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## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

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## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) on the June 2, 2024 Special Meeting

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Below is a list of questions that we have received and anticipated in connection with the Special Meeting scheduled for June 2, 2024.

### **What is the purpose of the Special Meeting?**

The sole purpose of the Special Meeting is to review and possibly modify the July 30, 2023 decision of the Board of Elders that “there is no evidence of disqualifying sins, as described in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, of such severity that they call for the Senior Minister to be disqualified from pastoral ministry.” All debate will be limited to this purpose.

The petition requesting the Special Meeting did not include any motions. Certain motions can be made by members during the Special Meeting, but they are limited to (1) permissible procedural motions and (2) substantive motion that are both germane to the Special Meeting’s stated purpose and within the scope of the authority granted to the congregation under our Charter and Bylaws. That is, any motion must directly relate to the special meeting’s purpose and be within the congregation’s authority as outlined in our charter and bylaws.

### **Is a Special Meeting the same as a Town Hall or similar style meetings that Park Street Church has held in the past?**

No. This is a formal business meeting of Park Street Church at which action binding on the Church, as a non-profit corporation, may be taken. A formal meeting of this kind can only be called for a proper purpose under our Bylaws. A formal meeting of this kind also is conducted pursuant to the procedural requirements of our Bylaws, and, where applicable and not in conflict with our Bylaws, Robert’s Rules of Order.

### **What does it mean to say that the congregation will “review and possibly modify” the Board of Elders’ July 30, 2023 decision? What is the scope of the congregation’s review authority?**

The Park Street Church Bylaws (Article IV(1)(A)(ii)) provide that decisions of the Board of Elders “are subject to review and modification at any duly convened business meeting of the congregation.” The Church’s former parliamentarian previously explained that “[t]his review authority is narrow. It only applies to ‘decisions’ made by the Board of Elders, and only permits ‘review and modification’ of such decisions. It does not apply to decisions made by the Senior Minister or any Church officers. It also does not allow Members to require the Board (or any committees under the Board’s authority) to make any particular affirmative decisions or take any particular

actions.” The Church parliamentarian later explained that “[b]y exercise of this power,

Members can effectively veto any decision by the Board, and can make modifications to such decisions that are consistent with and within the scope of the decision under review. This provision does not, however, allow Members to require the Board to make any particular affirmative decisions or take any particular actions.”

In practical terms, for purposes of the Special Meeting, the congregation has the authority to rescind all or part of the Board’s July 30, 2023 decision. The charges against the Senior Minister alleged four grounds for Biblical disqualification. The congregation could (i) affirm the Board’s decision on all grounds, (ii) “modify” the decision by affirming some subset of the grounds, but not others, or (iii) rescind the decision on all grounds. If the Board’s decision were modified or rescinded, the Board would need to then reconsider the decision. The Board could take a variety of actions, including, but not limited to, further deliberation of the matter, conducting an additional investigation on its own, and/or commissioning another outside investigation. Ultimately, the Board could decide to reinstate its prior decision or make a different decision. By voting to modify or rescind, the congregation can force the matter to be reopened, but it cannot dictate the manner in which the Board must proceed after the decision is reopened. That said, the Board will be able to take into consideration any requests or desires expressed by the congregation at the Special Meeting as to how it should proceed or what decision(s) it should ultimately make.

**The letter sent by the Board of Elders on May 6, 2024 following the report of the Vicinage Council communicated that the Board believes we have achieved closure on the issue of Pastor Mark’s Biblical fitness for ministry, and that “there is no need or reason for further investigation or consideration of this matter.” If that is the case, then why are we having this Special Meeting?**

The Board does believe that further investigation and consideration of this matter are unnecessary. We are nonetheless having this meeting because Park Street Church is legally obligated under its current Bylaws to call a Special Meeting if requested by any twenty-five members for any proper purpose. In this context, “proper” does not mean that the purpose must be good or edifying, but rather only that the purpose must be within the scope of the congregation’s power under our Bylaws.

A petition requesting this Special Meeting was submitted by forty members on February 6, 2024, and included one proper purpose. After receipt of the Vicinage Council report, the Clerk asked these members if they still wished to proceed, and thirty-nine responded in the affirmative. Thus, the Clerk was obligated to call the Special Meeting. While the Board continues to believe that this Special Meeting will be divisive and detrimental to our body, and that the concerns of these members could be better addressed in a less formal setting, it does not have the authority to prevent the Special Meeting absent a change to our Bylaws.

