

August 20, 2021

Dear Chapel Family,

I write today to share additional updates that have arisen out of our recent fact-finding measures. As the process has moved toward its close, you have persevered in prayer, in patience, and in support. I recognize the varying difficulties and hurts that those in our congregation have faced throughout the past three months. I thank you for the ways in which you have navigated these days with grace and patience.

Pastor Jim Mitchell

By way of clarification, in late May, Pastor Jim Mitchell went on a voluntary administrative leave as we prepared to begin our inquiry into the concerns regarding Green Campus Pastor Mike Castelli and Senior Pastor Tim Armstrong. As Executive Pastor of The Chapel, Pastor Jim's role in the Senior Office aligned him intricately with Tim's leadership. On Monday, August 16, Jim voluntarily chose to resign from his staff position at The Chapel. Jim writes,

Brenda and I, along with our sons, are inexpressively grateful for the ministry God has called us to and graciously allowed us to participate in throughout the years at The Chapel. Our hearts are intertwined with this congregation, and we count it pure joy to have served.

While we are deeply sorrowful to be moving on, we are confident of our principled belief in always holding our assignment loosely and with a constant readiness to step aside as God wills and the situation demands. And we are bolstered by God's enormous provision of grace and peace.

Jim arrived at this decision while the Constitution Committee was still deliberating on many issues; therefore, Jim's status as a Chapel employee was never brought forward for an official recommendation or Trustee vote. While the Trustees did not ask for Pastor Jim's resignation, and acknowledge that he followed his own conscience in this decision, we agree that this decision is right, and we accept his choice as the best way for The Chapel to move forward into a new season of healthy leadership.

This fall, we will host a reception for Jim at the Akron Campus, to honor and acknowledge his 30 years of dedication to The Chapel's ministry. We look forward to sharing the details of this event with you soon.

Pastor Mike Castelli

We commend Pastor Mike Castelli and say thank you. Our inquiry has revealed that Mike was in a difficult and complex situation when he exercised his only remaining option to expose Pastor Tim's harsh and fear-based leadership to the Trustees. The Chapel is in a better, healthier place today because of Mike's courage in bringing the truth to light. We affirm the integrity of Pastor Mike.

In partnership with The Center Consulting Group, we have had multiple conversations with Pastor Mike in recent weeks. Out of those conversations, we have reached a mutual agreement regarding next steps that we believe will be most beneficial to the congregation, the staff, and Pastor Mike and his family. Mike writes,

This has been a hard season for all of us at The Chapel. I am sure you feel it, too. In light of the resignations of Pastor Tim and Pastor Jim and the anticipation of moving towards greater stability at The Chapel, The Center has recommended a short season of healing for me and my family as well as, during that time, coaching to assist in the success of the future of our church. I fully agree with their recommendation. I am looking forward to the future, and I also welcome good coaching as I and we all earnestly seek better cohesiveness and unity across The Chapel Campuses. I am also looking forward to the evaluation and work towards an improved structure and governance model of the church. I love this church. It has been the home church for me and my family for some 32 years. I hope and pray we fulfill God's great calling for many years to come.

We expect this short season for Pastor Mike and his family to last for six weeks and desire to restore Mike to his position by the end of that time. Collectively, we will continue to move toward stability and unity as a church.

Organizational Structure: Ministry Model

We recognize the critical need to now shift our attention toward making additional decisions about The Chapel's ministry model. The current inquiry has highlighted some of the inherent challenges that exist within our multi-site model that have along with other factors, occasionally fostered tension, misalignment and a lack of unity. In the very near future, we will begin assembling an exploratory team that will evaluate and recommend updates to our model. The team will include Chapel pastors, Trustees, and other men & women who will work together to shape, guide, and give input to this process. They will spend 4 to 6 months analyzing the challenges and successes of our current model, considering alternatives, and crafting recommendations for the Board of Trustees.

Church Governance: Constitution

We also understand that our constitution was written when The Chapel gathered in only one location, and that our church, currently gathering in 7 locations, requires an updated constitution, outlining clearly a robust practice of a plurality of elders. Therefore, at the close of the ministry model evaluation, the Interim Senior Pastor will call a Constitution Committee to do the work of assessing and amending the constitution, in accordance with language outlined therein.

Interim Senior Pastor

After our ministry model and church constitution have been appropriately evaluated and modified where necessary, we will move into a third phase of post-inquiry decision making and consider the question of a new Senior Pastor. Until that time, the Trustee Board has appointed me to serve as Interim Senior Pastor. During this interim period, our church will also benefit greatly from the wisdom and experience of Pastor Emeritus Knute Larson, who has graciously offered wisdom and counsel to our pastoral team.

Summary of Findings

It remains our intention to deliver a Summary of Findings to the congregation. We plan to present this information at live, in-person, town-hall style meetings, in early October. You will have the opportunity to submit questions in advance of the meetings, in order to seek clarifying details. The presentation will offer insight into how and why our Constitution Committee and Trustee Board reached their conclusions throughout this process. Multiple, identical meetings will be scheduled in various locations, to allow for greater flexibility with regard to your participation.

In closing, thank you for continuing to pray for wisdom, courage, and the truth to come into the light. In every season, The Chapel finds her hope and rest in the grace and truth of Jesus Christ.

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Matthew 11:28-30

Christ is King,
Pastor Zac Derr
Interim Senior Pastor & Lead Pastor, Wadsworth Campus