

Good morning. My name is Tim Countryman. I currently serve as an Elder here at Maranatha and I'm up here to share what we call an Elder Minute.

As some of you may recall, back in February the Elders and Pastors got together for a retreat. Many of you were praying for us during that time and those prayers were very much appreciated. Thank you.

We believe the time we spent together was valuable, that God revealed some important things to us during that time. We've continued that discussion over the last few months and I'm standing up here today to give an overview of that ongoing discussion.

Let me start by saying, we know we're not a perfect church, but we also know we're not in bad shape either. Overall we are a healthy church; we have a **lot** of strengths as a body. We worship together, we are challenged from God's Word in our worship service, in our Sunday School time and in our small groups. We are actively ministering to each other and to the larger community - and the world. Can we do each of these things better? Certainly, all things can be improved. But we definitely have areas that we would consider strengths.

But there are some areas that we feel need some attention. We took this retreat as an opportunity to look a little deeper into these 'opportunities' and see what it would take to foster growth in those areas. This was not an easy process and it required accepting some hard truths. Nobody likes to focus on what they're doing poorly. It's a lot more fun to focus on what you're doing well. But we felt a deep dive into this topic was needed.

I won't go into the details of how we approached the discussion during the retreat, but let me tell you we were very well led and coached in this process. Scott Noll gave up his Friday evening and Saturday morning to be the 'uninterested observer' to help us see through the fog of data and guide us in a process that allowed us to put the data in a usable format. Many thanks to Scott for his efforts there.

The outcome of this process led to what we are referring to as the 'Elder Initiatives' - six areas that we would like to put some attention on.

So let me share with you each Initiative and give you the focus statement we've come up with to guide our approach. I think you'll see a pattern emerge.

First item on the list is **Evangelism**. The focus statement is: **To intentionally develop circles of influence beyond the church family for the purpose of inviting others into a relationship with Christ.**

While we would all like to see more people in our church every week, it is our desire that the primary means of growth at Maranatha be the result of the growth of God's kingdom. We believe God is asking us to focus on reaching our neighbors. We want to create a culture within

this body in which we are all are working on developing relationships with others and making a point to find opportunities to share Christ with them.

Second area is **Worship**. The focus statement to this one is: **To intentionally seek a spiritually mature man who will use his gifting, leadership and teaching ability to faithfully lead the church family in our weekly worship services.**

It is our desire to have a worship pastor who can shepherd the music ministry and bring some consistency to our style and worship service overall. We are blessed with a very talented group of musicians at Maranatha and they deserve consistent leadership and direction. We want to put in place someone who can invest in this team each and every week.

One thing that needs to be mentioned here is money. We acknowledge that we are not in a place financially to support this right now. But we believe God is asking us to proceed anyway. We don't know what that means or where he will take us, but we are willing to follow his lead and proceed through whatever doors he may open.

The third area is **Leadership Development**. Here's the focus statement: **To intentionally identify, train and empower the next generation of biblically-qualified men who will serve as Maranatha's deacons, elders and pastors.**

We know that we need to be intentional in developing and discipling our future church leaders. This body deserves to be led by men that are ready to accept the challenges God has for us in the future. This equipping doesn't usually happen by accident. We don't want to *hope* there will be some men ready in the future. We want to begin preparing them now.

The fourth area of focus is **Family Care**. The focus statement for this initiative is: **To intentionally integrate people into the church family so that they become well connected with and ministered to by fellow believers.**

We've been made aware of instances where some of our families have felt neglected by our church and its shepherds. This neglect wasn't intentional, of course, but it shows that this type of ministering needs to be nurtured, encouraged and modeled. We want to create a culture in this body where people are cared for by others; where the church family loves, supports, encourages and prays for each other.

Area five is **Discipleship**. This focus statement is: **To intentionally establish circles of friendship within the church family where interaction over the Bible moves each of us toward maturity in Christ.**

This area is directly related to the part of our vision of "moving toward maturity in Christ." We believe the call of every believer is to be a disciple who also discipled others. But again, this doesn't happen accidentally. So we want to be intentional about creating opportunities for the

people who attend this church to get connected to others in the Maranatha family so discipleship can happen; so we can use God's Word together to spur each other on to love and good works.

The final initiative is to be a **Praying Church**. This focus statement says: **To intentionally develop a churchwide culture where prayer is the natural inclination and response in all areas of life and worship.**

We want to see prayer become a part of the lifeblood of our church. Not just something we do sometimes, but something we do naturally, even reflexively, such that prayer is simply what this church does.

These are the six areas of focus areas we've identified. We believe these initiatives offer significant areas of opportunity for us; areas where we can grow together as a church family.

But, let me add one clarification to all this. We know we can't tackle all six of these at once. While we would love to jump in and focus on each of these areas simultaneously, we know that's a path to failure. If we spread ourselves too thin, all we'll end up with is six areas we still need to focus on. At this time we have decided to focus on the first two items: **Evangelism** and **Worship**. This does **not** mean we do not intend to focus on the others, but we also know our own limitations. We will not attempt to tackle additional initiatives until we begin making progress in these first two areas.

It's possible that at some point, some of you may be called upon to get involved in one or more of these areas. If you have input, please feel free to share. If you have questions about where we are in this process, please feel free to ask. But above all, please pray for the activity going on. We believe we've been given a significant challenge in this list and we need to be **intentional** (there's the pattern in case you missed it earlier - it's about being intentional) in addressing each of them.

Thank you.