

The Chapel

Summary of Findings

October 2021

The Center Consulting Group has written this report for the purpose of helping your church leadership to nurture ministry health and effectiveness. We recommend you not share it outside of your church community or via any form of social or electronic media without first having agreement by the church leadership.



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
BACKGROUND	2
KEY FINDINGS.....	4
NEXT STEPS	9
CONCLUSION	10

INTRODUCTION

TO: The Chapel Trustees

FROM: The Center Consulting Group

October 1, 2021

It has been a privilege to work with the Trustees, the Constitution Committee, and the people of The Chapel over the past four months. We know that this has been a hard season for many at The Chapel. We hope that the summary below will give further clarity to the challenges you have faced and suggestions on steps to work toward greater healing and unity. Accordingly, below are The Center’s Summary of Findings identifying several key findings from our assessment at The Chapel.

This report contains our best interpretation of our findings in our work with The Chapel. As a Christian consulting group, The Center provides these candid observations to help you think wisely and creatively. However, you are the ones entrusted by God to make the decisions on the future of The Chapel. The Center will walk alongside you as you act upon your decisions.

BACKGROUND

The Chapel has experienced a significant time of difficulty including interpersonal conflict and organizational disruption among its senior leaders. All churches consist of broken leaders and members, each capable of sinful and destructive behavior but also life-impacting service to others. Every church, should it live long enough, will experience some form of conflict and suffering. In light of the difficulties that came to a point in May 2021, The Center was asked to conduct an assessment of the situation to help The Chapel’s leadership navigate this season. We began our work in early June 2021.

This situation has presented unique complexities. For example, at the outset, three senior leaders at The Chapel were each on administrative leave at the same time. Those three leaders represent nearly 60 years of combined ministry at The Chapel, and they served in the two most senior leadership positions of the church and leadership of one of the largest campuses. In addition, concerns were being raised about leadership, interpersonal conflict, alignment, and divisions—all of which are intertwined but each is a significant issue on its own. These issues have been simmering in the context of significant campus and ministry growth, a church that has grown and changed over more than eight decades of ministry, social and political unrest in the culture, and a global pandemic. The Chapel has experienced a significant leadership crisis at a time when the world seems less and less interested in the things of God, and we acknowledge that this has been a difficult situation for staff and those who attend The Chapel.

The Chapel first contacted The Center in late May 2021. By June 2, two consultants from The Center traveled to Ohio to meet with the Constitution Committee and to meet individually with Pastors Tim Armstrong, Jim Mitchell, and Mike Castelli. The purpose of these initial meetings was to develop a greater understanding of the depth of the leadership crisis and provide immediate feedback to the Constitution Committee regarding the difficulties as well as a path towards renewed ministry and relational health. It was clear from these first meetings that this situation was going to take time and a deeper investigation of the challenges that were identified.

Following those meetings, The Center conducted further fact-finding into what led to the events of late May. The Center's investigation included several meetings, one-on-one interviews, a staff survey, and reviewing Chapel documents. The Center's one-on-one interviews included individuals identified by The Center, individuals identified by the three pastors, individuals identified by the Committee, and all current staff members who reached out and asked to be heard. The Center also conducted an anonymous survey of the entire staff at The Chapel, which included both relevant questions regarding organizational culture and open response opportunities. Staff across all seven campuses and central operations were given the opportunity to participate in the anonymous survey.

The Center's consultants were given access to speak with anyone at The Chapel that the consultants requested. The Chapel's leadership did not place limitations on the ability of The Center to seek to understand and assess the situation. From the time that The Center was engaged, we have seen The Chapel's leadership, including both the Constitution Committee and the Trustees, seek to move as urgently as possible while balancing the complexity and sensitivity of the issues at hand.

The Center's consultant(s) have been onsite with Chapel leadership five times since early June. Additionally, The Chapel's leadership has sought counsel in zoom meetings, telephone calls, and further communication over that time. The Center was also provided the opportunity to meet with the staff of the Green campus and the staff of the Akron campus to provide additional context on our work and also answer questions from each.