**Did the Board of Elders make any effort to find a way to alleviate the need for this Special Meeting or provide an alternative forum for concerns to be addressed?**

Yes. The Board first approved the appointment of a Vicinage Council by the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference (“CCCC”) to conduct an independent investigation into the

charges of Biblical disqualification made against the Senior Minister, and to evaluate the Board's process with respect to its handling of those charges. The appointment of the Vicinage Council mirrored the request in a petition submitted on October 22, 2023 by most of the same members who have requested the current Special Meeting. In that prior petition, these members "call[ed] for an independent investigation overseen and directed by the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference ("4Cs")." The Board of Elders considered this prior request in its deliberation on whether to approve the appointment of a Vicinage Council. The Board had hoped that the appointment of the Vicinage Council would be welcomed by these members and would satisfy their concerns.

Following the issuance of the Vicinage Council's report – which confirmed the Board's July 30, 2023 decision and affirmed its process – the Board reached out to each of the members who requested the Special Meeting. The Board asked these members to consider whether the Special Meeting would be in the best interests of the Church and whether it would promote the healing of our Church needs. The Board requested that each member consider whether they would be willing to forego a potentially divisive Special Meeting. The Board further offered to meet with these members and to explore other forums to address their concerns, including in smaller group meetings or in a larger town hall. Unfortunately, all but one of the members who requested the Special Meeting confirmed that they wished to go forward with this format of meeting.

### **Will the congregation decide if there is another investigation?**

No. As explained above, the congregation is empowered to review and modify decisions of the Board of Elders. It cannot, however, force the Board of Elders to make any affirmative decision or expend Park Street Church funds. The Board will, however, consider any concerns raised at the Special Meeting and suggestions on how to proceed.

In an effort to be completely transparent, the Board has stated and reiterates that it does not see a need or rationale for another investigation. Mark's Biblical fitness and the conditions of the Church's workplace have been investigated by three different bodies: the Board of Elders, VOCA (from a management perspective), and the Vicinage Council (from a spiritual perspective). It is unlikely that there is material new information or perspectives that have not yet been voiced. If, however, material new information is brought to light at the Special Meeting that would warrant an additional investigation, the Board will certainly consider that.

### **Haven't we already considered this issue at the Annual Meeting?**

The Senior Minister's Biblical qualification to continue in the ministry was debated at the Annual Meeting, but not directly voted upon. With that said, the two-thirds vote affirming Mark's call as the Senior Minister at Park Street Church suggests that at least this portion of the congregation believes Mark to be Biblically qualified. The votes at the Annual Meeting determined the future direction of Park Street Church. While the results were not unanimous, they were decisive, and the Board of Elders has recently communicated a clear resolve to move forward with Mark as our Senior Minister.

### **Why is this a “closed” meeting?**

Open meetings are open to the general public and media, whereas closed meetings are open only to members of the organization. Certain public bodies are governed by “sunshine” laws that require open meetings (like a city council or town meeting). Park Street Church is not a public body. While it has often held open meetings, it can hold closed meetings as well, particularly when sensitive matters that concern the Church are at issue.

In this instance, the Special Meeting concerns the character and Biblical fitness of the Senior Minister. Pastor Mark and his family have endured much already, as his character has been publicly attacked, including in the local and national media. It would be unfair to him and unbeneficial for our body to continue to publicly broadcast such sensitive matters.

### **I am concerned about recent and potential staffing issues, including those involving the ministerial staff who are not currently leading corporate worship. Does this Special Meeting concern those matters?**

No. The sole purpose of the Special Meeting is to review and potentially modify the Board of Elders’ decision on the Senior Minister’s Biblical fitness. By law, matters addressed and decided at a Special Meeting must be limited to the stated purpose of the meeting as set forth in the meeting notice. This is unlike our Annual Meetings, where the agenda provides for raising “new business,” or our informal meetings (like town halls) where no binding action on the organization is being taken.

