

# FAQ AND ELDER UPDATE



UPDATE ON THE SEARCH FOR A TRANSITIONAL PASTOR (8/28/20)

## **1. WHAT IS A TRANSITIONAL PASTOR?**

Transitional Pastors help guide churches in their transition from the leadership of one Senior Pastor to another. They can be especially helpful when the church experiences an unexpected transition. The purpose of the Transitional Pastor is to help the church stay focused on its mission, to help the congregation and staff through change by reducing conflict and rebuilding trust, and to prepare the staff and congregation for the arrival of the next Senior Pastor. The Transitional Pastor serves as the interim Head of Staff, providing leadership and additional support for our talented staff and ministries, serves on Session (the elder board) as Moderator and works closely with our denomination, ECO Bluewater Presbytery.

## **2. HAS A SEARCH COMMITTEE BEEN FORMED, AND IF SO, WHO IS ON IT?**

At our August 18, 2020 elder board meeting, the elders approved a search committee composed of two current elders and two “resting” elders (previously an elder) with Mike Barris from Presbytery as an advisor to the committee.

## **3. CAN A PERSON CURRENTLY ON STAFF BE NAMED AS TRANSITIONAL PASTOR?**

Per Presbytery guidance, the best practice is to hire an individual who can bring to a church specific transitional leadership gifts and perspective that serve the staff and congregation. It is atypical for a current pastoral staff member to serve as Transitional Pastor and it is also not recommended that the Transitional Pastor become the new Senior Pastor.

## **4. WHAT IS THE TIMETABLE FOR FINDING A TRANSITIONAL PASTOR?**

We want to find the person that God has ordained for this position. The hopeful goal of the committee is to have selected a Transitional Pastor over the next few months.

## **5. WHAT IS THE STATUS OF THE SEARCH?**

- Input has been received from staff on qualifications we should prioritize in the search.
- Presbytery has provided input on the search process.
- An initial list of potential candidates has been generated.
- The Transitional Pastor search committee has met and begun to review the potential candidates.

The committee will review resumes, conduct interviews, and consult with the Presbytery along the way, getting final approval from Session and Presbytery. The hiring of the Transitional Pastor does not require a congregational vote unlike the hiring of a Senior Pastor.

## UPDATE ON THE SEARCH FOR A SENIOR PASTOR (8/28/20)

### **1. WHAT IS THE STATUS OF THE SEARCH FOR A NEW SENIOR PASTOR?**

In our email to the congregation on August 21, 2020, we reported that the search committee for the Senior Pastor had been formed. This was premature. The committee member selection is in process and no committee has commenced the search. The Session will soon receive guidance from the Ministry Partnership Team at Bluewater Presbytery and will start the search in earnest after the Transitional Pastor has been hired.

### **2. WHAT IS THE TIMETABLE FOR FINDING A SENIOR PASTOR?**

Finding a Senior Pastor for Menlo Church could take anywhere from 6 months to two or more years. We will prayerfully search for the person God has ordained for this position.

## WHAT IS THE CURRENT STRUCTURE OF THE CHURCH LEADERSHIP?

The church staff is managed by a Senior Leadership Team comprised of the following people:

- Eugene Lee, Executive Pastor
- Andy VomSteeg, Creative Production and Marketing
- Bill Dewes, Finance
- Cheryl Fletcher, Discipleship
- Jake Chacko, Infrastructure
- Scott Palmbush, Campuses
- Sue Kim-Ahn, People and HR functions

The church leadership is accountable to Session.

## WHAT IS SESSION? HOW DO ELDERS GET ELECTED, AND HOW DO THEY ROLL OFF? (8/28/20)

“Session” is the name of the board of elders, who are responsible for oversight of the church’s mission for Christ in the world, assuring that the Word of God is taught, the Sacraments are rightly celebrated and disciples of Christ are formed and nurtured. The Session also is responsible for approving major church policies, the compensation of senior management, the budget, financial audits, and major expenditures.