After its initial assessment, The Center provided a full report to the Committee and the Trustees. The Center's consultants then met with the Committee and with the Trustees to answer all of their questions and discuss the assessment in detail.

KEY FINDINGS

This work brought greater clarity to several important issues.

At an encouraging level, through this process, many staff members reported that their individual relationships with God have been growing stronger over the past year, that they overwhelmingly see their work at The Chapel as a ministry more than just a job, and that they bring to their jobs passion and energy for the work. The Center heard the inspiring passion that many of The Chapel's staff have for the work of this church.

We also had the chance to hear many of the things that God has done across The Chapel campuses this past summer. We are grateful for God's faithfulness and the faithfulness of God's people at The Chapel.

This work also brought to light several difficult issues.

1. Tim Armstrong

There were significant and broad-based concerns regarding senior leadership and the staff culture at The Chapel. First, this process corroborated certain concerns about Tim's leadership at The Chapel. Some individuals praised Tim and his leadership, and there have been some great fruits of his ministry at The Chapel. However, in summary of our interviews and more detailed explanations we heard from individuals during those interviews, a significant number of individuals experienced his leadership in a harsh and fear-based manner.

Our assessment uncovered leaders and staff members from central operations and from various campuses who experienced Tim's leadership as harsh and fear-based. By way of example, some staff reported things like the following:

- **Harsh Treatment:** Tim was described by staff members as, at times, being ungentle, unkind, and overly harsh in his treatment of them and those they worked with. Some staff described situations where these kinds of interactions significantly affected them personally. Some feared being belittled and that speaking up would not make a difference.
- **Fear-based leadership:** A number of staff members described fear of losing their jobs based on both explicit and implicit comments and actions from Tim. Several staff members shared that they observed jobs threatened both in private and publicly in front of other people. Staff members further described a culture in which it was clearly understood that the senior pastor could end one's employment at any time, which under the circumstances resulted in further fear of losing their jobs. Some staff members believed that those who expressed disagreement with senior leadership would no longer be on staff after some time.
- **Leadership Isolation:** A number of staff members experienced consistent reminders that Tim was in charge and staff members were expected to fall in line. They described a culture that demanded submission, often without questioning, to senior leadership. They felt that there was to be no questioning or pushback at all. Some reported that, at times, their allegiance to The Chapel would be questioned. These concerns and the culture that several staff members experienced resulted in the feeling that they could not speak up and that complete submission to senior leadership without questioning was required.

Additionally, the staff survey raised concerns about the overall culture and climate of the staff. The staff survey responses showed that less than half of the staff believe that the overall culture and climate of The Chapel is healthy. The staff survey also revealed that nearly one in four staff members have not felt that interpersonal conflicts are handled appropriately. In addition, more than one in four respondents to the staff survey indicated that they do not believe it is safe to address concerns about or conflict with a pastor or another staff member.

In our interviews, it became clear that a number of staff who serve at The Chapel have been hurt under this leadership and culture. Staff members who experienced these things identified various reasons for not raising these issues sooner including fear of losing their jobs, fear that nothing would be done, and/or fear of other repercussions. In addition, many staff indicated that they didn't know where to go

with such concerns about a senior leader. At times, when some of these concerns arose, they were described as differences in leadership style. Because of the Board's fiduciary role and not elder role, there was a lack of clarity or confidence to bring concerns to the Board.

Based on the totality of our findings and the circumstances, we believe that Tim could no longer serve as the Senior Pastor of The Chapel.

In light of these issues and the resulting damaged credibility, and supported by the findings and examples underlying these issues, the Committee concluded that, in accordance with The Chapel's Constitution, Tim was unable to fulfill the duties of senior pastor and therefore could not be restored to the role. The Trustees, who also had the full report and underlying information, unanimously agreed with that conclusion.