The Board of Elders understands that some members have concerns relating to ministerial staff, and may desire to voice those concerns. We welcome dialogue with the congregation, and are exploring options to engage in that dialogue, including through more regular question and answer sessions, one-on-one meetings, meetings in small group settings, and/or town halls. We note that the topic of the Special Meeting, and any discussion and decisions made at the Special Meeting, will be unrelated to the status of our ministerial staff.

### **I have heard that the members requesting a Special Meeting sought an additional purpose, to reinstate the former Associate Minister. Why is that not part of the Special Meeting?**

The members submitting a petition for a Special Meeting did seek to review and potentially modify “the decision of the Board of Elders to affirm the decision of the Senior Minister Booker to terminate the employment of Associate Minister Balboni.” The Clerk denied this request, because it was not a proper purpose for a Special Meeting, on the following grounds:

First, as explained in the September 27, 2023, letter from our former parliamentarian, “Article V(1) of the Bylaws gives the Senior Minister supervisory authority over all ministerial and non-ministerial staff. Members of the Church do not have the authority to review personnel decisions made by the Senior Minister or to otherwise restrict or control the Senior Minister’s supervisory authority over all ministerial and non-ministerial staff.” While Petition 4 does not seek to directly review the Senior Minister’s personnel decision, it seeks to indirectly review it by focusing on the Board’s approval of it. Second, by its nature, the Board’s approval is not reviewable because the approved action has already

been completed. The Board granted its approval on September 24, 2023. Acting under the authority given to him under the Bylaws and with the approval of the Board, the Senior Minister discharged the former Associate Minister effective as of October 3, 2023. The congregation does not have the authority to compel the Senior Minister to reverse that action and rehire the former Associate Minister.

In addition, as the Church's former parliamentarian has explained, the congregation's "review authority" is "narrow" and "does not...allow Members to require the Board to make any particular affirmative decisions or take any particular actions." In other words, the congregation cannot force the Senior Minister to hire employees or rehire former employees. Moreover, and as the former parliamentarian also previously explained to the members who have submitted petitions, the congregation cannot force the Board to expend funds of the Church, including to pay the salaries of employees that the congregation seeks to have hired. The parliamentarian wrote as follows:

[I]t should be noted that both the Bylaws and the Charter grant the Board control over properties and moneys belonging to the Church. The Charter, which, as a legal matter, supercedes any contrary provision in the Bylaws, states directly that "[a]ll powers of the corporation over its properties, of every kind and nature...shall be vested in and exercised by a board which shall be entitled 'Elders of Park Street Church.'" Charter, § 3. The Charter goes on to specify that "[n]o contract, debt, gift, pledge or litigation affecting the property of the corporation, the control of which is vested in the aforesaid board, shall be binding on the corporation and no expenditure of money, the control of which is vested in the aforesaid board, shall be made unless authorized by a vote of a majority of the members of the board who are present at a meeting at which not less than a majority of the members of the board shall be present." *Id.*

For all of these reasons, the request to reinstate the former Associate Minister was not a "proper" purpose and will not be part of the Special Meeting.

### **Won't there just be another petition submitted? When will this end?**

Under our current Bylaws, the congregation has the right to submit petitions and request special meetings for any proper purpose. Until this past year, this is not a right that was exercised by the members of Park Street Church. Our hope is that this will not become a regular practice. These formal legal requests that seek to take binding action on behalf of Park Street Church require the officers of the Church to respond with equivalent formality. Neither the Board nor the Clerk wishes to stamp out the voice of the congregation, but they also cannot ignore their fiduciary duties when confronted with legal requests from a small group of congregants seeking to take action that is not permitted under applicable law or Park Street Church's governing documents. The Board would prefer to have more informal dialogue. However, it cannot mandate that. The Clerk will continue to faithfully fulfill her obligations under the Bylaws and will call additional special meetings for proper purposes as required.

With that said, it would not be proper to repeatedly submit petitions for the same issue after the congregation holds a special meeting and resolves that issue. Accordingly, if the congregation votes to affirm the Board's decision on the Senior Minister's Biblical fitness, any additional petitions on this matter will not be entertained.