The number of elders is re-evaluated each year. In August 2020, Session voted to increase the number of elders from 9 to 10. In addition, the Senior Pastor is Moderator of Session and has a vote alongside the volunteer elders. The Transitional Pastor, when hired, will become Moderator of Session. In August 2020, the elders voted that Assistant Pastor Scott Palmbush (who is ordained in ECO), subject to a vote by the congregation, be made a voting member of Session until the hire of a Senior Pastor. It is a common practice in our presbytery to have at least one ECO ordained assistant or associate pastor on the elder board. This will effectively add four new voices to Session in September 2020.

Unlike other churches and organizations in which board members may serve indefinitely, our volunteer elder board members are elected to 4 year terms with the possibility of a second 4 year term if both the elder board and the elder mutually discern that a second term would be in God’s best interest for the church. Therefore, in our church elder board, membership is refreshed annually with rolling turnovers due to staggered terms with new elders elected by the congregation at annual meetings.

It is the responsibility of the congregation to annually nominate and vote on candidates for the elder board to fill vacancies as a result of term limits for an outgoing elder. Nominees are interviewed and recommended by an elder nominating committee to the elder board who then recommends the elder candidates for congregational approval at the annual congregation meeting. Nominations are usually in the spring to early summer of each year and the annual congregation meeting is generally in August of each year to coincide with the end of the church fiscal year.

The elder board is accountable to ECO Bluewater Presbytery, and subject to their disciplinary authority as outlined in the ECO Constitution and Rules of Discipline. ECO partners with member churches to promote effective and impactful ministry of Jesus Christ in our communities.

## WHAT IS THE STATUS OF THE SUPPLEMENTAL INVESTIGATION (8/28/20)

### **1. WHAT IS THE SCOPE OF THE SUPPLEMENTAL INVESTIGATION?**

The newly authorized Investigative Advisory Committee will be responsible for interviewing and recommending a new, independent fact finding firm with expertise in child safety and sexual abuse to conduct a supplemental investigation of John Ortberg’s youngest son’s (“volunteer”) involvement in Menlo Church or Church-sponsored activities involving minors.

## **2. WHY IS THIS SUPPLEMENTAL INVESTIGATION BEING CONDUCTED?**

We want to be able to address all concerns that our parents may have for the safety of our children. Now that the volunteer's name has been made public, it is possible to conduct a more thorough investigation to confirm whether or not there has been any misconduct.

## **3. WHY ISN'T JOHN ORTBERG BEING FURTHER INVESTIGATED?**

The first investigation was focused on John Ortberg and no additional information has surfaced to warrant any further investigation.

## **4. WHAT IS THE STATUS OF THE INVESTIGATION?**

A five-person Investigative Advisory Committee has been formed composed of a staff member, a volunteer, a parent, a former elder, and a representative from our ECO Bluewater Presbytery denomination for additional oversight. The committee had its first two meetings this week. The committee will be interviewing potential investigation firms and will recommend one for approval by Session.

WHAT WERE THE CONCLUSIONS FROM THE FIRST INVESTIGATION? (8/28/20; MINOR UPDATE 9/9/20)

## **1. WHEN DID THE CHURCH FIRST LEARN ABOUT CONCERNS ABOUT THE ORTBERGS?**

In November 2019, the Elder Board learned that a person serving in the Menlo Church community had come to John Ortberg 16 months earlier to share in confidence an unwanted thought pattern of attraction to minors. Concerns were raised that John took no actions to prevent the volunteer from continuing to serve with our youth at the Menlo Park campus and did not consult anyone else at Menlo Church about the situation. As soon as these concerns were brought to the board's attention, we acted immediately and consistently with Menlo Church's Ethical Misconduct Policy.

