

FAQs — Elmbrook Family Meetings

Dec. 12 & 13, 2018

Question: Why did the Council of Elders (COE) choose an individual, rather than assemble a leadership team, as originally planned?

Answer: [Jeff Schultz] When we first started this process, we were focused on building a team. But about five or six weeks into the process, through prayer and fasting and many conversations, the Lord really turned that focus from a team to an individual. We had conversations with many people locally and around the country as to how this gap could be filled, and with whom it should be filled. And as a result, we moved in the direction of identifying a person whom we would equip to build a team, as opposed to the Council bringing in a team. We believe it was truly an answer to our prayers that the Lord led us in this direction.

Question: Why the title “Lead Pastor”?

Answer: [From a recent video interview of Lee Heyward and Jeff Schultz] The term “Senior Pastor” is what Elmbrook is familiar with. That’s not the title the elders have decided to give the new role. Instead, they’ve chosen the title “Lead Pastor.” This is because an “interim pastor” is generally in place for a few months, and doesn’t have much authority. A “senior pastor” title is generally reserved for someone we anticipate will serve the church for a decade or more. Neither of these apply in this situation. The Lead Pastor role is designed to help Elmbrook Church stabilize and revitalize, work that will likely take a few years. With the oversight of the Council of Elders, Lee will have responsibility for all ministry, staff and operations at Elmbrook Church for an extended period of time.

Question: Why did you choose Lee? What are his qualifications?

Answer: [JS] The Council of Elders chose Lee because we felt that his education, credentials and experience are an ideal fit, and are only surpassed by his godly character. We also felt that Lee has a unique perspective of Elmbrook but has not been inside Elmbrook for the last 30 years. He understands its DNA and the rich heritage that we have, but he also understands what the future could be.

Lee is the founder and president of Brooklink, an international ministry that strengthens churches in gospel movements by equipping, empowering, and releasing leaders. He has experience helping churches through transitions such as ours. From 1986 to 2009 he served as founding and senior pastor of Northbrook Church, and under his leadership Northbrook planted two other churches in suburban Milwaukee, and also supported and equipped a family of international workers around the world. Before planting Northbrook Lee spent three years as an associate pastor here at Elmbrook church. He has traveled to more than 50 countries, teaching the word of God, equipping emerging leaders and encouraging pastors. He holds a BA in business from Furhman and an M. Div and a Doctor of Ministry from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He also serves as an adjunct professor in practical theology at Trinity. We believe that we couldn't find anyone better suited for Elmbrook for this season.

Question: **Lee, what is your preaching style?** [find several recordings of Lee's messages on our News page, at elmbrook.org/news]

Answer: [Lee Heyward] I remember a well-known quote by Phillip Brooks who said that preaching is divine truth through a human personality. So one of the things that I seek to do in preaching is to convey divine truth through my unique personality. When I think about preaching, and when I think about preparing a message, a good message that I've preached contains three things. Number one, it contains solid content. A sermon has to be driven by a biblical text. That's what we believe in. We believe the Word of God to be inspired from Him. And so a good sermon is based on a biblical text.

Not only that, but it also is Christ-centered. It's focused on the person and work of Christ and it has a gospel focus. It's not about our human effort. It's about leaning in, leaning into what God has already accomplished through us, for us, through the Cross.

But there's also a strong bias toward application. I believe that if you preach a sermon and you just simply unfold and unpack the text and it has no practical application for how people can work it into their lives Monday through Friday, then basically I've given you an intellectual challenge, but it's not going to help you in day-to-day-life.

It's important that I not only deliver good content, but also do it with enthusiasm. I think it's a sin to bore people with the Bible. We ought to be excited about what God is teaching us through his Word. I believe very strongly that preaching has to have an enthusiastic component.

And then finally, I think that it also has to be genuine and authentic. I've got to live in the text as a preacher. I've got to demonstrate that when I come on a Sunday morning or Saturday night and unfold and unpack the word of God to you, that I've been living in the text. I'm trying to absorb it myself and I'm trying to apply it in my own experience. I want to demonstrate to you how that particular text is working in my life.

Question: **What about the next generation?**

Answer: [LH] One of the things that keeps me honest about today's generation, and all the generations behind me, is that I have four adult children who are constantly enlightening their old man. They keep me honest. They share their own insights with me. They've grown up listening to my preaching. They critique my preaching. They give me insights into how their generation hears things.

One of the questions that I ask myself fairly often is this question: How would Jesus feel if I refused to consider what I need to change in myself, in order to reach new communities and new generations?

What if I'm simply stubborn and stuck in my ways, and I don't want to think about how I need to change my thinking... not necessarily my beliefs, but the way in which I behave or the assumptions that I make about a particular generation or culture? What if I just refuse and remain firm in my own perspectives about that generation. That's going to put distance between me and the generations I'm trying to reach. So I'm constantly asking Jesus to open up my heart to the things that I need to see about the generation behind me.

I have a mentor who used to say it this way to me. He said, “We need to live with one arm reaching up to the generation ahead of us and one arm reaching back to the generation behind us.” I have the opportunity to do that.

I need to be thinking about those who've gone before me. People like Stuart and others who've had a huge influence on the way I think and understand ministry. Part of what I've tried to do in life is simply to reach ahead to those people and draw on their considerable wisdom, experience and knowledge. I can learn about the things that you've done in your life and perhaps you have a read on what we're doing today that I need to listen to. At the same time, I want to reach behind me to the generation behind me and offer my perspective to them, and open myself to their perspective about our own times and our own generation. I've found that over the years that's been a pretty good approach.

Question: Does the COE expect Lee to come in and make big changes?

