

Response to Senior Pastor Questionnaire
River Hills Baptist Church

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Note: unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations are from the CSB.

Theology

1. Do you agree with everything in this church's statement of faith? Is there anything missing from this statement of faith that you would like added?

While I heartily agree with almost the entirety of the RHBC statement of faith, there are two items that give me pause.

The first relates to article XII. I whole-heartedly agree with article XII in so far as "law of God" does not refer to the Mosaic law but refers to God's moral perfection and the commands that correspond thereto.

The second relates to article XV. I do believe that Christians should follow the pattern of the apostles and New Testament church by gathering for corporate worship on the Lord's Day and stewarding Sundays well through the "devout observance of all the means of grace." At the same time, I do not believe that the Lord's Day is the new covenant equivalent of the old covenant Sabbath. Please see the following paragraphs for further explanation.

XII. Of the Harmony of the Law and the Gospel.

I whole-heartedly affirm that the eternal and unchangeable rule of God's moral government is holy, just, and good. However, I want to clarify that in my understanding, the reference to "the law of God" in the first line of the article does not refer to the Mosaic law—the law of the old covenant.

Two reasons prompt this clarification. First, I have read a copy of the New Hampshire Confession of Faith from 1853 with Scripture references, and the passages cited included references to the old covenant law. Second, the language of this article pulls from Romans 7:12 ("So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good"), and in the immediate context, Paul refers to the Mosaic law. In 7:6 Paul contrasts service "in the newness of the Spirit" to service "in the old letter of the law." Christians walk in obedience to God's righteousness by the power of the Spirit, but this obedience is not defined by conformity to the Mosaic code.

In an effort to ensure absolute clarity, I want to specifically state that I interpret "law of God" in this article to refer to God's moral perfection (and corresponding decrees) rather than the old covenant law, since Christ "made of no effect the law consisting of commands and expressed in regulations, so that he might create in himself one new man from the two, resulting in peace" (Eph 2:15). While the old covenant law certainly contains elements of the eternal and unchangeable rule of God's moral government, it also contains temporal commands that were specific to God's covenant relationship with ethnic Israel. The whole old covenant has passed away (Heb 7:12; 8:13), and Christians do not relate to God through the old covenant but through the new covenant. The gospel of Jesus Christ produces faith working through love, and love is the fulfillment of the law (Gal 5:6; Rom 13:10).

XV. Of the Christian Sabbath.

I am not a Sabbatarian. I do not believe that Sunday is inherently more holy than any other day. I do not believe it is inherently sinful to work on Sunday, mow the yard, wash clothes, do the dishes, prepare a meal, or engage in edifying recreation. I do think it is wrong to neglect the gathering of the saints and to prioritize one's own earthly pleasures over the kingdom of God and his righteousness (on Sunday or any other day of the week). In Romans 14:5 Paul states, "One person judges one day to be more important than another day. Someone else judges every day to be the same. Let each one be fully convinced in his own mind." This stands in stark

contrast to the old covenant, which prescribes the death penalty for violating the sabbath (cf. Num 15:32-36). The old covenant Sabbath is typological and points to the rest that Christ gives his people (Heb 4:1-11). After speaking of Christ's atoning work, Paul writes, "Therefore, don't let anyone judge you in regard to food and drink or in the matter of a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of what was to come; the substance is Christ" (Col 2:16-17). Paul warns against those who would judge Christians for not observing a Sabbath day.

If "Christian Sabbath" in article XV merely means a day wisely set aside for corporate worship and rest in preparation for our eternal rest, then I agree with the article.

In enumerating my concerns, I do not mean to disparage the RHBC statement of faith in any way. Rather, I want to provide as much clarity as I am able.

2. Is there a confession of faith which better articulates your views?

There are preferential differences in how particular elements of doctrine are phrased, but the only significant areas where other confessions of faith better articulate my views involve clarity on the Lord's Day and the law.

Reaching & Teaching International Ministries is one organization that adopts the New Hampshire Confession of Faith with modifications to both articles XII and XV ([link](#)). I am very pleased with the [doctrinal statement](#) of the church which I currently serve as a pastor. This represents a modified version of the Abstract of Principles from the original charter of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (Note that Immanuel Baptist's modifications of the original Abstract of Principles include a removal of the section on the Lord's Day and the addition of a section on the Holy Spirit).

