

Statement From the Bethel Session, Sunday, October 16, 2011

Opening Remarks:

On behalf of the Session, thank you for being here. We recognize that most of you have come to this meeting with a need to understand how and why our church is now without a Senior Pastor. We understand that you have likely experienced a wide range of emotions and thoughts since you first heard this news including surprise, hurt, anger, and concern. These are natural responses to an action of this gravity in a church. We do not discount them, and they are not unexpected. We do not expect that you will necessarily leave this meeting feeling that our actions were justified and indeed, you may never come to fully understand our reasons for taking the action that we did. Our desire for this meeting is that you will allow us to explain, to the extent we can, why we asked for Michael's resignation, and why he agreed to tender it.

We also want to convey to you our motives and thoughts in reaching this decision. This has not been an easy or quick process but is the culmination of many meetings and deliberations over more than a year. It is my belief that during this process, no one on the Session has put personal goals or desires ahead of the needs of the Church nor is this the result of any personal agenda or animosity against Michael or Christy. This has been a very agonizing and prayerful process for the Session and we have humbly sought much Godly counsel both inside and outside the church. This is also a very complicated situation. There is no single event or issue that caused us to reach this conclusion, but rather a pattern of events and pastoral and personal dealings on Michael's part. Some of you may speculate that the problems and issues surrounding Women's Ministry and ultimately the resignation of our Women's Ministry Director were the cause of our course of action. My response to those thoughts is that while the issues concerning Women's Ministry were serious, they were also symptomatic, and arose from other issues and concerns that we as a Session have been dealing with for some time. Ultimately this is a personnel evaluation decision, measured against what we see as the needs of our church, and while we will discuss our evaluation with you generally, we will not provide specifics.

Bethel Governance Preliminaries:

As a preliminary, we want you to understand the basics with regard to Bethel governance. Bethel is an Elder-led church, and the Senior Pastor, while the only permanent sitting Elder, is only one Elder among many. All Elders must be approved by the congregation in order to serve. Elders at Bethel are appointed for life, but are not necessarily part of the church's governing body which is the Session. The current Session consists of 10 Elders including Michael. Each of the men currently serving are men that Michael personally sought to serve alongside him. The Session at Bethel is responsible for the spiritual oversight, shepherding, governance and management of the church. All decisions in these matters rest with the Session alone and require a plurality of the Elders in order to act; no single Elder or minority group within the Elders can implement policy or set direction. The only decisions requiring congregational approval other than the appointment of Elders are incurring debt or selling the church. We want you to know that the Session takes these responsibilities seriously before God, as we fully believe that Bethel is Christ's church and not ours.

On the decision to ask for Michael's resignation, the Session voted 8 to 1 (with Michael not voting) to request that he resign. None of the six non-serving Elders, after being fully informed on the issues and concerns, counseled against this decision. Finally, it should come as no surprise that Michael fully supports Elder rule at Bethel and agreed to tender his resignation.

What Michael's resignation is not about.

With the preliminaries taken care of, let me begin by saying what Michael's resignation is not about. Michael has not been asked to resign by the Session as a result of immorality, financial impropriety, or the preaching or teaching of heresy. In short, the Session wishes to be perfectly clear that our request to Michael for his resignation is not on the basis of sin in his life. We do not believe that anything Michael has done throughout this process in any way disqualifies him from ministry. We do believe that had this been an issue of unrepentant sin, Scripture would require us to handle this matter in a much different manner (see 1 Tim 5:19 – 20). Sin is not the issue.

What Michael's resignation is about.

Some of you may believe that there is no cause other than sin for removing a pastor from ministry, but we find no evidence in Scripture to support such a stance. Rather, we believe that God calls his leaders to shepherd His people well. Our concern as shepherds at Bethel is to try as best we can to shepherd the people in this church in a manner pleasing to our Lord. We are not perfect in that task, but we accept that we are required to get better at it. It is the sense of the Session that this church can be better shepherded with a new Senior Pastor. This is our desire, and ultimately this is what is driving our request that Michael resign.