**The Annual Meeting was an unpleasant experience and I do not want to repeat that. Why should I attend this Special Meeting?**

It is important that members participate in all of our congregational meetings, but participation in this Special Meeting is particularly important if we are going to obtain closure on this matter and move forward as a Church. The Board believes the question of the Senior Minister's Biblical fitness is resolved. The congregation's vote at the Annual Meeting is indicative that it believes the same. A decisive vote at this Special Meeting would put an end to this controversy and allow us to focus on the healing our body so desperately needs. However, if a fully representative portion of our congregation does not attend the meeting, this controversy may continue. Only ten percent of the congregation is needed to constitute a quorum and to take a binding vote. Those members requesting the Special Meeting have demonstrated that it is a priority for them. Their voice is important. The voice of the rest of the congregation is equally important though. It is important that everyone attend.

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May 18, 2024  
Statement from the Board of Elders

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May 18, 2024

Dear Members of Park Street Church,

We are writing in connection with the Special Meeting scheduled for June 2, 2024. Though our church is divided in many ways, one thing we share, sadly, is hurt incurred at our recent Annual Meeting and in the events leading up to it. We know for many this hurt predates recent events. Though we do not want to see our church body experience similar hurt, as explained below, we are duty-bound to schedule a Special Meeting. We believe our members have a similar duty to participate, and, as a Board, we also have a duty to provide the facts and context necessary to enable informed participation. To that end, we are providing this statement and urging the congregation to affirm the Board of Elders' decision rejecting the charges of Biblical disqualification that were brought against our Senior Minister.

The Board received those charges in good faith and took them very seriously. A thorough and thoughtful review was conducted. In connection with that review, the Board found that the allegations against the Senior Minister were almost entirely staff related, concerning interactions with the Senior Minister in the employment context. While the charges demonstrated certain areas of potential leadership and management growth for the Senior Minister, the Board determined that there was no evidence of disqualifying sins, as described in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, of such severity that they called for the Senior Minister to be disqualified from pastoral ministry.

Despite conducting a confidential process, the charges against the Senior Minister were publicly disseminated following the departure of the former Associate Minister. Park Street Church has been reeling ever since. Divisions were created and have deepened, culminating in an intense and difficult Annual Meeting on February 25, 2024. The Annual Meeting reflected these divisions, but it also brought needed clarity for the future direction of Park Street Church. Since the Annual Meeting, Mark and the Board of Elders have been working to move our body forward—to seek to resolve the internal strife and conflict, and to place our focus back on our primary mission of embodying and sharing the good news of the Gospel.

To that end, in March 2024, the Board approved the appointment of a Vicinage Council by the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference (the “CCCC”) to conduct a separate and independent investigation into the charges made against the Senior Minister, and also to evaluate the Board's prior process. The Vicinage Council was comprised of seven senior clergy members from outside of Park Street Church, selected by the CCCC in its sole discretion. The Vicinage Council was given full latitude to conduct its investigation in the manner of its choosing, and full access to the records and personnel of Park Street Church and the Board of Elders.

The Board did not approve the appointment of the Vicinage Council because it had any concerns about the Senior Minister's Biblical fitness or the soundness of its prior investigation. Rather, it

was an attempt to bring healing and clarity. Certain members of the congregation had submitted a petition in October 2023 calling for an independent investigation by the CCCC. A majority of those members also signed the petition submitted in February 2024 requesting the current Special Meeting. Given that the appointment of the Vicinage Council largely mirrored their prior request, the Board of Elders had hoped that appointing the Council would satisfy these members' concerns and alleviate the need for the Special Meeting.

The Vicinage Council concluded its work in early May 2024 and issued a report that was disclosed to the congregation. The Vicinage Council unanimously agreed that there was “no evidence present that Senior Pastor, Mark Booker, has disqualified himself to serve as a spiritual leader at Park Street Church or any other pastoral ministry in the future.” The Vicinage Council fully supported the Board’s process for assessing the charges made against the Senior Minister and determined that it “was a careful and thorough attempt to deal with a significant crisis in the church and ‘speak the truth in love’”.

Following the Vicinage Council’s report, the Board reached out to each member who signed the February 2024 petition and asked them to consider not moving forward with the Special Meeting. The Board stated that, in light of its own investigation and the work of the Vicinage Council, as well as the assessment made by the workplace consultants at VOCA, there was not any need for a further review of the Senior Minister’s Biblical qualification. The Board also stated that it feared that another potentially divisive meeting on the heels of our Annual Meeting would be harmful to our body. A copy of the letter sent by the Board of Elders is included with the meeting materials.