We agree with that conclusion, as well. Accordingly, we believe that it was right for the Trustees to accept Tim's resignation.

2. Jim Mitchell

As the Executive Pastor, Jim aligned himself closely with Tim. Jim understood the role of Executive Pastor to be a key support for the work of the senior pastor. Jim described his understanding of the role in this way, and others described their observations of Jim in the role in this way. Jim served at The Chapel for 30 years and was beloved by many over his years at The Chapel. As Executive Pastor, Jim did serve as a key support for Tim in his ministry at The Chapel.

In general, many staff viewed Tim and Jim as tied together closely in leading The Chapel. This, at times, led to difficult dynamics for some staff in fostering uncertainty about where to go if they had concerns. Some staff indicated that if you went to Jim with an issue, you were talking to Tim and nothing would change or you would fear for your job. We believe that Jim had the positional authority and relational influence to hold Tim accountable to the behaviors that people shared with him, and many felt that they could not go to Jim with concerns because they would be given to Tim which could potentially result in the loss of their job.

Jim also said several times, as he expressed to the congregation, that he has always held his position loosely and would submit to the situation and to the Lord. In light of the overall circumstances, we believe that it was right for the Trustees to accept Jim's resignation as The Chapel moves to a new season.

3. Mike Castelli

This process also brought to greater light some divisions within The Chapel. These divisions have not been over matters of theology or doctrine. Rather, there has been a continuing sense for some time that not all of the staff and campuses of The Chapel are aligned in ministry and action, particularly between the Green and Akron campuses.

This has shown itself, for example, in difficulty among some staff working together toward common ministry goals as well as in conflict or strife among some staff. These divisions also came to light in polarization at The Chapel seen both in our assessment and more generally.

Several staff members affirmed this in interviews. The survey of the staff revealed that less than half of the staff believe that all the campuses operate with a shared vision and belief that The Chapel is one church. Even at the Green campus—which by many accounts has been prospering and where the staff members have a deep care for each other and their campus—only about half of the staff indicated that they believed that all campuses operated with a shared vision and belief that The Chapel is one church.

Some believe that this lack of unity has afflicted The Chapel for many years. Some leaders discussed the tension of having two large campuses so close together, and they describe a relationship that appears to us to be at times competitive or jealous towards one another.

Mike has been serving as the Lead Pastor of the Green campus. Earlier this spring, Tim indicated his intent to address this lack of unity and misalignment within The Chapel and, specifically, the Green campus under Mike's leadership. At a summary level, several key things occurred this past spring. Tim raised some of these concerns with the Trustees in March. In April, Tim communicated to Mike and others that change would be coming. Mike thereafter sent a letter to the Trustees and Human Resources raising the concerns about Tim's leadership. The Trustees then met with Tim, Jim, and Mike to discuss Mike's letter. Then, on May 20, Tim met with Mike and ended his employment.

Although there are some conflicting reports surrounding the decision to end Mike's employment, Tim indicated that it arose out of what he perceived as a lack of unity and misalignment. It was then that a Constitution Committee was called, Mike was reinstated and put on administrative leave, and Tim and Jim went on voluntary administrative leave.

With respect to Mike, over the past several months, there has been significant time and conversation devoted to seeking to more deeply understand what role Mike played in the leadership crisis. We agree

that misalignment did exist. We believe, however, that there have been a number of factors contributing to that misalignment.

We believe that the struggles that Mike and others experienced under Tim's leadership contributed to the misalignment. Mike acknowledged to us that he should have raised his concerns sooner, though he says he feared doing so would result in his termination. He acknowledged that, as he led at the Green campus, he attempted to isolate the staff from what he perceived as unhealthy leadership at The Chapel. In Mike's words, this allowed philosophical leadership tensions to develop that bore fruit of misalignment and lack of unity. These tensions were also developing in the midst of other organizational challenges that contributed to the situation.

