

## A Call to Pray

Transition Team's Sense of God's Leadership

*Members Meeting, January 29, 2017*

### I. Introduction [Chuck]

- A. Thriving Christians and thriving churches are above all *people of prayer*.
1. The Scriptures tell us quite plainly that apart from God we can do nothing, but with God all things are possible.
  2. And so, as a church family, and as individual Christians, we honor God when we both passionately ask him to meet needs and trust him without reservation.
  3. God is good and he has so ordained that he works in the world by his Word through the praying of his people.
- B. It is an astonishing reality that the Creator and Sustainer of the universe beckons us to bring our praise and needs to him. God hears and God listens.
1. We seek as a faith family to be a people faithful to God. The Word of God does the work of God, so we gladly submit ourselves not to our own wisdom but to his.
- C. As one of your pastors, I could not be more encouraged by the work God is doing among us.
1. You seek to be a people faithful to God and his Word.
  2. And in God's providence, this has led to a period in which Church on Mill is not only faithful, but also fruitful in good works for God's glory.
- D. Considering God's astonishing kindness to us as church, the Transition Team humbly asks that all would 'double-down' our collective efforts in prayer.
1. Tonight, we will submit three significant opportunities for your prayerful consideration.
  2. Our sense is that these things are consistent with the Bible and the long-standing God-given vision of the members of Church on Mill.

3. Our reasons for bringing these matters to you are:
  - a. first, to ask you to pray;
  - b. second, to ask you to get involved with us in thinking about God's leadership in these matters and how to implement them;
  - c. and finally, we would ask that you consider how you could sacrifice to bring about progress in each area.
    - A culture of disciple-making
    - Healthy church and churches
    - Pastoral proximity

## II. A Culture of Disciple-Making [Chuck]

- A. Over the last 19 months, a shocking 50 people have joined the Church on Mill family. And in the next few weeks you'll see several more be baptized and added to that number.
  1. I personally would be just as glad if that number was 5 people, not 50. *My point is not the higher the number the more successful the church.*
  2. The reason we bring this up is to express the unusual kindness of God and the great scope of opportunity he has seen fit to grace us with.
- B. What is church membership? At the most basic level, membership is an affirmation of salvation and an intentional decision to invite each other into mutual discipleship.
  1. Membership is an individual saying, "I believe Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and I stand publically with him by standing with you. I believe the church is the body of Christ, and I open my discipleship to you and ask you to do the same for me."
  2. Membership is the church saying, "The gospel you believe is the biblical gospel and we see evidence of God's saving grace in your life. Let's mature together in Christ and live on the mission of making disciples together."

3. Friends, 50 people have done that in the last 19 months!
  - a. God's gospel is forming a new humanity, and God is being glorified through a diverse people who share Jesus in common.
  - b. Praise God! He has added to his family; now may we faithfully care for one another as family.
- C. The Transition Team asks that you would pray about how you can further engage in the lives of the members of this church.
- D. God is raising up a culture of discipleship. This is nothing new, of course, but it is beginning to take shape in substantial ways.
  1. Two of the five distinctives of Church on Mill, adopted years ago, state that we are to be *devoted to each other* and *gospel-centered*. By grace we are.
  2. This morning we looked at part of Titus 2 and 3. Here's the way the passage begins, which we did not have time to cover in the sermon:

Titus 2:1-10 ESV but as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. <sup>2</sup>Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. <sup>3</sup>Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, <sup>4</sup>and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, <sup>5</sup>to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. <sup>6</sup>Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. <sup>7</sup>Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, <sup>8</sup>and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us. <sup>9</sup>Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, <sup>10</sup>not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.
  3. How is it that we mature in Christ? How do we become in practice who we already are in position?
    - a. One crucial method God gives us is that of men discipling (mentoring) men and women discipling women. Titus 2.
      - i. Taking the initiative to get together for the sole purpose of learning the Bible and being shaped by God into greater Christlikeness.