Sadly, the Board’s request was rejected. As a result, the congregation must now review the Board’s decision that Pastor Mark was not Biblically disqualified. This is a serious accusation that goes well beyond saying that Mark is not a good manager or a good fit for Park Street Church. The charges lodged against him were that he was not qualified to be a minister of the Gospel. Not just at Park Street Church, but anywhere. The Board urges the congregation to affirm its decision that Mark is not disqualified, and to remove this cloud from him and his family once and for all.

The Board submits that additional consideration or investigation into the charges made against the Senior Minister are simply not warranted. The critiques raised by those members seeking to have this matter reopened are factually inaccurate and do not otherwise justify prolonging this matter, especially after the Vicinage Council’s independent review. Based on the materials submitted with the meeting request, it appears that the primary critiques made against the Board’s decision and process are that (i) the Board’s process was not thorough, (ii) the Board’s process was inconsistent with past actions, (iii) the Board’s decision was not deliberate, and (iv) the Board’s decision was biased.

First, the Board’s decision is critiqued because the Board did not interview additional members of staff to assess concerns they may have had. As previously communicated at the October 2023 Informational Meeting, the Board decided that it did not need to interview additional personnel because it was able to confirm the relevant factual circumstances through its initial interviews. The Board found that any specific factual allegations that could not be verified or rejected through these interviews, could simply be presumed to be true without impacting the overall determination. That determination was that the factual allegations—stripped of characteriza-

tion—did not support the conclusion of disqualification. Additional interviews were also unnecessary insofar as the general nature of the concerns of other staff members were already known by certain members of the Board at that time. Finally, and at this point, the concerns of staff members are known and have been expressed to the Board, VOCA, and the Vicinage Council. Those concerns do not alter the Board’s determination that the Senior Minister is not Biblically disqualified.

Second, the Board’s process is critiqued because, unlike in a situation involving the former Minister of City Engagement, the Board did not commission an outside investigation. This criticism was lodged before the commissioning of the Vicinage Council and is now moot since the Vicinage Council was an independent outside investigation. While the Vicinage Council is not a law firm, it is a more appropriate body to assess Biblical qualifications for the ministry. It should also be noted that the situation involving the former Minister of City Engagement was quite different. In that situation, the Board concluded that there was evidence to support the charges that were made. Conversely, with respect to the charges made against the Senior Minister, the Board determined that the evidence did not support the charges of disqualification. The Board did not believe an additional review was warranted for a situation where the evidence did not meet the threshold. Finally, the Board was aware that conducting an additional investigation in that prior case did not actually satisfy most of the members who were calling for further review. Based on the response to the Vicinage Council’s report, it appears that is the case once again.

Third, the Board’s decision is critiqued as not giving the Elders access to the witnesses or sufficient time to assess the matter. This is simply false. The Board acted as a deliberative body and made a decision after receiving a report from the subcommittee that was duly delegated with responsibility to conduct the investigation. The Board could have chosen to reject the subcommittee’s work, to compel the subcommittee to conduct further interviews, to conduct further interviews as a committee of the whole, or to repeat interviews that the subcommittee conducted. The Board could have sought more evidence and could have continued to debate the charges as long as it wished. No one forced the Board to make a decision when it did.

Moreover, the Board continued to stand behind its decision after it was made and challenged. While the Board, as a body, continues over the time, the individual members comprising that body change. At present, there are several Elders on the Board who did not participate in the July 30, 2023 decision that is under review. Those Elders have been provided the information relevant to the July 30, 2023 decision and have been able to participate in the recommendations the Board now makes in this letter. But it is important for you to know that prior to these new Elders joining the Board, a separate statement was approved by the Elders in December 2023 in connection with an earlier petition for a special meeting.<sup>1</sup> That separate statement also urged the congregation to support the Board’s determination. A copy of that statement is included with the meeting materials.

A final critique of the Board’s decision is that it was biased. The materials submitted by the petitioners claim that four of the five members of the subcommittee that conducted the Board’s

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<sup>1</sup>That petition was submitted on December 3, 2023. In February 2024, a new petition was submitted replacing the December 3rd petition. The December 2023 and February 2024 petitions were nearly identical in substance.

investigation were “known to be highly loyal to Mark Booker.” The insinuation is that these and potentially other Elders put their supposed loyalties to Mark above their spiritual and fiduciary duties to act in the best interests of Park Street Church. The Board does not claim to be perfect in all of its decisions, but it categorically rejects any contention that its members lack the integrity and character to faithfully fulfill their duties.

