightening his load by taking on the projections. It was apparent that Randy also needed a place of service and a peer group of Christian brothers. Doug, George, John and Russell befriended Randy in a way he truly needed.

Riverside Fellowship became a central focus of my prayer life. The church began without a pastor, and as the months passed, I became burdened for this post to be filled by a Bible teacher who would

see the needs of this sweet congregation. God prompted me to call a seminary-trained Sunday School teacher in my home church and ask him if he would consider coming to guest preach. After sharing my heart with him, I was surprised at his enthusiastic response. Once again, God orchestrated perfect timing in bringing 2 needs together – Riverside Fellowship and Kevin Wood.

Early on, two ensembles were formed - Riverside Singers and Riverside Ringers. While Cindy Kurzrock organized the bells, I tried to organize a choir with just a few folks. We would meet in the tiny basement classroom with Cindy's keyboard. I'm sure my rehearsal techniques and expectations seemed ambitious, considering that my primary job since 1998 was preparing the Nashville Opera Chorus. With the help of some additional voices, we were able to present a Christmas cantata, "Shepherds Jubilee" complete with biblical costumes, a narrator and a stellar cast – Buff Groth as the old shepherd and Leland and Eli Mercado as the young shepherds, Cindy Kurzrock and Dorothy Mercado as women of Bethlehem.

The choir continued to improve and sing more regularly in the service and I sought out individuals to participate as readers and soloists. It was always a blessing to have musical guests from the congregation, particularly Ronny Hughes and Richard Jefferson on guitar, as well as some of my friends who came to play trumpet, violin, drums as well as wonderful vocalists to sing solos. By our 2<sup>nd</sup> Christmas, we had a large group participating in a second cantata, "King of Kings" - this time with blue choir robes, Cindy's heavenly decoration and costumes for Lydia Wood and Katherine Carswell as angels, Gabriel Mercado as shepherd, Keith Bilbrey as Wise Man and our newly named pastor Kevin Wood as Narrator.

When our congregation moved into Page Middle School, Riverside Singers feared that we would have nowhere to rehearse. We could never have imagined that our biggest fan, Julie Mowery, would jump at the opportunity to open up her spacious home to us for our weekly rehearsal. For the first time, we were able to sing with a grand piano and hear ourselves in a surround sound acoustic! Since last summer, Julie and Blair have made every rehearsal so special. Julie's spiritual gift of hospitality is on full display as she welcomes us with freshly prepared desserts and coffees. Singers rehearsal is one of my favorite hours in the week.

And unless you are part of it, you don't realize the closeness that happens in a small choir. We laugh all the time, but we also share our life struggles, we pray over one another, we sing truths

over one another and it is healing to our souls. We were there for our sister Nona Inglis just days before God took her home. I will definitely miss my small group Riverside Singers.

Riverside, you have ministered to me and my family so well over these past 3 years. You have supported our son Tate through his college and summer internships, his engagement and marriage to Olivia, even to host a spectacular wedding shower in the Sipes' home which was attended by such a large group of ladies and led so perfectly by Penny Vaughan. You have been generous in so many ways. When Randy broke his foot, both Mandy Hastings and Melanie Lang brought him ambulatory equipment that was invaluable. You have lavished so much love, as well as cards of encouragement and unexpected gifts. You have been an Acts 2 church in our lives and it has been one of my greatest joys to serve in ministry here. Tate, Olivia, Randy and I thank you.