I mention these other confessions as examples, but I do not see irreconcilable differences between my beliefs and RHBC's current statement of faith. It is my intention to clarify my views (and the current views of RHBC), but I would be happy to espouse and teach the current statement of faith with appropriate clarification.

3. What is the gospel?

The gospel is the good news of who God is and what he has done to save a people for his own possession. God is the righteous creator of all things, and everyone is accountable to him. Rather than submit to God's righteous rule, Adam and all who are born in him have rebelled against God and deserve God's eternal wrath for their sin. But God, who is rich in mercy, sent his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who lived a perfectly righteous life, died on the cross in the place of his people, to pay the penalty for their sins, so that he might reconcile them to God, and rose bodily from the dead on the third day, commissioned his disciples to proclaim his saving work to all peoples, and ascended into heaven from whence he will come to judge the living and the dead. God commands all people everywhere to repent (turn from their sin) and worship and obey the risen Lord Jesus. All who call upon the name of the Lord receive forgiveness of sin and will be saved from God's wrath.

Believers are saved by grace alone through faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone. When God draws people to himself, he brings them from death to life and pours out his Holy Spirit on them and works in them both to will and to do his good pleasure (Phil 2:13), such that those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ bear fruit in keeping with repentance and desire to purify themselves even as the Lord Jesus is pure (1 Jn 3:3).

There is a broader sense of the gospel that extends beyond the salvation of individuals to the entirety of the kingdom of God and the restoration of all things. Jesus has inaugurated his kingdom, and the fullness of the good news of Jesus Christ extends to when God will make all things new in the new heavens and new earth, where God will dwell with his people in perfect harmony for all eternity.

4. Do you believe in the doctrines of grace? Why or why not?

Yes. I believe the Scriptures clearly teach the doctrines of grace. From beginning to end, salvation belongs to the Lord. God is the decisive actor in salvation.

Total Depravity. Due to Adam's sin every part of a human being is affected by sin. Fallen man is totally depraved—not in the sense that humans are as sinful as they could possibly be, but in the sense that the totality of the human being is corrupted by sin. In other words, there is no part of being human that sin has not affected.

When God created man in the garden, God made him very good (Gen 1:31). God warned Adam that on the day he ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil he would “certainly die” (Gen 2:17). Adam died spiritually when he rebelled against God, and he later died physically. Whereas God declared man to be very good prior to the fall, after the fall, God “saw that human wickedness was widespread on the earth and that every inclination of the human mind was nothing but evil all the time” (Gen 6:5). Adam's sin resulted in spiritual death, physical death, and spiritual corruption—both for himself and for all born in Adam (Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:22). Through Adam's disobedience, his descendants were both condemned and made sinners (Rom 5:18-19). Scripture describes fallen humans as sinners in rebellion against God who knowingly suppress the truth of God and give themselves over to idolatry and the fulfillment of every sinful desire. Sin affects a person's reason, will, emotions, affections, desires, physical body, relationships, and more.

Unconditional Election. Election and salvation do “not depend on human will or effort but on God who shows mercy” (Rom 9:16). In his infinite wisdom and great love, God has chosen a people for himself from every language and people group. God set his love on his elect prior to the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4), prior to and irrespective of any act of theirs or any foreseen faith, “so that God's purpose according to election might stand—not from works but from the one who calls” (Rom 9:11-12). Everyone born in Adam deserves God's eternal wrath, and God's gracious election of his people is not due to any sinner's work of righteousness—past, present, or future (Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:4-5). Salvation is entirely to the praise of God's glory (Eph 1:6, 11, 14).

Definite atonement. In his atoning work on the cross, the Lord Jesus suffered and died in the place of the elect; he paid the penalty for their sins, and he accomplished their salvation, securing their reconciliation to God. Jesus' atoning work secures believers' sanctification and obedience. Jesus suffered “so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (1 Pet 2:24). Jesus' death and resurrection brings believers healing, new life, and obedience. Through Jesus' obedience, believers are not only declared righteous but will be made righteous (Rom 5:19).

According to Romans 8:28-34, the ones for whom Christ died are the ones who receive the benefits of Christ's death. Paul assures the saints in Rome that “all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28). As evidence of God's unmistakable love, Paul cites God's foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification and glorification of his saints. Paul then asks, “What then are we to say about these

things? If God is for us, who is against us? He did not even spare his own Son but offered him up for us all. How will he not also with him grant us everything?” (Rom 8:31-32). Those for whom God offered up his Son are the same group of people who receive the blessings of Christ’s death.