- ii. Intentionally showing up to connection classes, GC, and the gathering early to check on how brothers and sisters are doing spiritually, and to meet new people.
  - iii. Getting trained for all of this in Disciplemakers.
- b. This is messy, relational work.
- i. It is done best not in formal programs but in an organic web of relationships.
  - ii. Deacon, Katina Skinner, is helping to lead these efforts by example and training for women,
  - iii. and the Transition Team is aiming to help her and also work with the men of COM.
- c. Please pray that God would further grow a culture of discipling in which we truly and joyfully do take responsibility for each other's discipleship.
- d. Pray that it would become common for a new member to be asked multiple times, "Welcome to the family! Are you meeting up with someone to read and apply the Bible?"
- E. I met a pastor named Erik Raymond through 9 Marks, one of the organizations we support as a church. He wrote something this week that I found helpful.

"The Christian life is difficult. It's not quite spitting into the wind hard, but it's still tough. But there is a difference between it being hard and being lousy."<sup>1</sup>

1. Let's help each other walk the difficult, yet joy-filled, road of the Christian life together through a culture of disciple-making and discipleship.
2. Pray the Lord would overwhelm all of us with his love and power, so we will be genuinely fruitful in discipling one another.

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<sup>1</sup> Erik Raymond, <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/erikraymond/>, Accessed 27 Jan 2017.

### III. Healthy Church and Churches [Tad]

A second matter for prayer we could spend hours on, but instead, I'll take just a few minutes here because you are quite familiar with and living out this idea in many ways already.

- A. There are no perfect churches, because this side of heaven, there are no perfect people. We will get frustrated and feel defeated if we aim at church perfection, but we can aspire to church health.
  - 1. Hopefully you get an annual physical. The doctor is looking for health.
  - 2. One of the responsibilities of elders, and in the interim Transition Team members, is to assess the church for health and apply the medicine of God's Word where healing is needed.
- B. We are in a remarkable season of health as a family.
  - 1. The Bible is being preached and taught, both publically and privately.
  - 2. Our gatherings are marked by loud singing for God's glory.
  - 3. A very high percentage of us are serving both formally and informally.
  - 4. Membership is more meaningful, holiness is pursued, and the gospel is increasingly embraced and shaping the character of our shared lives. Sin is gently confronted.
  - 5. Love and unity are the norm. People are being trained up and sent out to help encourage church health elsewhere.
  - 6. Many people are seeking to faithfully share the gospel with the lost and encourage their fellow church members with the same gospel.
  - 7. Generosity is practiced. While we are a bit behind in the start of the new year, we ended last year incredibly strong, lacking less than \$100 to the projected budget goal. Thank you for your sacrifice.
  - 8. There are no perfect churches, but God has graciously given us improved church health. *And now he is allowing us the joy of helping other churches.*

- a. Our impact is increasingly disproportional to our size
  - b. Frankly, I never dreamed God would give us as a church so many opportunities to bless and support other pastors, churches, and ministries.
  - c. It turns out that churches growing in health help other churches grow in health.
- C. Why does all this matter? The church is the gospel made visible...and healthy churches are God's chosen means to best fulfill the Great Commission.
1. If you do not often let me encourage you to praise God for his work among us and through us.
    - a. Pray God will install the first plurality of elders this church has ever had. Pray he does so this year: it seems several men are recognizing God's call to be pastors and we hope to bring you more elder candidates to consider soon.
    - b. Pray all the training – from 2 people in Starbucks reading the Bible, to seminary classes in the office on Thursdays – from children learning of God's great love for the first time, to older men and women discipling the growing gift of more college students here, from the pastors who come here to learn to the gospel communities who scatter in homes – pray God's Word does God's work.
    - c. Pray that we would aspire and attain even greater diversity among the people we share the gospel with and the people who become members. This maximizes the display of God's wisdom.
    - d. Pray that love for God, love for people, and the delight in the gospel that God has given us would be exported far beyond these walls – whether that's to an international scholar across the street, or at our jobs across the cubical, or in our homes across the kitchen table, or across the oceans to our mission partners. Pray God's Word would be heard and obeyed.
    - e. Pray God would protect our church's health and help us to help others.
  2. Thank you for your tremendous generosity. Thank you for understanding our responsibility is not to build our kingdom but to live in light of God's Kingdom.
    - a. Thank you for being a people who do desire to glorify God through lives changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- b. As individuals and as a church family, let's press on in Christ. Paul put it this way, "Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more" (1 Thessalonians 4:1–2).