When Michael was first called to Bethel, the desire of the Session at that time was to find a Senior Pastor who could teach and preach successfully in the footsteps of Bob Tolson. The Session today recognizes that Michael fit that calling particularly well. We and probably most of you acknowledge that Michael Boys is an excellent pulpit preacher and teacher, and a careful expositor of the Word with encyclopedic knowledge of the Scripture. We affirm this view. In his original calling Michael fulfilled and exceeded the requirements of that call. Yet we all must also acknowledge that none of us does all things well. Michael, like all of us, has strengths which we can easily see, but he also has weakness, some of which are obvious, and some which only a few see. We believe that these weaknesses are the responsibility of the Session to address and to fix if possible. The Session, fully aware and informed of Michael's strengths and weaknesses, has determined that for the good of this body we need a Senior Pastor with a broader set of strengths to lead and shepherd this church going forward. We do not believe that anyone's interest is served in detailing Michael's weaknesses. We will simply state that in the areas of pastoral care, relational ability, and church leadership, Bethel needs a set of strengths and capabilities that Michael does not currently possess. We do not believe that these are trivial weaknesses, nor are they vague or difficult to describe. We do believe that they are and will be a significant and continuing hindrance to our church becoming all that the Lord desires. We do believe that it was imperative that they be dealt with in the most constructive manner possible.

What has the Session done to address Michael's weaknesses?

We believed and still do believe that the most constructive possible solution was for Michael to overcome these weaknesses or for the Session to provide a means for effectively compensating for these weaknesses. This is simply to say that the Session has gone to great lengths to counsel Michael on these weaknesses and has encouraged him to address them in every way we practically can. We have counseled Michael individually and collectively numerous times over the last three years. We have attempted to compensate for certain weaknesses and the present position of Executive Pastor was put in place on May 1 of this year as part of that process, along with the hiring of a Women's Ministry

Director in August. These weaknesses have been clearly documented in personnel reviews and problem solving sessions. Yet despite the most forceful, pointed, personal, and direct interventions, it is the Session's view that Michael has failed to address the problems or in some cases has failed to even acknowledge that a problem or issue exists. In light of this extraordinary effort and in the face of little or no encouragement that the weaknesses can be addressed constructively, the Session was forced to conclude that Michael's resignation was the most hopeful way of addressing the matter. Again, while Michael did not necessarily agree with our conclusions, he does fully support Elder rule at Bethel and agreed to submit his resignation in accordance with the will of the Session.

What are the Session's responsibilities in this?

Our responsibilities in this are to God first and then to you as we find in Scripture:

1Pe_5:2 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;

We have made this decision carefully, humbly, deliberately and with much prayer. Each Elder (including non-serving Elders) was consulted and asked to speak to this decision. We discussed this decision with other counselors outside of Bethel. There was no rush to judgment. We left room for the Lord to act and waited for Him to do so. We discussed our concerns directly with Michael and we gave him room to act as well. We believe we have properly fulfilled our responsibilities to our Lord and to you.

We also believe that we have fulfilled our obligations to Michael and Christy. We acknowledge that their ministry in this church has been a blessing to many. We are thankful for them and for their service and desire to recognize and honor their contributions in ministry here. We are committed, by guarding what we say, to preserve their history of service here and to protect their opportunities for future ministry service elsewhere. And finally, we have purposed to provide what we understand to be a generous provision that will allow them the time they will need to seek and find those future opportunities without financial or medical insurance uncertainties.

What are our collective responsibilities going forward?

We do not judge Michael's motives in this, nor should we judge each other's motives:

1 Cor 2:11 For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

1 Cor 4:5 Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

Indeed, we hope that you will acknowledge that it is possible for Michael and others on the Session to love this church, to view the same issues of ministry or service differently, and to arrive at vastly different conclusions on what is best for the church, and yet for neither to sin in doing so.

If we love Michael and each other, we are obligated to think the best and to convey the truth in love.

1Cor 13:4 – 7 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Please pray for Michael and Christy and others at Bethel who are hurting. Pray for the Elders, our staff, and for our church.

Php 4:6 - 7 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally pursue unity and the love of Christ at Bethel.

1Pe 3:8 – 12 Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For "Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."