Irresistible grace / effectual calling. God’s grace is effectual, and the Lord Jesus will save each of his elect. As the Lord Jesus said, “Everyone the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will never cast out... This is the will of him who sent me: that I should lose none of those he has given me but should raise them up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father: that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him will have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (Jn 6:37-40). Not one of those whom the Father has chosen will fail to come to the Lord Jesus, and not one of those who come to the Lord Jesus will face rejection. Just as the Lord Jesus called Lazarus forth from his grave, so God makes the dead alive when he draws his elect to his Son. “Everyone who has listened to and learned from the Father comes to [Jesus]” (Jn 6:45).

Perseverance of the saints. Scripture teaches that those whom God saves he will keep until the final day. God is the one who begins the work of salvation in an individual, and God will bring it to completion at the day of Christ (Phil 1:6). As Paul declares, “For those [God] foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified” (Rom 8:29-30). There is an unbroken chain of salvation that reaches from God setting his love on an individual in eternity past to God ushering that person into his glory for eternity. Jesus will strengthen his people “to the end, so that [they] will be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; you were called by him into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1:8-9). God actively keeps his saints safe to heaven’s shore.

Furthermore, Scripture teaches that all who truly believe in Jesus will persevere to the end. It is through faith that God guards his people by his power (1 Pet 1:5). Jesus repeatedly instructed his disciples that it is the one who endures to the end who will be saved (Matt 10:22, 24:13; Mk 13:13; Rev 14:12). Paul writes, “If you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (Rom 8:13). Those whom God has made alive and united to the Lord Jesus must work by the Spirit to put to death the deeds of the body. Believers persevere by continuing to repent of sin and trust in the Lord Jesus until Christ returns or calls them home. Those who forsake the Lord Jesus and make shipwreck of their faith will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. As Jesus and James proclaim, it is not those who merely profess faith in Christ but those who do the will of God who will enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 7:21-23; Ja 2:20-26).

5. What are some theological issues that you think are especially important for Christians to get right in this time and place?

Authority and sufficiency of Scripture. As Christians, Scripture should be the basis for everything we do. Consequently, there is always a need to emphasize the doctrine of Scripture. Our cultural climate elevates personal experience, the opinions of specialists, quick results, and the celebration of moral depravity. Christians need to constantly remind one another that, in the Scriptures, God has given believers what they need “to be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17). By the help of the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures are sufficient for every

spiritual need. Scripture—not experience, not “what works”, not what is culturally acceptable to modern sensibilities—is our authority for faith and practice.

Holiness of God. God is righteous; he loves what accords with his own character, and he hates all that stands opposed to him. In a world that is concerned with being emotionally relevant, politically correct, and culturally sensitive, God’s people need to have their beliefs, emotions, and actions submitted to and aligned with God. He is the standard and He is the good news. Abortion, LGBTQ+ activism, sexuality, politics, justice, compassion, “being kind,” and all the rest must be viewed in light of the holiness of God. I directly call out the holiness of God, but one could put all of the character of God under this category as well.

There is great need to understand grace in its fullness. Scripture articulates the grace of God both in terms of pardon for sin and power to walk in holiness. It is the grace of God that has brought salvation and that instructs us to “deny godlessness and worldly lusts and to live in a sensible righteous and godly way in the present age” (Titus 2:11-12). Repentance and faith manifest themselves in an active pursuit of God’s kingdom and righteousness.

Creation. God is the righteous creator before whom everyone stands accountable. We are creatures and he alone is the creator. We do not decide our gender, determine the proper bounds of sexuality, define marriage, or have the authority to shape reality after our likeness and word.

Marriage & Sexuality. While a biblical view of marriage and sexuality will flow from a proper understanding of the authority and sufficiency of the Scriptures, the holiness of God, and creation, I mention it specifically because LGBTQ+ issues provide a clear theological and cultural dividing line in our day. It is important that the church stands unapologetically against the sexual perversions of American society while proclaiming and displaying the love of God for sinners in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Ecclesiology. Many Christians in America have a very poor understanding of the church. In a fragmented and individualistic society, believers need to understand and articulate a robust understanding of who the Church is, what its mission is, and how it should function for the building up of the body of Christ, good of our neighbor, and the evangelization of the world.

6. Summarize the meaning and purpose of Genesis 1. How do the events described in this chapter relate to science and history, to the biblical story, and to the Christian life?

