

Advisory Committee on Board Transition
FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS
as of May 24, 2018

Observations

For many years now the leadership of the elders has been under severe stress, managing through extended crises both organizational and external. Our church constitution, adopted in 2016, has been largely untested. The addition of non-staff elders in the same timeframe is also an ongoing process with both benefits and unintended/unexpected effects as well. Into this milieu we chose and affirmed a new Lead Elder with strong convictions and very different cultural background, and into this context he agreed to come. Collectively though, this combination of circumstances and environment created a perfect storm of extensive misunderstanding, miscommunication, and growing mistrust that resulted in the decision by the elders to part ways with our Lead Elder, now rescinded. The process of coming to this decision was absent of substantive member involvement, resulting in tremendous confusion, eroded trust, and great risk to the sustainability of the church.

Further, this current leadership breakdown has exposed fundamental deficiencies in our church leadership, which significantly reflect our congregation and culture:

- Failure and/or inability to build and maintain bridges of trust, resolve issues (e.g., work with a strong leader, and as a strong leader, build trust within the team)
- Structural failures, mismatch of ministry models and concept of elder role (board size, function, principles/values/behaviors/emphases - e.g., majoring on important yet secondary matters [Matthew 23:23], focus on accountability over ministry)
- Misaligned expectations, false/unnecessary dichotomies (e.g., pastoral care vs. visionary leadership, priority of working board vs. caring for the board, priority of governance over ministry)

In aggregate, we find ourselves in a critical, untenable condition as a church, lacking clarity and trust among both members and leaders, requiring significant and even radical action in response.

But this is not only corrective; we believe God is using all this in a way we didn't expect nor want, but that will ultimately strengthen us as a church in better reflecting him and setting us on a trajectory for significant growth in loving him, loving one another, and serving his purpose. There is a way to make immediate, much-needed changes and yet not overlook core issues and concerns that must and will be addressed amongst the Board of Elders and our church. We believe this proposed framework and recommended

changes are consistent with our current constitution and are essential to address the fundamental issues that led us to this state.

As stated in the Advisory Committee (AC) charter, “the Advisory Committee on Board Transition has been formed to help PJ Smyth determine whether he can re-engage as Lead Elder of Covenant Life Church, and what Board configuration would best facilitate that purpose.” The Advisory Committee has no governing authority and we make these recommendations in an advisory capacity for the Board of Elders’ consideration.

Motivation to Respond Quickly

While the Advisory Committee wishes to perform a thorough review process to ensure completeness of analysis and recommendations, it is important that this committee work quickly and efficiently for the following reasons:

- Critical condition of church - lack of clarity/trust
- Critical/untenable position for leaders

There is a way to make needed changes and yet not overlook core issues and concerns that must and will be addressed.

Summary Recommendations

Phase One: To be addressed quickly (i.e. 2-4 weeks)

1. Rebuild trust among leaders and with church
2. Reposition for effective and expanded ministry
3. Reorganize leadership framework

Phase Two: To be addressed by Interim Board

4. Adjust pastoral priorities/focus
5. Continue rebuilding trust
6. Continue reorganizing leadership framework
7. Other thoughts

Details on Recommendations

Phase One: To be addressed immediately

1. **Rebuild trust** (separate from or regardless of current/future roles)
 - **Among leaders** (former and current) - core to our gospel witness, essential for functioning elder team

- (Re)open lines of genuine communication. The priority of simply talking to one another cannot be overstated (Matthew 5:23-24), especially as a plurality of elders.
- Reconcile relationally, resolve concerns (2 Tim 2:24-26, Prov 27:17).
 - Encourage elders to meet one on one with PJ or two on one, as comfortable, to speak openly and graciously about their perspectives. (By God's grace, this is already happening.)
 - Questions for each elder to consider:
 - Have we followed the biblical directive to treat others as we want to be treated?
 - Have we spoken to others as we would want to be spoken to?
 - Have we spoken OF each other as we would want to be spoken of?
 - Have we been critical of one another – uncharitable, unloving, and unkind in our thoughts, words, and actions toward each other?
 - What could we have done differently, better, to avoid circumstances such as this?
 - How can we better model disagreement that protects the biblical priorities noted
- **With church family**
 - Draft letter from the Board of Elders documenting the rescinded decision being made without duress and that the Board of Elders (BOE) has absolutely no fundamental (i.e., disqualifying) concerns with PJ's integrity or character. This is to officially and publicly document the Board of Elders decision for both the BOE's and PJ's protection moving forward to remove potential of suspicion or additional inquiry months or years from now.
 - Address member questions in categorical responses - must convey understanding of real issues with sufficient clarity to respect members legitimate concerns