For example, we believe that critical structural and governance issues, in addition to the leadership struggles, have contributed, at least in part, to the misalignment and current difficulties. The Chapel has grown significantly over the years and now to multiple campuses as a senior-pastor-led organization. Although there has been a fiduciary Board of Trustees, there does not seem to have been a plurality of elders with meaningful spiritual oversight of the church. Since most of the spiritual oversight was entrusted to the senior pastor and other staff, there was no clear way to deal with conflict and dysfunction when it arose among the very group charged with the oversight. As a senior-pastor-led congregation, there has been significant authority in one individual over the years. This becomes even more challenging as a church grows and continues adding more campuses. We believe that some of the struggles of having that authority in one person have contributed to the complexities in working through the current situation. This has contributed to the difficulty and confusion of the current situation.

Further, The Chapel has gone through variations of its approach to being a multi-site church, sometimes over relatively short periods of time. For example, the centralization vs. decentralization of The Chapel and its ministries has undergone various changes in recent years. Additionally, the degree to which individual campuses are expected to be uniform in their expression vs. individual or autonomous has changed over the years. We believe that, at times, there were differences in the philosophy of ministry among leaders that contributed to some of the internal divisions at The Chapel. In addition, as campuses grow and achieve ministry success on their own, tension can increase if there is no clear alignment around a unified vision and understanding of the church. We further believe that the philosophy of ministry underlying the multi-site model should more clearly align with the leadership and governance of the church, and we recommend that The Chapel re-evaluate these issues moving forward.

We have spent significant time working through these issues with Mike. In addition to ongoing conversations, on September 7-9, Mike and his wife came to The Center's offices for three days of coaching and healing. They came with open hearts and minds, and we found this time with them to be very beneficial. Through this process, Mike has acknowledged the issues of unity and misalignment and, as he stated publicly, acknowledged his part in it. In light of all of these circumstances, including his own acknowledgments, we affirm the decision of the Committee and the Trustees to restore Mike to the position of Lead Pastor of The Chapel's Green campus.

NEXT STEPS

1. Governance

We suggest that The Chapel put together a committee to consider a governance model that provides a plurality of elders who partner with the pastoral leadership to provide meaningful spiritual oversight and leadership at The Chapel. We also recommend that this Committee review The Chapel's Constitution and consider changes to the Constitution to ensure that it is updated for the future of the church.

2. Multi-Site Structure

We suggest that a committee be put together to evaluate The Chapel's current multi-site philosophy, including considering what should be centralized vs. what should be done at local campuses, the financial model of support, staffing relationships, etc.

3. Previous Staff

We suggest that the interim senior pastor develop a plan to connect with previous staff to consider their experiences and determine whether reconciliation is necessary.

4. Current Staff

We acknowledge that this has been a difficult season for the staff of The Chapel. They have shown that they love the Lord and that they love the people of The Chapel with great care and affection. We suggest that the interim senior pastor continue the ongoing efforts to bring reconciliation and unity among the staff.

5. Trustees

We suggest that the Trustees meet in the near future for the specific purpose of looking back at the challenges that have contributed to this season of difficulty at The Chapel, debriefing together on what has happened and how it relates to the current leadership crisis and continuing to lay the foundation for health moving forward.

6. Greater Health

We believe that God has uniquely positioned The Chapel for great kingdom impact on the people of The Chapel, northeast Ohio, and around the world. Out of this season of hardship, it is our prayer that the leaders would bring a concentrated focus on greater health to The Chapel. A healthy church is one in which every member grows, serves, builds others, and reaches out. We suggest that The Chapel leadership develop a plan for what the key markers of health will be for The Chapel.

CONCLUSION

We believe that the events of the past four months have set in motion a profound transformation of The Chapel that has been needed for many years. The challenges that The Chapel has been facing are complex. The ways these challenges are intertwined have demanded time and deeper consideration to address them with wisdom and understanding. Although painful at times, we believe that The Chapel's actions so far are helping The Chapel address these issues and move forward in a healthier way as the local church serving God's kingdom.