As the letter approved by the Board in December states, the Elders have an awesome responsibility to care for the spiritual welfare of Park Street Church. It is a responsibility that each of us takes very seriously. We submit that the Elders acted faithfully and consistently with that responsibility in the decision rejecting the charges made against the Senior Minister. We now ask that the congregation affirm that decision.

In Him, and to His glory,

The Board of Elders

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December 26, 2023  
Statement from the Board of Elders

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December 26, 2023

After a review of the charges made by the former Associate Minister against the Senior Minister, the Board of Elders determined that there was no evidence of disqualifying sins, as described in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, of such severity that they called for the Senior Minister to be disqualified from pastoral ministry. The current motion seeks to review and potentially rescind that decision. This motion presumes that the Board did not faithfully execute its responsibilities in connection with the former Associate Minister's charges against the Senior Minister, and that the Board should not be trusted in its decision-making processes and in its governance role. For the reasons described below, we urge the Congregation to vote "No" on this motion.

Scripture states that the elders of a local church keep watch over the souls of the congregation and will give account to the Lord for the spiritual welfare of the church (Heb. 13:17). This is an awesome responsibility that your Elders, individually and collectively, take very seriously. We do not presume to be perfect, but we seek to be faithful to our calling.

We recognize that support of and submission to church leadership is not without limits. However, in the absence of evidence that the Elders are acting unfaithfully, irrationally, or inconsistently with Scripture, our hope is that the Congregation will support us—including in this moment and give us the benefit of the doubt, even in the face of difficult decisions.

With respect to the particular decision at issue, the Board submits that it acted faithfully, rationally, and consistently with Scripture. The charges made by the former Associate Minister were considered and understood. Through a sub-committee it authorized, the Board gave the former Associate Minister an opportunity to explain the charges, and it questioned the former Associate Minister on the specific allegations. The sub-committee also questioned the Senior Minister on those allegations, obtained his perspective, and learned additional relevant facts that the former Associate Minister did not provide. In addition, the Board took into account facts and information known by individual Elders that were relevant to but not included in the former Associate Minister's submission. Through this process, the Board was able to gain important context and separate the facts from the characterization.

While certain information has, and continues to circulate about this matter, only the Board has obtained a complete picture and heard both sides of the story. Some within the Congregation have argued that they should be entitled to stand in the Board's shoes and should be given all of the information so that they can make an independent judgment on their own. While this reflects a desire for truth and transparency, it also reflects a lack of trust for those whom the Congregation has duly elected and appointed to govern the affairs of Park Street Church. The Board has, nevertheless, sought to be responsive to these calls for information, within the bounds of confidentiality and the Church's governance structure. We held an Informational Meeting on October 8, 2023, and a Q&A session on October 11, 2023, but we have been, and remain, reluctant to publicly litigate this process more than we already have. The allegations made against

Mark malign his character and integrity. They are replete with characterization and reflect the personal perspective of someone with whom Mark had a strained working relationship. This does not mean that the allegations are inherently false or did not warrant assessment. But, for the most part, that assessment was and should have remained confidential. It has been unfair to Mark and hurtful to his family to have these allegations publicized across the Congregation, especially after the charge of disqualification was found to be unsubstantiated (by which, for clarity, we mean “unwarranted based on the facts,” not that the facts themselves could not be determined).

With that said, we do want to address three issues that have been raised since the publication of the written charges. One of those is that this was a matter of spiritual abuse, and the Board did not consider that issue. That is incorrect. The Board considered all of the allegations that were made. While those allegations were labeled by the former Associate Minister as spiritual abuse (including more emphatically after-the-fact), a label is not determinative. With respect to the actual allegations, the Board found no instances where the Senior Minister used Scripture or his calling by God to demand compliance with or submission to his prerogatives. There was no evidence that Mark abused a position of trust to obtain personal information of congregants or to otherwise manipulate or control. As for the former Associate Minister, he did not consider Mark to be his spiritual director, and he was not seeking Mark’s counsel or guidance in any of the interactions highlighted in his charges. Unlike the relationship between a congregant and a pastor (where a congregant might be in a position of vulnerability), the former Associate Minister did not give any special trust to Mark or approach him as a spiritual authority.