2. **Reposition for effective and expanded ministry**

- Separate office of elder from functions (particularly staff functions) to increase flexibility to make changes and to improve ministry execution.
- Appoint deacon teams extensively to multiply and expand ministry (prayer, worship, care groups, education, counseling, governance, HR, administration, youth, singles, facilities management, finance, etc)

3. **Reorganize leadership framework**

- Reduce size of the current Board of Elders to 5-7 to serve for an interim period (~6 months), comprised of existing BOE members selected based on evident faith, key strengths, and expected contributions to the objectives of this team (including relational commitment). During the AC's initial conversations with the BOE, there was broad agreement amongst the Board and PJ that the Board needs to be smaller, more diverse, skew younger, and have diversity of giftings. (This does NOT mean staff elders must quit staff positions or ministry consistent

with respective gifts. The AC understands that a transition process is already underway for some and recommends the Interim Board of Elders engage those transitioning to best position them for most effective ministry. This would include retaining those on paid staff but who no longer serve on the Interim Board, finances permitting.

- Charge the Interim Board with the following objectives:
 - **Develop new eldership team** (~7-10), increasing diversity of skill/gifting, ethnicity, and age.
 - Give the Lead Elder meaningful though not unilateral say in the composition of the team. This does NOT equate to less accountability (which will be explicitly strengthened per below) but assumes a more balanced view of elder team enabling leadership and execution
 - Invite 3-5 prospective young men/potential elders to participate in some way without authority or formal role in order to
 - add perspective and help reset elder team culture
 - help them test calling to eldership in a hands-on way
 - Invite outside advisory assistance (e.g., from Alan Frow and Matt Hosier); build relationships and solicit input on process
 - Establish new culture for leadership
 - **Monitor rebuilding trust** (process described above) by documenting plans and holding team and stakeholders accountable to implement.
- Have Interim Board appoint a Member Advisory Team of 5-7 men and women (including 2-3 members of the current Advisory Committee on Board Transition for continuity) to serve as a sounding board and to provide some consistent input and feedback to help shape the reorganization and monitor progress toward objectives.
- Ask congregation to affirm the Interim Board and objectives.

Phase Two: To be addressed by Interim Board

4. **Adjust pastoral priorities** and embrace with eager faith the process of God's discipline and change (Isaiah 58, Hebrews 12), particularly with respect to long-standing principles/practices which appear to be more defined by our history and fears than scripture and faith.
 - Guard our gospel witness, gospel unity (Ephesians 4).
 - Care for the church, including the least of these, those with little/no voice, and especially the next generation.
 - Demonstrate biblical eldership based on gospel unity, mutual trust and commitment, and humility/open-handedness in perspectives and positions.
5. **Continue rebuilding trust**
 - Know the people well and cast vision/build faith for what God is calling us and our individual parts to play. Trust the people to receive it well, as we are one body, one church

- Assure congregation of accountability of elders and ongoing role in affirming them.
 - Reset and ground biblical view of leadership (Heb 13 without pedestalization)
6. **Continue reorganizing leadership framework**
- **Propose constitutional changes and present for congregational affirmation**
 - Increase functional accountability (consistent with Matthew 18) in concentric circles of accountability as described below:
 - Elders (constitutionally defined - no changes required)
 - Congregation (not constitutionally defined - no changes required)
 - Affiliation (e.g., Advance - not constitutionally defined - no changes required, though recommend pursuing affiliation and furthering relationships)
 - External “parachute” for outside help in crisis such as deadlock or unresolved disputes on eldership team (not in current constitution - recommend adding explicitly within constitution)
 - Enable Lead Elder to serve as board chair and/or better define board chair role to better support the elder team as well as the lead elder.
 - Institute 4-year terms for all elders, staff and non-staff with reselection/continuance depending on 67% of elder team support perhaps followed by 67% of present member affirmation
 - Initiate external partnership with Advance, for mission, relationship, and accountability.
 - Get outside help reevaluating administration, management, and staff oversight (and link to deacon team empowerment).
 - Ask congregation to affirm newly developed Board of Elders at the completion of the Interim Board objectives. This may include all or some of the Interim Board of Elders, plus the additions of any identified elders through the Interim Board’s process.
7. **Other thoughts**
- As part of a cultural reset within CLC, the Advisory Committee has observed a tendency toward criticism in speech within our congregation. The AC would like to recommend that the members be challenged to focus on encouragement and refrain from unsolicited criticism for a period of time (i.e. 6-12 months) unless something unbiblical or unconstitutional is at play (Col 3:16-17, Eph 4:29).
 - While many of these recommendations are fruitful in the process of re-engaging PJ as Lead Elder, we recommend these changes be applied regardless of PJ’s decision to remain as Lead Elder.

Respectfully submitted,

Advisory Committee on Board Transition