#### **IV. Pastoral Proximity (Tad, Randy, Chuck, Todd)**

- A. The final prayer point the Transition Team asks you to consider is what we are calling pastoral proximity. Randy Hagler will address the historical backdrop.
- B. [Randy] Church on Mill has a long history of intentionality and sacrifice for the cause of Christ. In loving obedience, many went before us to ensure, through prayers, generosity, and hard work, that the need for a Bible-believing Baptist church in downtown Tempe, Arizona would not go unmet.
  1. Here's but one example – many of you may not know this, but when Church on Mill began, the church was located at University and Beck. As the church grew, our present location, much closer to the ASU campus, became available and was purchased over 50 years ago as a permanent home. The church has been a lighthouse on this intersection for decades.
  2. Slowly, Church on Mill bought a total of 14 lots for expanded gospel witness in downtown Tempe. We are all recipients of the thoughtfulness and openhandedness of those who faithfully followed God's vision to plant, expand, and sustain the property that we gather at tonight.
- C. In many ways, the last 10 years has continued revealing this vision of a gospel-centered church who gathers at 1300 South Mill. Many of us here were present in August of 2010, when the members of Church on Mill embraced a Church Constitution. After over a year of weekly Bible studies, prayer, weighty conversations, and sermons, this constitution was adopted to guide us under God's Word towards greater biblical faithfulness and effectiveness at 13th and Mill. Scouring God's word to better understand the structure of healthy, biblical churches provided clarity in seeing God's continued purposes for us, further developed desire for biblically based acts of obedience, and prepared us for growth, not just in numbers but in response to God's call on our own hearts.
  1. Several years later, in September 2015, we prayerfully worked together to revise our bylaws to better reflect Scripture's instructions. One of those changes included adding both men and women deacons, (and we are all here tonight witnessing a wonderful result of the growth of the Deaconate in the appointment of four new Deacons, who you approved just minutes ago– if yes vote).
  2. All of this, and the continuation of our work together tonight, testifies to a hope that the need for this church, which began before many of us were born, continues by God's grace. This vision includes an appreciation of God's providence in establishing an outpost of His Kingdom at this location and we are

responsible to faithfully continue to proclaim the gospel of Christ in this context, all so that God would be glorified not just in Tempe, but across our state and the world. Every significant change that has taken place since August of 2010 has been rooted in the biblical convictions expressed in our Church Constitution.

3. God has been so kind to us! Just look around: the Lord has brought many new people passionate about Christ and living holy lives on mission together, we now have a strong ministry across Arizona to other churches and pastors, we are training and sending people equipped for a lifetime of ministry, the gospel is put on display in how we interact, meaningful ministry is occurring on and off the church property, God's people are responsive to God's Word, I could go on and on. We have become a church glorifying God through lives changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

D. In many important ways God has allowed us to become like the very first church, described in Acts:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved (Acts 2:42-47)

1. Over the years, we have taken many steps of obedience, sacrifice and intentionality as a church family, fully consistent with the vision set before us by our dear brothers and sisters who purchased this property. Isn't God's blessing truly overflowing these walls that were erected in the hope of being a place of worship, service, and mission? This is why the transition team believes the time is near in taking the next step together with you, Church on Mill family, as we seek God's will for expanded worship, service and mission.
2. The transition team believes now is the time to prayerfully consider ways we can humbly, obediently and passionately engage the community and context God has providentially placed us in. We are asking you to join us. Chuck will share one particular idea regarding pastoral proximity that we believe has unique merit in us moving forward together. Just as many of us here have felt a call to move our households closer to church property, Chuck and Jill have the same desire. Their hope is to model a faithful family in as close of proximity as possible to the hub of worship, service and mission activity at Church on Mill. This is a good thing and one that the transition team believes we should support as a church family. We share this in terms of asking for your prayers, careful consideration, and sacrifice consistent with this church's founders and the Church's founder, namely Jesus Christ.
3. And now with more detail, Chuck...

E. [Chuck share here] When this property was purchased and later this facility constructed, there is no way our brothers and sisters could have guessed that Arizona State would become one of the largest universities in the United States.