Genesis 1 records God’s creation of the universe and the beginning of his written revelation of himself. The opening pages of Genesis are foundational for the rest of the Scriptures and the rest of human existence—both in this age and in the age to come. Genesis 1 testifies that God is the creator of everything. He created all things from nothing by the word of his power. God owns all things and all creation stands accountable to him. God created all things good. God made humans distinct from the rest of his creation by forming them in his image and commissioning man to fill the earth and rule over it. God made mankind with two genders—male and female. God’s first words to man were blessing and command. God’s creation flourishes in obedience to his loving rule.

I believe Genesis 1 (and the entire book) records factual, historical events. Based on the testimony of God’s word, I believe that God created the universe in six days and rested on the

seventh day. I believe God brought a world-wide flood that destroyed every human being that was not aboard the ark with Noah (1 Pet 3:20; 2 Pet 3:6-7).

There is nothing in the text that gives me reason to think the record of events should be taken as anything other than a record of actual historical events. Those who deny a 24-hr six-day creation account seem to be strongly motivated by extra-textual factors (which I do not find persuasive). Furthermore, the rest of Scripture refers to the events of Genesis as actual historical events. Moses grounds a six-day work week and sabbath day of rest in the fact that God created everything in six days and then rested on the seventh (Ex 20:11). Jesus describes his return in terms of the days of Noah, and states that the flood came and “destroyed them all” (Luke 17:26-27). Paul testifies that all humanity descended from one man—Adam (Acts 17:26). Furthermore, Paul testifies to the creation account by stating that woman came from man (1 Cor 11:8).

I do not think the theory of evolution stands in any way compatible with the Scriptural account of creation. Properly understood, science is not a body of knowledge but an approach to understanding how the world works. The reigning paradigm of the scientific community staunchly rejects God’s testimony to his creative work in Genesis 1, but Genesis 1 does not stand at odds with science (i.e., the process of observation, hypothesis, experimentation, etc.).

The world openly rejects God’s role as creator. Rather than honoring God as their creator and rightful ruler, sinful humanity fashions gods in their own likeness and rejects God’s good order, purpose, and design in creation—even to the point of denying the fundamental realities of male and female.

The Christian life is one of new creation. In Romans 5 Paul carefully contrasts the two representative heads of humanity. The first Adam brought death and condemnation to all his descendants. The last Adam—the Lord Jesus—brings justification and life for all who are in him. Adam was a type of the Lord Jesus (Rom 5:14). Everyone who is in Adam dies, but everyone who is in Christ will be made alive (1 Cor 15:22). Each believer in Christ is a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), “being renewed in knowledge according to the image of [his] creator” (Col 3:10). God created man in his image to fellowship with God and represent God on earth. In Christ, God is remaking fallen sinners into his likeness. Those who follow the Lord Jesus submit to their creator and walk by faith in this fallen created order as they eagerly wait for the fullness of the new creation.

Ministry

1. How do you preach (e.g., expositionally, topically, etc.)? What have you preached in the last two years?

I am committed to expositional preaching. It is in the Scriptures that God reveals his glory; it is through the Scriptures that God births his people (1 Pet 1:23), and it is through the Scriptures that God teaches, rebukes, corrects, and trains his people to equip them for every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17). God creates and strengthens faith through hearing the message of Christ (Rom 10:17). Preaching through consecutive passages of Scripture and through whole books of the Bible best allows for the biblical authors to speak on their own terms and to shape the agenda and priorities of public teaching.

In one sense all preaching should be expositional. A sermon should move from correctly expounded Scripture to life application. Generally, this may be best accomplished by preaching through consecutive sections of Scripture. At the same time, true Christian preaching may also address topics, worldview issues, and specific occasions. Such preaching may be considered expositional in so far as it moves from proper exposition to address a topic, worldview issue, or

occasion. The New Testament epistles provide examples of topical teaching. In 1 Corinthians Paul moves through a variety of topics to build up, instruct, and rebuke the Corinthian church.

There has been no need for me to preach at my church in the last two years, so I have faithfully served in other capacities (e.g., prayer room leadership, teaching adult education classes, and Gospel Community Group leadership). Since January of this year, I have preached on the following passages: Psalm 16, Ecclesiastes 1:1-7, Daniel 3, Matthew 11:28-30, Ephesians 1:15-23, and 1 Peter 5:1-4.