A second issue concerns instances where Mark was allegedly demanding confidential information from the former Associate Minister. Both the former Associate Minister and the Senior Minister readily agreed that it would be inappropriate for a minister to disclose without consent (even to another minister) confidential and personal matters that a congregant shared with him (e.g., personal struggles with sin, difficulties with children or a spouse, etc.). This is not the type of information that Mark was seeking in any of the instances alleged. Instead, in each instance, the Senior Minister was seeking information about organizational matters (such as initiatives the Senior Minister was attempting to implement or personnel actions he was taking) or about interpersonal issues with staff or lay leadership in which he was directly involved for the sake of ensuring relational health among leaders.

A final issue is the notion that the Board’s rejection of the charge that Mark was Biblically disqualified is equivalent to the Board’s determination that there are no matters of concern that warrant further assessment or attention by the Board. This is also incorrect. The Board recognizes that there are areas of unhealth within our Church and our Staff, likely arising in part from different expectations of how leadership is exercised. Action is already being taken to address this. Mark has discussed with the Congregation the leadership training he will be receiving, which he welcomes as an opportunity to strengthen and refine his management skills. Additionally, the Board has recently engaged the VOCA Center to obtain a comprehensive and unbiased assessment of our staff culture, to pinpoint any issues of concern, and to develop a plan for health. The Board is not turning a blind eye to serious issues that exist within our Church.

Above all, we want to care for this church as God desires. We want to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s guidance. We ask that God would give us soft hearts, clear sight, and open ears so that

we would be wise, obedient, and faithful stewards of this calling to lead and shepherd Park Street Church. We have been persistent in our prayers that God would renew and revive this congregation and would begin that work in our own hearts. We are committed to working to lead the Church to a place of health and unity in the Lord.

We understand that recent circumstances have been challenging. As your Elders, we have been appointed by you to lead, including through times of difficulty. We ask for your support in this present time of difficulty by voting “NO” on this motion. We further ask for your prayers for wisdom for our entire congregation, and particularly those of us bearing the weight of leadership. We are encouraged by the hope of Christmastide that God is with us, his people. May he use this season and every part of our life together to make us more like Jesus together, for his glory.

In Him and to His glory,

The Board of Elders



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May 8, 2024  
Letter from Board of Elders  
to Petitioners

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## PARK STREET CHURCH

Dear—,

This has been a challenging time for Park Street Church. We know that you are hurting and upset, and that many of you view the previously requested special meeting as the only vehicle to voice those feelings. As a Board of Elders, we affirm that members of the congregation have a right to request a special meeting for an appropriate purpose. We acknowledge, moreover, that many of you have sought a special meeting for months now and have felt exasperated with the process. We understand that, for many of you, the concerns motivating the request for a special meeting include a genuine care for the welfare and health of our church and our staff. We further recognize that, in this time of low trust, any request from us to pursue a different course may be received as unloving and domineering.

Nevertheless, we write to appeal to you now as our fellow brothers and sisters who clearly have a deep love and devotion to Park Street Church to not proceed with a special meeting. We ask that you consider whether proceeding with a special meeting will promote the health and restoration that our body so desperately needs. The Elders believe that Park Street Church is in a vulnerable and injured state. The Annual Meeting was a painful experience for all of our members, regardless of how they voted. We believe that now is a time for repentance and renewal. Holding another potentially divisive meeting on the heels of our Annual Meeting may inflict additional harm.

We also do not believe that there is a need or reason for a special meeting. As the Clerk has explained, the only decision to be reviewed is whether Mark is biblically qualified to be a minister (not just at Park Street Church, but anywhere). This issue has been assessed by two different bodies—the Board of Elders and the Vicinage Council. In addition, while VOCA's assessment of our staff culture was not directly focused on this issue, it was relevant and aligned with the assessments made by the Board of Elders and the Vicinage Council.

From our standpoint, the question of Mark's biblical fitness is resolved. We recognize, however, that there are ongoing issues with respect to the Church's workplace, including with Mark's management of the staff, and the staff's conduct under his management. We share your concerns for our staff and the workplace. The efforts of our consultants at VOCA are directly aimed at addressing these issues and bringing the staff to a place of health. We are committed to seeing that work through to its completion.