1. Even if they had anticipated such a unique university context for the church, certainly they would never have thought ASU would become the school with the most international students studying in the States. It's astonishing really.
  2. And more and more people, of all different ages, are moving into the area. The opportunities for evangelism, discipleship, and sending gospel workers to plant and sustain healthy churches around the world is unparalleled.
  3. Imagine 50 years ago. No one would have expected Tempe to have so many people it goes up instead of out. People everywhere!
  4. All of that is within walking distance of where we sit tonight. Praise God! Additionally, Church on Mill draws people from many parts of the Valley.
    - a. As brothers and sisters, we gather to worship Christ and then go home with Christ, and faithfully share him with our neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces.
    - b. Furthermore, we partner with people around the globe who are doing the hard work of starting and sustaining healthy churches.
  5. It is humbling for a church that is not large to cast a shadow of the cross so vast.
- F. In recent years, we have matured as a church in our understanding of the urban context God placed us in. Every church is responsible to God to know their context and do all they can to reach those closest.
1. Thanks to the godly leadership of people who know the college campus, international ministry, the needs of the homeless and less fortunate, and the diverse neighborhood we sit in,
    - a. great things are happening in disciple making efforts within proximity of the church property.
  2. By God's grace, we have made huge steps forward in the last decade at reaching the neighborhood God put us in,
    - a. and more and more construction is occurring, bringing even more people of all ages into Tempe.

- G. Because we are a Bible-believing church, we must be a church with sights set on gospel witness locally, regionally, and internationally.

In the words of the Scripture, we are to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

1. The local work is our first priority and drives the work being accomplished in our regional and international partnerships.
2. Providentially, our church's facilities are placed within an urban corridor full of people who need the gospel. This gives us the chance to minister to a transient community including people from many different walks of life.
3. Thank you for being a church willing to embrace our context because God has many in this city to save.
4. Not every member needs to nor could live in the neighborhood, of course, but we have come to believe your lead pastor would be wise to do so.
5. We believe this would further existing members relationships with me and my family and
  - a. encourage new gospel initiatives through our church to begin.

- H. For years, the former Leadership Team and now Transition Team have discussed how to maximize local gospel witness, including what might be called 'pastoral proximity'.

To put it quite simply, we have come to believe the lead pastor living beyond walking distance to this neighborhood is not as effective as it could be if he lives within walking distance.

1. In addition to a context for raising a family, the pastor's home is to be a place of hospitality, example-setting, pastoral training, member care, and evangelism. Good pastors do not work an 8-5 church office job: they live all of life for the glory of Christ and the progress of the church.
2. Whenever possible lead pastors, especially in urban contexts, should maximize pastoral influence and disciple making labors *by living as close as possible*. A pastor's home frequented by church members and neighbors alike, in the neighborhood of the church's facilities, communicates commitment, stability, openness, and love.

3. Our sense is, both now and 50 years from now, this would bless Church on Mill and all our varied members and ministries.
- I. By God's grace, I want to be able to say to you what Paul said, "...I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house" (Acts 20:20).
1. Like Paul, whether God gives me 4 or 40 more years as your pastor, I long to share with you not only the gospel of God but also myself, because you have become very dear to me (1 Thessalonians 2:8).
  2. The Transition Team believes I, and whoever will pastor after me, will best do that by living on or very near church property.
    - a. The opportunities within walking distance of this room are simply too great not to maximize every moment possible.
    - b. And invite you into them along with me.
- J. Our sense is that everything Jill and I do in our home with members today would continue if we lived in this neighborhood, and more things we cannot easily do today would be added.

If you come to affirm this idea and God made a way for it to happen...

1. I envision preaching on Sundays and inviting new people to walk across the street to enjoy a meal with my family around the intimacy of our kitchen table.
2. I anticipate waking early to a group of men in my home office ready to study the Scriptures as members of Church on Mill.
3. I long for pastoral residents to walk across their driveways and talk theology while I throw a football in the yard with my son.
4. Whether you live near or farther away, I'd love to make you a cup of coffee in the kitchen and then prayer walk the neighborhood together.
5. It would be a privilege to teach seminary classes, not only in the auditorium or a classroom, but my living room.

