

September 4, 2015

Report from the Pastor Search Committee

Please note: The following is a summary of comments made by Saerch Committee chairman Bill Gladney at the August 26, 2015 Central Presbyterian Church town hall meeting.

- Greetings from your pastor search committee; we are excited to be able to bring the congregation an update
- You'll recall from previous updates the search committee requested the session clarify a number of key issues which we thought should be addressed before bringing a new pastor to Central. You have probably heard Bob Hopper refer to these as "gates" which needed to be recognized and addressed by the session. – The primary gates the committee recognized had to do with **our site ministry at West County Fellowship; women serving in leadership roles; and governance....how the session operates.**
- The session has addressed these issues plus many others the past 2 years. These "gates" have not all been completely repaired or replaced, but the search committee is comfortable that they have all been addressed and that we can move forward with our search for our next Senior Pastor.
- Much of what our committee does is confidential and cannot be shared broadly; we've appreciated your prayers for us and your patience as we continued our work below the radar
- That said, we promised transparency (when possible) and we'd like to bring you up to date on our activity at this point so we can make public the substance of our recent efforts
- Last Fall the committee felt the session was making good headway on the "gates" so we began our search in earnest. We solicited the names of candidates from the congregation and from outside sources. Thank you for submitting many names. They are **all** being given full consideration. We met with most of the senior staff here to get their input on what qualities of a senior pastor we should be most aware of. We called and spoke with search committees from a number of large churches in the United States to gain knowledge from their experience.

-We discovered that most large churches now use outside consultants to assist their search efforts. The search process has changed dramatically the past few years. When we did our last senior pastor search (13 years ago), these firms were not in existence. These search firms possess the experience and knowledge we have attempted to gain. Last fall we researched a large number of firms and were ready to begin the process of selecting 2 or 3 firms to interview in person. Then things changed.

-In all search processes, organizations are wise to **consider internal candidates first**, if there are any

- Early on, many of you were eager to nominate **Eric Stiller** as our senior pastor; you may recall the provision from the EPC denomination that prohibits assistant pastors from being called to the senior pastorate. Also recall Eric's clear statement that he did not wish to be considered for our senior pastor. As we know, Eric's heart is in the Central West End and we rejoice with he and Jenny as they move forward in direct ministry there (of course, still closely related to Central!)

- More recently, and beginning about 15 months ago, we began receiving **many** nominations for **Pastor Hopper** to be our permanent senior pastor.

-For a number of years Bob and Tacey felt God's call to the mission field in Russia. When Bob arrived at Central, Tacey was serving in Afghanistan and Bob told us he would be heading to Russia to serve with Tacey full time when the Lord was ready.

-Something changed. The Hoppers fell in love with Central and after much prayer, Bob and Tacey met with the search committee and informed us of their change of heart and asked that he be considered as a candidate for senior pastor.

- Beginning in January 2015, the search committee met with Bob and Tacey to explore their sense of call. EPC search guidelines do not permit congregations to **consider** interim pastors as senior pastor candidates without permission from both the session and the presbytery. There is a detailed and very complicated process which must be closely followed.

-Before the search committee could consider Bob Hopper as a candidate, we first needed permission

- As a search committee, we familiarized ourselves with the most recent rules governing the process to be able to consider Bob as our senior pastor. To make a (very) long story short, we spent the first 7 months of this calendar year going through the process of trying to secure permission to consider Bob Hopper as a senior pastor candidate.

-First, the session must approve the request from the search committee to consider the interim pastor as a candidate. Then, the ministerial committee of the presbytery must also give approval.

- This is technical, but we never did get approval from the presbytery to consider Pastor Hopper; we were going through the proscribed steps to be able to consider him.

-In late June Bob requested a meeting once again with the search committee. He asked that his name be withdrawn from consideration. Bob can share with you his reasons.

- We respect Bob and Tacey so much. This was a very difficult decision for them. They both love Central and we are incredibly grateful for their agreement to remain at Central until we call a new senior pastor. Many of you may want to join us in expressing our gratitude to the Hoppers for their gospel leadership in the pulpit, with our session, and with our congregation. **Please join me in giving them a round of applause!**

- So, where does that leave the search process?

- Glad you asked. **We are back at it.** Last December, we reached out to several search firms that we thought might help us in our process. We then put them on hold.

- The past few weeks, we've met in person with and considered a number of search firms. We are checking references and are close to selecting a firm to assist our efforts.

-The firms we are considering have performed many, many senior pastor searches in the EPC and other denominations. They have expertise and access to candidates which we can't touch.

- **We promise to follow up on every nomination** that we have received from you -- and there have been many; **keep them coming!** In addition, search firms have literally thousands of contacts that they can explore on our behalf, letting the Lord lead the interest of potential candidates and influential leaders across the country (and perhaps beyond!).

- To close, on behalf of our committee, let me thank you personally for your prayers. As a committee, we truly enjoy each other's company and are amazed at how the Lord has led us together as a group. We can honestly say that while we've had healthy discussion and maybe even debate sometimes. We have been unanimous in all our major decision making to this point. Please continue to lift us before the Father. We so deeply want His candidate for our church to be revealed, in His time. Some of us are a bit anxious, many of us come from professional worlds where searches operate on a much different (read: quicker!) timetable. That said, each of us, to a one, is comfortable with and confident with our process to date. That's proof in and of itself of the Lord's presence among us.

-Thank you for being here tonight. Thank you for your prayer support. It means a lot to us and we feel your prayers.

-I will be available to answer questions in open session this evening. If you have a question and would prefer to talk privately, I will hang around after the meeting and be available. You can always call or email me or anyone on the committee.