Answer: [JS] We intend on calling Lee as a lead pastor to shepherd and pastor the congregation. One important role of a leader is to define our current realities. We fully expect Lee will take time to assess our entire church and its operations and this will take time. From there he and the COE will collaborate and have a collaborative conversation with the congregation as well. We have not presumed any major changes.

[LH] One of the things that I'm doing is that I have invited the present staff into a discussion. I've invited every single staff member of Elmbrook church — full- and part-time — to spend 30 minutes with me. I'm just going to ask a series of questions so that I can try to understand what the current reality is. I don't envision making any major changes until I understand the context.

Question: What will happen with the vision developed by Elmbrook over recent years?

Answer: [JS] We haven't made any decisions yet on the vision created by prior leadership. We can tell you that the vision, just like everything else, will be fully evaluated. We sat in front of you a couple of months ago and said everything's on the table, and that's still the case.

Question: What impact did the last few months of transition have on finances and attendance?

Answer: [JS] Thank you, Elmbrook, for your continued generosity. Along with attendance, your giving has remained steady over the last number of months. In our Home fund, which funds our normal day to day ministry, we're slightly above budget. In the Harvest fund, which supports all of our local and global mission work, has lagged behind by about 15 percent.

A concern that we have is regarding the Faith Promise that was held at the end of Homecoming this year. Those numbers are down about 35 percent. We will be having further conversations about this probably over the next 30 to 60 days.

This is year end, and many of you are very generous each December. We thank you in advance for that.

Question: What is the relationship between the Lead Pastor and the Council of Elders?

Answer: [LH] I've had the wonderful privilege of working with church boards and councils of elders for more than 30 years: at Northbrook Church and Brooklink, as well as at Meadowbrook while I served there in an interim capacity.

When you think about healthy churches and churches that have a high impact, not only in their community, but across the world, there are generally four aspects present. Number one, there is a council of elders that's clearly governing the church, and they are governing it with wisdom and careful discernment. They are governing it with information: proper, accurate information. They're asking lots of questions. They're out front and they're visible to the congregation. People know who their elders are. The elders exercise a spiritual role and spiritual oversight as overseers of the congregation. So there's a very strong element of elder governance in a healthy high impact church.

The second aspect is that there's a senior leader who's giving directional leadership to the church. He's not pursuing his own personal pipe dream. He's setting a direction and he's giving direction to the elders. He's meeting with the elders. There's a lot of goodwill and trust between the senior pastor, the senior leader in the elders. That leader is not afraid to step out front and say, "this is the direction I think that we need to go". And people generally listen to that kind of leader because of their calling, their vocation, the skills and abilities and gifts that God has given to them.

And then thirdly, if it's a large church such as Elmbrook, there is a staff made up of many pastors and directors and those who serve the ministries, and they have a very clear understanding of what their role is. And that is to equip the people for the work of ministry. They know what's going on in people's lives. They're offering training opportunities. They're discipling their leaders. They're pouring life and energy and truth and principles and leadership into those that they're trying to develop, so that ultimately it's the people in the pews that are doing significant outward-focused ministry.

Now, here's the catch with all of those things: with a council that governs the leaders, with a lead pastor or senior pastor giving direction, with a staff who's equipping the people, and with a congregation that's involved in significant ministry. All of them have accountabilities.

The council of elders has accountability to the congregation that they oversee, for the way in which they conduct themselves and their governance as elders. The senior leader, the senior pastor (the lead pastor in this case), is accountable to the council. I'm not allowed to pursue my own pipe dream and just go off and do whatever I want to do. If I'm setting a direction for the church, if I'm giving direction to the church, if I'm casting direction for the church to go forward, that direction needs to be vetted and refined. It needs to be embraced; it needs to be massaged by the council of elders. And then once the vision is agreed upon with the senior leader and the council, then you go forth with that direction for the church, and you become guardians of that direction. You ensure that everything in the church is helping to achieve that particular direction. And then the staff comes along and they understand that direction too, and they begin to equip the people so that direction can become a reality. And then the congregation who's been equipped and prepared to do the work of ministry takes the things that the direction of the church and they begin to engage and get involved in outward-focused ministry. The congregation also have accountability. Ultimately their accountability is to God.

Over all of that, all of us are accountable to God Himself. That's the way I see the working relationship between a lead pastor and a council of elders and administrator.

Let me just say one other thing about that. There is no place in a church for a lone ranger or a dictatorial leader. There's just no place for it. I think that Philippians 2 is probably the best leadership manual that we have. The attitude of a leader is that of the Jesus. The Lord Jesus did not consider His equality with God something to be held onto. He didn't do power plays. Jesus didn't grasp for power. Paul says that Jesus made himself nothing. He took the nature of a servant. He was made in human likeness and found in appearance as a man. And he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. And it was as a result of his obedience that God exalted him for it. That's the model.

We have a great model in the Lord Jesus of what true leadership is. It's not a lone ranger leader going off without any accountability whatsoever or seeking to dictate to people what ought to be done. It's living as a servant, seeking to get beneath the people, helping them to understand what God's calling us to and then empowering them and equipping them to go and do it. And that's what a church of high impact looks like.

Question: **What is the next step in the process of calling a Lead Pastor?**

Answer: [JS] The Elmbrook Council of Elders, by constitution and bylaws, calls the Lead Pastor. We call the pastor, but only after we ascertain the support of the membership of the church. We are in the process of ascertaining your support right now; it started the minute the announcement came out about our intention to call Lee. We have technically not yet called Lee to the position of Lead Pastor. It's our intention to call once the ascertainment period is complete, which we would expect to be in the next few weeks. There has been overwhelming support for Lee's call, with very little dissent. We would anticipate a formal announcement on the call sometime prior to the end of the year and, if everything goes as planned, a commissioning and installation sometime in January.