6. I'd enjoy handing a homeless man a sandwich straight out of the fridge while our home is jammed full of people for GC.
  7. I anticipate college students without cars walking over to talk with Jill and me about a tough matter after our kids go to bed.
  8. I yearn for an international considering if God exists to sit in on family devotionals after dinner.
  9. I'd love for you and your kids to pop in after a meeting at the church
  10. It would be wonderful to host Elder meetings in the warmth of a home like this.
  11. God has put in me a deep love for you and this community and I hope to leverage not just office time and public preaching, but the entirety of life.
    - a. This would not simply be the pastor serving: it would be all of us making further impact for Christ.
    - b. This would be *our* work as a church family.
- K. Would you prayerfully consider this as a means to follow the example of those who came before us to further invest in God's work in Tempe?

We understand this initiative not to be new or novel, but just one more faithful step consistent with who Church on Mill has always been.

More importantly, this seems to be the way the early church functioned.

1. We believe this is a crucial next act of obedience for Church on Mill *to glorify God through lives changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ*. It is another way to be *passionately engaged in both our community and around the world*.
2. You have embraced the residency program and now campus missionaries. The Naylor's residing just a few houses away has proved enormously effective.
3. The Transition Team would like the Newkirks to follow.

- a. It's a little scary, but my family and I are ready and willing,
  - b. for God's glory, your good, and the salvation of those yet to hear that Jesus saves.
- L. This idea may raise questions in your minds and we will both gladly listen to and consider them. But above all, would you pray for God to guide us in unity as a church family?
1. Please understand this is not a critique of your love for or commitment to your church if you live beyond downtown Tempe or even in another town altogether.
    - a. Wherever you are, God's will is that you be doing good works for his glory.
    - b. You do so as a Christian and as a member of Church on Mill, *wherever you are*.
  2. Church on Mill remains committed to local, regional, and international labors, and a diverse body making varied sacrifices will be part of what God uses to continue to expand our gospel impact.
  3. This has been a long process for Jill and me to understand and be willing to take this kind of step,
    - a. and we humbly ask you to consider taking it with us
    - b. by praying God would somehow make it possible
  4. Do you see the wisdom in your lead pastor living near this room,
    - a. to better support efforts to teach and lead existing members,
    - b. and help us all as a church reach people with the gospel of Jesus Christ?
  5. Please ask the Lord, communicate with members of the Transition Team, and explore creative ways God could make this a reality.
    - a. The Transition Team has no specific plan or timeline for how we could relocate in close proximity,

- b. but we want to invite you into prayer and conversation in this very early stage of exploration.
6. Any financial considerations would, of course, be brought to you for discussion and affirmation; however, we come with no proposal at this point, other than to ask you to pray.
  7. Please be sensitive to our kids. We've talked about the possibility but not probability of a move. We want them to feel a part of this mission, but at appropriate times. Moving can be hard on kids and we want to be sensitive to caring for them well.

## V. Summary / Conclusion / Prayer [Todd]

- A. We've shared several things with you tonight, I hope it has been encouraging and perhaps even a bit challenging to you. I wanted to wrap up with three specific things that we as a transition team would ask for you to be praying about.
  1. First, let's praise and thank God for his amazing grace. God has been so good to us! Let's thank Him and remember what he has providentially done for this particular church, and pray for the continued unity and spiritual health of this church body.
  2. Second, let us prayerfully ask how we can each be more passionately engaged in the discipleship of one another, as well as in the proclamation of the gospel of reconciliation in our own Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. Maybe that means prayerfully asking how you might be a part of the work of reaching the ASU campus. Or maybe to prayerfully consider how you can be more intentionally involved in your gospel community. For each of us, that likely entails a different kind of personal sacrifice, but our God is more than worthy of everything we have to offer.
  3. Finally, would you pray with us as we consider ways to help the Newkirk's and future lead pastors of this church to live on or near our campus? We believe this to be something that God is calling us in humble obedience to follow, but we honestly don't have a clear sense of how to make it happen.
- B. We'd like to take a few minutes to answer any questions or comments you might have about what we've shared tonight, and then to spend some time in prayer.
- C. In the interest of time, we'd like to continue to some time of prayer. I would personally encourage you (and I know I speak for everyone on the transition team) to come talk with myself, Kent, Randy, Tad or Chuck with any questions or thoughts you have. Several of us will be hanging out after the meeting tonight if you would like to talk, or feel free to contact us any time, we'd love to hear from you.