2. What steps do you take when preparing a sermon?

Here is my general approach to sermon preparation. I endeavor to wrestle with the text before turning to commentaries for confirmation, fresh perspectives, or insight on particular difficulties.

- Pray
- Repeatedly read the text (in the original language & English)
- Understand the context and the flow of thought in the text
- Identify focus area(s)
- Flesh moves
 - Explanation/theology
 - Application
- Illustrate ideas
- Develop the introduction & conclusion
- Finish a manuscript
- Polish manuscript, finalize outline, and practice delivery

3. What is a pastor's primary responsibility? What are the next few priorities after that?

First and foremost, a pastor must cultivate and guard his personal holiness and public teaching. Paul commands Timothy, "Pay close attention to your life and your teaching; persevere in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tim 4:16). The success of Timothy's ministry depended on his personal walk with the triune God. A faithful pastor sets an example for other believers to follow (1 Pet 5:3).

Second, if he is married and has children, a pastor must prioritize shepherding his wife and managing his own household well, for if he "does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of God's church?" (1 Tim 3:5). These first two priorities are foundational prerequisites for being qualified to serve as a pastor, and they remain pivotal to pastoral ministry.

Third, when it comes to the particular work of pastoring, a pastor must prioritize sound teaching. If he does not preach a clear gospel, his ministry is in vain. God's word will not return empty or prove ineffectual (Isa 55:11), so a pastor's first priority in public ministry is to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15) and clearly proclaim Christ from the Scriptures. As Paul writes to Timothy, "I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus, who is going to judge the living and the dead, and because of his appearing and his kingdom: Preach the word" (2 Tim 4:1-2). Sound teaching is foundational to all else that a pastor does.

Fourth, a pastor must keep watch for souls as one who will give an account to God for each of those entrusted to his care (Heb 13:17). He must "be on guard for [himself] and for all the flock" (Acts 20:28). The care of souls spans a wide range of activities, including nourishing

and equipping the saints through public preaching and teaching, establishing and maintaining biblical church structures (e.g., membership, discipline, qualified leadership), building up individual saints in one-on-one discipleship, pursuing believers with more intensive discipleship/counseling, offering personal rebuke and correction, and offering comfort and encouragement in suffering and loss.

4. What are some of the most important ideas and practices that you think cultivate health in a local church?

Jesus builds his church in accordance with his Word, by the power of the Spirit and for the glory of the Father. A healthy church is one that is vibrantly connected to and nourished from the vine—the Lord Jesus Christ. This spiritual vitality will evidence itself in faithful devotion to the apostles’ teaching, prayer, fellowship with the saints (including corporate worship), and the observance of the Lord’s supper and baptism (cf. Acts 2:42). I find Mark Dever’s *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* to provide a helpful summary of ideas and practices that are key to church health: sound teaching, a biblical understanding of conversion, faithful evangelism, meaningful membership, church discipline, care to teach disciples to obey all that Jesus commanded, and biblically-qualified elders and deacons.

In keeping with the above, I also want to highlight a proper understanding of every-member ministry. Jesus has given pastors and teachers to the church “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12). Rather than being the one who alone does the work of ministry, the pastor trains the saints to minister. As pastors equip the saints to build up the body of Christ, the whole church grows in maturity. It is not merely (or even mostly) a pastor who does the work of ministry. When church members see themselves as gifted by the Spirit, equipped by their pastors, and commanded by their Savior to do the work of ministry, the church will grow in health.

5. How do churches grow, according to the Bible?

Jesus builds his church through Spirit-empowered leaders equipping the saints for the work of ministry, through Spirit-empowered saints giving themselves to the work of ministry, and through the proper function of each member of the church in accordance with the Scriptures. God reveals his plan for church growth in Ephesians 4. Paul testifies that Jesus gave the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness” (Eph 4:12-13).

What does maturity look like? Paul describes maturity as unity in the faith. This indicates a clear, shared, convictional understanding of the Scriptures. Paul further describes the goal as unity in the knowledge of the Son of God. In addition to right beliefs, Christian maturity involves an experiential knowledge of Christ that comes from walking with God and his church in accordance with the Scriptures. When the church reaches maturity, the saints stand unshaken by the winds of doctrine that assail the church (Eph 4:14). Instead, the saints build one another up by speaking the truth in love to one another (Eph 4:15). As pastors faithfully labor to equip the saints and as the saints faithfully use their gifts to do the work of ministry and speak the truth to one another in love, the church will grow to maturity.

