

Updated Member Communication

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Dear Members of Mars Hill Church,

“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed; shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever, Amen” (1 Peter 5:1- 11).

The above passage of Scripture has been powerful to me as of late. It is rich with the truth of the Gospel and particularly helpful in the challenging season we find ourselves in as a church. It would take pages and pages to unpack this section of Scripture in full, but I do want to highlight some of its truths which are very important and timely to our church.

Peter admonishes church elders to set an example for our people and faithfully oversee the people and affairs of the church. The flock of Mars Hill is now quite large, with approximately 6,400 people in attendance this last Sunday (1,500 more people than last year at this time). The growth is both exciting and challenging because we take Peter’s words to heart. We care about more than just numerical growth; we care about the maturity and growth of those that call Mars Hill their home. We are laboring to see that God’s flock is well shepherded, and there is simply no way that what will soon be thirty pastors can properly care for the fast growing number of people under our care. Therefore, we are laboring diligently to architect a care structure that attends to the needs of Jesus’ flock entrusted to our oversight.

At Mars Hill, we have found that the most healthy and growing Christians are those that are connected to a both a campus and a Community Group, where they have regular interaction, prayer, Bible study, and fellowship with other brothers and sisters. Subsequently, our primary efforts are presently focused on pouring more energy and resources into building the leaders and systems that enable the campuses and Community Groups to operate with utmost health, and to produce as much fruit as possible.

Peter also says that the elders of a church are given the responsibility to exercise oversight in the church on behalf of Jesus. This verse should cause a godly fear in the heart of every elder as they prayerfully oversee the church. This passage speaks to the methods of our oversight and care. First, we must exercise oversight and make decisions for the whole church that are in the best interest of the Gospel. Second, serving as an elder is a personal sacrifice to one's family, and we must not be forced or obligated but willing to oversee. Third, your elders must not be greedy for personal gain, whether that be for power, finances, control, information, or preference, but rather we must be eager to serve.

Each man that is an elder of Mars Hill Church has willingly offered their life to serve as a pastor of this flock. This includes submitting to a rigorous testing and approval process in order to determine if he and his family's life is worthy to be an example to the flock. As new elders are approved, there is an ongoing expectation of all elders to continue walking in a way that is above reproach and submissive to spiritual authority (which includes God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures, the elders as a whole, and our particular overseeing elders, along with godly pastors from other churches with whom we are in accountable relationships and seek for counsel in all we do). We take Peter's exhortations quite seriously, regardless of the personal difficulties we may face at times such as the present. We are committed to continually repenting of personal sin and holding each other accountable so that we may continue to grow in Jesus and set an example of the kind of humility of which Peter speaks.

Daily, the elders continue to lean on Jesus as the Chief Shepherd of this church. He serves as the head of the church and our example and authority in everything. Because we are sinful and have no righteousness apart from Jesus, we rejoice in the fact that He leads, convicts, teaches, matures, and empowers us while also making up for our innumerable shortcomings. Without Jesus there is no hope; and with Him there is indeed great hope

It is amazing to sit back and watch God's sovereignty as the life and challenges of the church providentially align with whatever book of the Bible or sermon series we are going through at the time. As Pastor Mark approaches chapter two in the book of Philippians, we are given an unprecedented picture of Jesus' humility as our example. This example is counterintuitive to everything we are taught in culture, but it is a primary theme in Scripture, and vital to the life of a faithful Christian. Who are we without Jesus? We are nothing. We are utterly dependent on His grace for everything. In this season, Christ-like humility is an important lesson and truth of Scripture that we must all meditate on so that we might become more like Jesus and bear more fruit with Jesus. We must be sober-minded, alert, and quick to give Jesus our sin, our worries, and our fears. We can do this solely because He does care for us as only He can, sympathizing with our weaknesses as we draw near to Him. Furthermore, he gives us mercy and grace in our times of need. In that we rejoice.

Sadly, a few of our roughly two thousand church members have responded very poorly over the last few weeks to the unprecedented, difficult issues that the elders have been dealing with. Some have gone so far as to be rudely demanding, slanderous, immature, unwise, selfish, disrespectful, and utterly sinful. Some have done this through private means, such as slanderous gossip and emails to the elders, while others have chosen to post anonymously on our main church website under the Ask Anything thread for Pastor Mark's upcoming sermon series. This grieves the hearts of your elders, as these actions are harmful to the church body and harmful to the forward progress of the Gospel.

But only a few members have responded in a negative way. For the masses who have continued in prayer for your elders and supporting us, we thank you for that. Concerns and questions are normal, and we expect you to have them, but we do ask that you handle them in a godly, mature fashion that would honor Jesus. The elders are walking the tension of caring for the flock, both, by helping those who are hurting, and by exercising oversight and discipline of those that are hurting the flock by sinning in their demands for information, their slander of the elders, and their unfounded accusations and gossip.

Our hope was that our members who had serious concerns or questions would follow our request and speak with an elder, so that we might shepherd our flock as Peter requests. Sadly, the division being caused by the few who have not honored that request has left us with a need to communicate more broadly to the entire church membership. But we want to do this in a manner that is “fitting and orderly,” as Scripture commands for all church affairs. The practical difficulty is how to accomplish this task. We are too big to have a membership meeting with two thousand people, and in light of how some members have already reacted, we know that simply opening up the members’ site would result in a full-scale digital flame-throwing all-church fight, which would not be wise or helpful to anyone. Therefore, we have devised a “fitting and orderly” plan through which we hope to answer the questions of our members on the very important decisions that are being made during this season of Mars Hill.

To further address the questions of our members, we will open a forum on our members’ site for you to post questions for your elders. It will be called “Ask Your Elders Anything.” The forum will be open for a short period of time (seventy-two hours), beginning next week after the elders conclude their October 29 meeting and the results of the meeting are communicated. We will then take your questions and craft thoughtful responses so as to do a good job of informing our members. Please be patient and give us a day or two to finish what will be a lengthy document so that we can answer as many questions as possible in one thorough manner.

We have chosen to wait until after October 29 to open this discussion because there is not much that can be reported until after this elders’ meeting. This is arguably the most important elder meeting in the history of our church; we will conclude Bent Meyer’s investigation, discuss and vote on our new bylaws, approve several new elders, and take the next step in establishing local elder teams at each campus, a system that replaces the singular elder team which has until this point governed all of Mars Hill. In many ways this meeting marks the replanting of Mars Hill Church — this time with a large core group distributed among many different locations, and the ability to launch many more campuses so that more people can worship Jesus as God at Mars Hill. Our recent controversies and conflicts underscore the need for us to reorganize around campuses so that future church discipline issues of leaders and members can be handled at the local level and be discussed on a campus specific members’ site, thereby making communication and care more effective.

In the meantime, please pray for your elders and your church. Please also begin to consider any questions you would like answered regarding recent events and/or the future of our church. This is also a good season for every member to reevaluate his or her commitment to follow Jesus and actively serve and support Mars Hill Church.

On behalf of the elders,
Pastor Jamie Munson, Lead Pastor