

Senior Pastor Search Update Q&A  
November 2023

**1. Where are we at with the Senior Pastor search process?**

On Sunday November 5th, Mark Eshoff, our Presbytery's Stated Clerk from the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), shared with our congregation that the search process is paused, and we do not have any candidates being engaged. The Session has been meeting regularly to discern and decide our next steps with the guidance of our Presbytery.

You can read more and watch the update by [clicking here](#).

**2. Why are we here?**

When our previous Senior Pastor departed, the Session was advised that moving existing staff into interim positions was a wise choice. We were assured that those who would be moved into the temporary positions of leadership had been mentored by our previous Senior Pastor and were qualified to handle the duties. This has proved to be true and has been successful. This move has provided stable interim leadership over the last year and a half. We have been guided by steady hands with quality teaching and preaching.

Over the past 9 months there have been challenges identified. The Session has learned from them and humbly acknowledges that some of the challenges could have been avoided. (1) In retrospect, it may have been a mistake having an internal interim team because it made it difficult for some qualified candidates to continue in the search process. If an external senior pastor were to be chosen, it could adversely affect their relationship with the congregation due to the impact it would have on the internal interim team. (2) We have heard from numerous credible sources that currently there is a high demand for quality pastors, but limited supply, which has led to a small pool of qualified candidates applying. (3) Our Search Team Consultant was contracted primarily to work with the Search Team. In retrospect, our Session should have insisted that our Consultant have regular contact with our Session, church staff, and congregation. That could have fostered alignment, unity, and accountability across these groups during the search process. (4) Communication and updates between the Session, the congregation, and the Search Team were not timely enough to provide information and help alleviate false narratives.

It is natural to want to blame a group or person, but our situation is multidimensional and the best route we can take is to seek the Lord (Matthew 6:33) and recognize what He is doing in this season at Christ Community.

**3. What steps has our Session taken?**

- a. In early October, our Session engaged in a 3-week season of prayer seeking the will of the Lord.
- b. After another 2 weeks of prayer, the Session met on November 12th and unanimously decided to explore Vital Church Ministries (VCM) to provide a congregational assessment and a potential external interim senior pastor. VCM has worked with numerous EPC churches that are in transition to help them become reconciled and restored to unity, with gifted leadership in place, gospel values embedded, effective governance established, an exciting mission agreed on, and discipleship pathways engaged.
- c. Our Search Team Consultant concluded his time with Christ Community in October. In consultation with the remaining Search Team members, it was determined that we need to dismiss our current Search Team and search process in preparation for our next steps. The remaining three members have agreed and support the Session's recommendation. In order to conclude the current Search Team, it requires a congregational

vote. The following motion will be put forth by the Session to the congregation at the December 3rd meeting.

**“To recommend to the congregation that the Senior Pastor Search Team be dismissed with deep appreciation and gratitude for their service to Christ Community Church.”**

We are thankful for their service and are deeply grateful for their efforts over the past year.

#### **4. Why utilize an external interim ministry?**

Through reflection, discernment, and prayer the Session has recognized that Christ Community is in a different place today than we were 18 months ago and believes it is crucial as a first step to have an in-depth assessment completed to help guide us into the future and evaluate our potential needs. Once the assessment is finalized, the Session will use the results to evaluate an external interim senior pastor and ministry such as VCM, or other options based on the assessment, which could help alleviate some of the challenges we have faced.

#### **5. Why are we doing an external assessment?**

We believe that a deeper look and analysis of the needs of our congregation is necessary. Not only has our perspective perhaps changed in the last 18 months but this assessment will be more extensive and completed by external professionals. They are likely to see things that we are blind to. This assessment could lead directly to ministry objectives for the Interim Senior Pastor and better prepare us for our next search process.

#### **6. What will the financial cost for an assessment be and what is the process?**

The in-depth assessment with VCM will range from \$15,000 - \$18,000. The assessment process will utilize a customized on-line survey as well as face-to-face sessions. The Session wants to hear from our congregation and for each person to be given the opportunity to be heard. The process will take approximately 2 months.

#### **7. What is the timing of this?**

We anticipate entering into a contract with VCM within the next 30 days in order to begin the assessment process in early January. Once completed, the results will help discern our next steps in the employment of a new interim senior pastor, which we would anticipate having on-site in early March.

#### **8. What will the role of the external Interim Senior Pastor be?**

The interim will be the lead pastor who will help accomplish the ministry objectives identified during the assessment period and share in the preaching responsibilities. He will use the assessment findings to understand what issues or conditions exist that need to be addressed prior to launching a new search process or the arrival of a permanent Senior Pastor. He will provide leadership and guidance to our Session and will make efforts to unify the church body.

Also, one of the key attributes the Session desires in an interim senior pastor is someone who can continue to mentor Dustin DeVriend, Ryan Balbi, and the rest of the church staff. We have been thrilled to see the development of our staff and eagerly desire to see that continue.

### **9. What will the engagement of the external Interim Senior Pastor be like?**

This will be a full-time job. We anticipate having him on-site most of the time for the first 30 days, then less time during the next 90 days. After the initial startup period, we anticipate that he will be on-site approximately half-time to cover two Sundays per month. He will connect with various leaders through Zoom when he is not on-site. VCM does not have any local interim pastors, so he would likely reside outside California and must travel to be on-site.

### **10. What will the financial cost be for an external Interim Senior Pastor?**

There are variables that are not completely predictable at this time. A rough cost estimate for a 1-year contract with a VCM interim senior pastor will be \$160,000 - \$185,000. This cost range includes the interim senior pastor's salary, travel, lodging, meals, and any other expenses related to engaging VCM. The Session will consider other cost-effective interim senior pastors and potential options based on the assessment results. The Session believes this expenditure is an investment into Christ Community's health over the next decade. Since this is not a budgeted expense, we anticipate a majority of it will be covered from our contingency fund.

### **11. What will happen to our current Interim Senior Pastor and Interim Teaching Pastor?**

Both Dustin DeVriend and Ryan Balbi will stay at Christ Community and their roles will be adjusted.

Our current Interim Senior Pastor, Dustin DeVriend, will return to his previous role of Executive Pastor and retain the duties he has held. Dustin's gifting has made him an effective Executive Pastor and we are excited about him being able to focus on those duties. We are appreciative of the leadership he has provided during his tenure as Interim Senior Pastor.

Our current Interim Teaching Pastor, Ryan Balbi, will shift into a new role and continue to utilize his gifts and share in the preaching responsibilities. We look forward to enjoying Ryan's contributions in an expanded teaching role that he will assume in addition to his preaching duties.

### **12. Why is Ryan Balbi not being considered at this time for our Senior Pastor?**

We know that Ryan has done an excellent job in the pulpit preaching and is a gifted teacher, however, he did not meet our current Senior Pastor Profile requirement in regard to ordination. Ordained Ministers in the EPC need to have a Master of Divinity (M.Div.) or equivalent seminary degree. Ryan is on track to complete his by early 2024. One of the benefits of using VCM is to provide Ryan and other staff members with growth opportunities and mentoring which will allow them to round out their experience.

### **13. How can I ask further questions or share concerns?**

There will be a Q&A time during the Congregational Meeting on December 3rd where the Session is looking forward to your feedback. If there are questions, comments, or concerns after the meeting, please email our Session at [session@cccnw.com](mailto:session@cccnw.com). To see who our Session members are, please [click here](#).

We also ask our congregation to continue praying for where the Lord is leading Christ Community in our next season!

“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.” - Colossians 4:2