6. Is practicing church discipline important to you? Why or why not?

Yes. I believe Christ commands his church to exercise discipline for the perseverance of the saints and the purity of the church. Church discipline spans from private confrontation to formal excommunication—the entire range of Matthew 18:15-20.

Scripture sets forth multiple purposes for church discipline. The foremost purpose and aim of church discipline is the restoration of an erring brother—winning your brother (Matt 18:15). The process of church discipline is one of the means God uses to keep his people. Before instructing his disciples on pursuing a brother who sins against them, Jesus tells the parable of the lost sheep in which a shepherd leaves his 99 sheep to pursue the 1 that has gone astray. Church discipline is a search and rescue mission to preserve God’s people safe to the end. Even when Paul instructs the Corinthian church to hand a man over to Satan it is “for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” (1 Cor 5:5).

Another purpose of church discipline is to protect the purity of the church. Paul instructs the Corinthian church that “a little leaven leavens the whole batch of dough” (1 Cor 5:6). When one person in the church lives in unrepentant sin, the whole church is both affected and threatened. In order to preserve the purity of the church, Paul commands the Corinthian believers to “clean out the old leaven” and “remove the evil person from among you” (1 Cor 5:7, 13). One of the purposes of church discipline is to guard believers from the contaminating influence of unrepentant sin.

A third purpose is preventative. Paul instructs Timothy to “publicly rebuke those who sin, so that the rest will be afraid” (1 Tim 5:20). In this context, Paul is specifically discussing elders. However, whenever a church discipline case goes before the church, and whenever someone is disfellowshipped from the church, the discipline sends a sober warning to the whole church to take heed lest they fall and shipwreck their faith.

7. Should a church have more than one pastor? Why or why not?

A church should aspire to have a plurality of pastors. While it is not wrong for a church to only have one pastor, the New Testament provides a consistent pattern of a plurality of pastors. Paul charged Titus “to appoint elders in every town” (Titus 1:5). Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every church (Acts 14:23). Paul specifically calls out the “overseers and deacons” in his epistle to the Philippian church (Phil 1:1), and Paul summoned the elders of the church of Ephesus and charged them to shepherd the church of God (Acts 20:17-38). A plurality of pastors stands out as the norm in the New Testament.

A plurality of pastors spreads the pastoral load. This can help guard against growing weary in well doing. A plurality of elders means the church benefits from more than one brother’s strengths or giftings. Furthermore, a plurality of elders provides increased accountability and guards a solo pastor from bearing all the weight of pastoral decisions (and the accompanying criticism).¹

¹ Phil Newton helpfully enumerates ten specific benefits to a plurality of pastors. Phil A. Newton, “Why is Pastoral Plurality Better for the Church’s Health than Single Pastors?” in *40 Questions about Pastoral Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2021), 51-57.

8. In a situation in which the church has more than one pastor, how should the “Senior Pastor” relate to the other pastors in terms of authority and responsibility?

Fundamentally, I do not believe Scripture draws a distinction between staff and non-staff pastors or between senior and associate pastors. The office of a pastor is in essence the same regardless of whether a pastor is the senior pastor, an associate pastor, or serving without pay. Where a plurality of pastors exists, each should have equal weight when it comes to voting on pastoral decisions. A senior pastor may carry more influence by nature of his position as the one provides leadership and expounds the Scriptures week by week, but the other pastors are his equal in pastoral authority.

While all pastors equally hold the office of pastor, the orderly care and function of a local church requires differentiation of responsibilities and clear structures for how the pastors function. Paul tells Timothy that “the elders who are good leaders (“rule well” ESV, “provide effective leadership” NET) are to be considered worthy of double honor” (1 Tim 5:17). Some pastors will stand out as effective leaders, and it is natural and wise for a church to appoint a lead or senior pastor who will delegate responsibilities, and provide leadership to the elders as they organize themselves, care for the church, and equip the saints. It is of utmost importance that a senior pastor exercise his particular oversight not by domineering but by humbly setting an example for his fellow pastors (cf. 1 Pet 5:3). The senior pastor should not use his position to centralize power but to multiply the ministry of the church by entrusting particular responsibilities of oversight to other pastors.