## **2. HOW QUICKLY DID MENLO CHURCH MOVE INTO ACTION WHEN IT LEARNED OF THE VOLUNTEER? WHAT WAS THE SEQUENCE OF EVENTS SURROUNDING THE INITIAL INVESTIGATION?**

Within a few days of receiving the email about the volunteer, the board initiated actions, which included:

- Immediately removing the volunteer from the ability to serve at the Church.
- Placing Senior Pastor, John Ortberg, on leave.
- Informing ECO Bluewater Presbytery (the denominational governing board over Menlo Church) of the nature of the complaint and the identity of the volunteer.
- Launching an independent third-party investigation into the allegations.

## **3. WHAT WAS THE SCOPE OF THE INITIAL INVESTIGATION AND WHAT WERE THE FINDINGS?**

The scope of the initial investigation was two-fold: Did John Ortberg receive a confession from the

volunteer (his youngest son) that he struggled with unwanted thoughts, fail to prevent his son from volunteering, and fail to inform anyone at the church?

Did the volunteer engage in any misconduct, and did John or the church ever receive a specific allegation of misconduct concerning the volunteer or otherwise become aware of any misconduct by the volunteer in connection with his volunteering at the church?

The elders were careful to select an independent third-party investigator with no ties to John or the Ortberg family, which had the breadth of capability to address the scope of the investigation. The nationally recognized firm Coblenz Patch Duffy & Bass LLP was hired by the board and was given unrestricted authority to conduct a thorough investigation, interviewing whomever they deemed appropriate, as far back in history as needed, including a search of all church documents and John's email. The investigator had the discretion to disclose the identity of the volunteer if it was needed in the course of the investigation.

The investigation included speaking to relevant student and children's ministry leaders going back to 2008, each of whom was asked to disclose any information about which they were aware involving any allegations of misconduct by any leader or volunteer.

Both during and following the investigation, members of the church were asked to come forward with any knowledge or other information of any misconduct, and thankfully, no allegations or concerns involving the volunteer have surfaced.

The investigation did find that the volunteer shared with John Ortberg in confidence an unwanted thought pattern of attraction to minors and that John believed firmly that the volunteer posed no threat of acting on his unwanted thoughts. The investigation further found that John failed to prevent further volunteering and did not inform anyone at the church or seek their counsel. John did not realize at that time that his objectivity was fundamentally compromised because of the family relationship, and that he should have brought the elders or others on staff into the situation.

#### **4. WHAT WAS THE REASONING BEHIND THE ELDERS' DECISION TO RESTORE JOHN ORTBERG TO THE PULPIT?**

The elders considered all options and communicated with Presbytery and our denomination in a partnership of accountability throughout this decision-making process. After considerable time of prayer and discernment, the elders decided that John Ortberg be forgiven due to his remorse and repentance, and for him to engage in a thorough restoration process with elders, staff, and congregants. John completed the thorough restoration process before the elders voted to restore him to the pulpit.

#### **5. WHAT, IF ANY ACTION DID THE BOARD TAKE AFTER JOHN WAS RESTORED TO THE PULPIT?**

The Elder Board in collaboration with Presbytery transitioned John from his administrative responsibilities and shifted his role to be a Teaching Pastor. This eliminated John's direct responsibility as head of staff, returning that role to Session who in turn delegated the day-to-day responsibilities to interim Executive Pastor, Eugene Lee. Further, the board worked closely with staff leaders to reconfigure internal leadership responsibilities and expand the breadth and experience of

staff on the Senior Leadership Team, effective June 1, placing Eugene Lee as convener and leader of the new Leadership Team. This new agreement was ratified by John and Session on June 9th. The combination of these steps, completed prior to disclosure of the volunteer's identity, served to realign and refocus John's responsibilities on teaching instead of day-to-day staff management. It also strengthened a new group of staff to take on more leadership responsibilities.

