We Begin to Pass the Baton to the Next Leaders in the Story of Ascent Church

Shared by Lead Pastor John Morlan at Ascent Church (Sunday, September 15, 2019)

A few weeks ago, I sat down with Ascent’s Elders and shared something with them I had been sensing for about a year—my time on sabbatical (Summer 2019) only further pressing this sense into me. And even since my return back to rhythms here, post-sabbatical, it’s only been reinforced. So our Elders asked if I would make what I shared with them known to you all.

In the past 5+ years since we’ve been gifted with the call to Evergreen, we’ve seen some pretty amazing things here at our church:

1. You’re here! That’s a huge win!
2. A really authentic and gifted leadership has been identified and put into place in our Eldership, in our ministries’ leadership, and on our staff. God will continue to use these awesome people to lead our church.
3. Not too long ago, we saw more people follow Jesus in baptism on one day than had been baptized in any one year in our church’s 63-year history!
4. People who would never go to church before—let alone enjoy church—now make community here at Ascent a living priority. Real lives have been changed.
5. Projects led by servant-volunteers and funded with everyone’s faithful giving have improved almost every square inch of each and every part of our facilities here.
6. In wisdom a few years ago, our church decided to change our name to Ascent Church to not only better communicate our heart to our community, but to also communicate our intentions—which is to believe in an UPWARD-ness God has us all on.

And I believe this is the trajectory line God has Ascent Church on . . . upward.

Now, I believe that this reset in our church—from what was going on here 5+ years ago to the incredible culture we have today that can lead us into our future—was the primary reason God called both me and my family here. It’s because of this mission nearing fulfilment that I am sensing that we should begin to pass the torch to Ascent’s next generation.

So, in concert with our Elders, we will begin an intentional and unified transition into Spring/Summer 2020 with our hopes being to offer enough up-time to begin a search process for the new Lead Pastor God is intending Ascent to call. (On average, it takes 9+ months for a church and a new Lead Pastor to get linked up, so we desire to foster the loveliest, most stable, and healthiest way possible to work that process out.)
Important in this is that everyone understands that I am not resigning. I am hoping to help Ascent transition to its next chapter of leadership. As our years here have seen a very strong Eldership and Ministry Staff be identified, grown, and deployed, it makes a passing of the torch not only possible, but ideal to where our church is already going.

During this transition, I'll keep preaching and leading and counseling and discipling and encouraging our leaders all along the way.

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Now, in case you’re wondering: there’s no need for anyone to search for drama in the motivations that formed this decision. We have wonderful leaders here who will continue to lead with godliness. You can trust their authenticity and their love for you. There’s no hidden storyline to worry about here. There are no secret sins going on among any of our leaders. And no one is pushing me out. We Morlans are just making sure Ascent is fully ready and that our camels are light so we can enter the next door in God’s Kingdom for us. [This last sentiment was an illusion to Sunday’s message from Matthew 19:16-30.]

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On that count, we do not yet know what that next thing is. We don’t have a name in any hat. There’s no greener pastures we’re seeking. We will be listening to God and following Him through that door when we sense what it is.

In the meantime, you’re stuck with me, my preaching, my bad jokes, my Kansas City Chiefs’ smack talk, and—in all seriousness—our prayers and love. We are here to continue to serve you and hopefully be a blessing. The Elders simply wanted to let this be as transparent a process as can be possible for all of us, so that your prayer, your input, and your stepping into building the next generation of Ascent is made most possible.

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And, one final encouragement: this decision to pass the leadership torch on our part has nothing to do with anyone here’s commitment and covenant with Ascent. Since we’ve never discipled people at Ascent to be Consumer Christians, no one should be here because of what we get, but what we give. Everyone here has a commitment to everyone else that’s a part of this Family—and that’s not contingent on circumstances. And it doesn’t come and go with whoever the Lead Pastor is. I’ve only ever been just one of the under-shepherds of our church and that will continue to be the way it is when the next Lead Pastor emerges. Jesus leads us. And our Elders follow Him as they lead our Body.

We love you and are grateful the immense blessing we will surely be to one another in the coming days and months as we hear God speak to us all. Of course, if you’d love to come and talk, pray, and/or offer insights, I would love to sit with you. This is my official invitation to you—as I have an open door to each and every one of you!