9. What is the purpose of gathering on Sunday morning, and how should that gathering be structured?

The purpose of Sunday morning gatherings should be the worship of God for the glory of God and the building up of his people. God has not prescribed a particular time for Sunday gatherings or a particular order of service, but God has provided clear patterns and elements that should mark Christians’ corporate worship. The Sunday morning gatherings of a church should be structured around New Testament elements of worship: read the Bible, preach the Bible, pray the Bible, sing the Bible, celebrate the Lord’s supper, and observe baptism.² Sunday mornings should be marked by the worship of God in song, in financial giving, in prayer, in seeing and savoring the triune God through the exposition of the Scriptures, in observance of the ordinances, and in fellowship.

One helpful structure is as follows.

- Call to worship
- Worship in song
- Worship in prayer (pastoral prayer)
- Worship in preaching
- Worship in the Lord’s supper
- Worship in song
- Benediction
- Worship in giving & fellowshiping (Giving could be done by passing the plate in the service or by having a collection box.)

² Summary drawn from Mark Dever & Paul Alexander, *How to Build a Healthy Church: A Practical Guide for Deliberate Leadership* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021).

10. What are your thoughts on worship music for the Sunday morning gathering?

It is good and fitting that God's people should praise God in song—both with their voices and musical instruments (Ps 33:1-5). Those filled with the Spirit of God speak “to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music with [their] heart to the Lord” (Eph 5:18-20).

Here are several principles related to Sunday morning worship music. First, the songs sung in corporate worship (and elsewhere) should be faithful to the Scriptures—both in explicit statements and in implicit connotations. Second, music for corporate worship should be musically accessible to the congregation. The congregation may need to work to learn a song together, but melodies, ranges of notes, and rhythms should be somewhat intuitive and easily singable by the congregation. Third, as much as possible, the music should pair well with the lyrics. In regards to the second and third points, what may be most important is that the congregation sings the same songs enough to gain a sweet familiarity with them. Worship music should testify to the worth of the triune God and should help the congregation meditate on God's person and work and call for an appropriate emotional response to God.

11. How do you cultivate a sense of biblical, godly community in a local church?

The early church provides a beautiful example of deep community. Those who believed and were baptized on Pentecost “devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer....All the believers were together and held all things in common....Every day the devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, praising God” (Acts 2:42-47).

It is the gospel of the Lord Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that produces this deep, godly community. Much could be said on specific ways to cultivate a sense of biblical, godly community in a local church, but the foundation, source, and vitality of such community lies in the gospel and is borne out in the regular rhythms and ordinary means of grace (i.e., devotion to the Scriptures, prayer, corporate worship, hospitality, the one-anothers of Scripture, evangelism, and devotion to the glory of God). Biblical, godly community comes from doing together what God calls us to – making disciples and then teaching them to do (by example and instruction) all that Jesus commanded.

Some key ways pastors can help cultivate Christian community include the following:

- When preaching, follow the New Testament authors in making application to the church as a body (corporate applications) and not merely offering individualistic application of the Scriptures.
- Model and encourage hospitality.
- Regularly recast the vision for Christian community (e.g., one-anothers of Scripture) and the covenant commitments of church membership.
- Establish structures that support community (e.g., community groups)
- Cast and recast a vision for every-member ministry. Jesus calls every Christian to the work of ministry.

12. Which translation(s) of the Bible do you use when preaching? Why?

For the past number of years, I have enjoyed reading from the CSB, but I generally preach and teach from the ESV, since that is the translation most widely used in my current context. No translation is perfect, and translations do not replace the original languages or represent a new work of inspiration. English-speaking Christians benefit from a number of excellent translations, and I desire to preach from a translation that simultaneously represents careful adherence to the original languages while offering clear and accessible English.

13. How long are you looking to stay with your next church? Why?

Ultimately, I would like to continue at my next church for as long as the Lord would have me there for his glory and the flourishing of his people. I do not know what the Lord has for my future, but I desire a long-term ministry in a single place. Caroline and I both desire to enter a context where we could plant ourselves for decades of ministry.

The Lord can make any length of time profitable, but a long tenure at a single church tends to serve both pastor and church well. Relationships require time to build, and a particular pastor and particular congregation will grow to know and trust and love each other more the longer they walk together. I desire to see the Lord save, sustain, and sanctify saints in a local church over a long period of time.

Additionally, a long-term pastorate contributes to general stability for a congregation. This increases the ability for a pastor to develop leaders, set expectations, and cultivate healthy rhythms that will serve the church. This stability also serves a pastor's family, and I would be glad to serve in a context where our children could grow up and benefit from deep relationships in a single local church.