## **6. WHY WAS THE IDENTITY OF THE VOLUNTEER BEING INVESTIGATED NOT DISCLOSED BY MENLO CHURCH?**

The elders believed that because there existed only a suspicion of misconduct by the volunteer, but no evidence of misconduct was found, it was not appropriate to disclose the identity of the volunteer in question. Revealing the volunteer's name would unnecessarily risk violating the volunteer's right to privacy and could potentially result in defaming the volunteer's character. It is important to note that while Gunn High School administrators and the local police received the same letter of concern that Menlo Church did, we are the only ones who chose to conduct an investigation.

The elders were careful not to reveal the identity of the volunteer as the church has a moral responsibility to protect the confidentiality of confession, especially when it pertains only to thoughts and not actions. Menlo Church aspires to be a place where congregants can honestly confess their struggles and find support to resist temptation and find freedom from sin. However, we want to clearly state that any congregant confessing unwanted thoughts or attraction towards minors would not be allowed to volunteer in our children or student programs.

At the time, because of the dynamics of the family conflict that we were aware of, we believed that the identity of the volunteer would eventually be made public. However, we did not believe (and still do not believe) it was appropriate or just for the church to disclose the volunteer's name as there was no evidence of any misconduct.

## **WHY DID JOHN ORTBERG RESIGN? (8/28/20)**

The board and John spent considerable time mutually praying and discerning God's direction for John and our church. We have consulted with Presbytery at every step. Our decision has not been taken lightly and stems from the board and John's collective desire for healing to begin in our church community.

John recognized the pain and broken trust his poor judgment has brought to the church he has loved and served for 17 years, in particular among many parents, youth, volunteers and staff. John expressed on several occasions willingness to resign if the elders believed his presence had become a distraction from the mission of our church.

The elders and John mutually recognized that if John remained at Menlo, it would mean a significant delay in our ability as a church to pursue our mission and ministry with the unity of spirit and purpose we believe God calls us to. A thorough supplemental investigation would take time and the restoration of trust after that investigation would likely take even more time. John had already served 17 years as Menlo's Senior Pastor, and eventually would want to retire. This would likely mean multiple transitions in leadership over the next few years that would impair Menlo's ability to accomplish its mission, something that John would never want to cause.

We also mourn the division and strife in the Ortberg family and support John's need to focus on healing and reconciliation within his own family over his pastoral duties at Menlo Church. Going through another lengthy process of restoration with the staff and congregation after the supplemental investigation, and then trying to preach and teach all while trying to heal his family would be an incredibly difficult task.

For these reasons, both the board and John concluded that it would be best for John to resign to help our church to return our focus to our ultimate mission: helping people find and follow Jesus. In July of 2020, after a process of mutual discernment with John and in consultation with the Presbytery, the board unanimously concluded that John should resign as Senior Pastor of our church. He agreed and tendered his resignation in late July.

## WHAT IS THE CHURCH'S COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY?

We believe that one of our highest callings as a church is the bond of trust around our children's safety. The safety of our children is of paramount importance to our staff, volunteers and elders. Our goal is to make sure our community has full confidence in the quality of the programs provided for our children. For more than 30 years, we have had child safety practices in place; our current practices can be found on our website [here](#).

The board has directed staff to seek an external, independent audit of our existing child safety policies and procedures. Staff members are researching options and will provide an update on the expected start of the work as soon as we know more about the timing.

## HOW CAN THE CONGREGATION BE PRAYING FOR THE ELDERS? (9/9/20)

1. For unity among the congregation, staff and elders to fix our eyes on Jesus and focus on our mission to help people find and follow Jesus.
2. For the search committee for the Transitional Pastor and the candidate for the Transitional Pastor that God has ordained for this role.
3. For the new elders, Katy Korsmeyer and Jennifer Blatnik, and Scott Palmbush to quickly assimilate into their new roles on the Board.

## WHO CAN I TALK TO IF I STILL HAVE QUESTIONS?

All of our pastors are available to provide support and guidance to those in need. Members of our community with questions for elders can email [elders@menlo.church](mailto:elders@menlo.church).