We also want to make clear that, by requesting that you do not pursue a special meeting, we are not signaling that we are closed to dialogue or to receiving constructive criticism or feedback. To the contrary, we would welcome the opportunity to speak with you, but in a less formal setting. A request for a special meetings made under our Bylaws is a legal request that seeks to take legally binding action on behalf of the Church, as a non-profit corporation. As a Board of fiduciaries, we are required to respond to these legal requests in kind, limiting the purpose of such meetings to what is permissible under our Bylaws, and conducting such meetings with the formalities and

coldness of Robert's Rules. That is not how we would wish to proceed. If what you desire is a forum to voice your concerns and hear from your leadership, we are willing and ready to carve out time for that, either in smaller groups or in a larger town hall setting. Proceeding in that way would also allow us to address a host of topics and concerns, including staffing decisions and other matters that are not subject to formal congregational review and rescindment.

Our hope is you will receive this request in a spirit of love and understanding. We ask that you please pray and consider what is in the best interests of Park Street Church as a whole. If the Lord so leads, whether individually or collectively, please let the Clerk know of your decision. In the meantime, Elders are available to speak with you, to discuss this request or any other concerns you might have.

Thank you for your prayers for and devotion to Park Street Church.

In His Service,

The Board of Elders

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Background Materials  
Submitted by Petitioners

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## *Special Meeting Request #4 Background Materials*

Submitted February 6, 2024

### ***Purpose 1(a) – Timeline of the Board of Elders' Determination:***

1. **Early July:** Jason Abraham and Kathie Lindemann (a personnel committee member) summon Michael Balboni to a meeting with Mark Booker, where Michael Balboni summarizes his concerns about Mark Booker. Jason Abraham requires Michael Balboni to submit his allegations in writing or rescind them.
2. **July 7:** Michael Balboni requests unpaid leave of absence to pray and discern more before writing or rescinding his allegations.
3. **July 8:** Jason Abraham denies this request, requires Michael Balboni to keep all allegations confidential inside and outside the church (which restricts his ability to seek prayer or counsel), and demands that he immediately submit his allegations in writing. Jason Abraham convenes a subcommittee of five elders in advance of receiving the allegations. Four out of five subcommittee members are known to be highly loyal to Mark Booker.
  - a. Subcommittee members: Geoff Raux (chair), David Murgatroyd, Kirstin Peltz, Jason Abraham, and Yannick Assogba
4. **July 15:** With no other choice, Michael Balboni submits a 17-page memo, describing allegations of spiritual abuse, deception, and breaches of pastoral ethics regarding Mark Booker.
5. **July 15-29:** The subcommittee interviews Michael Balboni (in a single two-hour meeting) and Mark Booker (the number of meetings or length of time has not been disclosed). Subcommittee members are not allowed to communicate with Michael Balboni outside of this single interview.
  - a. No additional witnesses are called, even though Michael Balboni's letter identified at least nine other unnamed staff members who could substantiate his concerns, and strongly urged that their testimony be invited. Scripture requires at least two witnesses in order to consider allegations against an elder.
  - b. Michael Balboni is not permitted to testify before the entire Board of Elders, and was not allowed to an advocate at the Board. He was also never allowed to review or respond to Mark Booker's testimony, nor the subcommittee report assessing his allegations.
6. **July 29:** The remaining seven elders receive Michael Balboni's memo and the subcommittee report concerning the allegations, with under 24 hours to review the materials and vote. They were not allowed to speak to Michael Balboni during the entire process. We do not know if elders were permitted to speak with Mark Booker.
7. **July 30:** The Board determines in Executive Session, based solely on the subcommittee report and recommendations, that "there is no evidence of disqualifying sins, as described in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, of such severity that they call for the Senior Minister to be disqualified from pastoral ministry."



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- a. By calling a vote on whether "evidence" of disqualifying sins exists without first attempting to collect evidence from a broader group, the board prematurely rejects Michael Balboni's allegations.
  - b. Michael Balboni never alleges "disqualifying sins," making the phrasing of this motion notable. Rather, Michael Balboni's charge was that Mark Booker was not "above reproach," the Biblical standard.
  - c. Despite the exact phrasing of this motion pertaining to whether there was "evidence of disqualifying sins...of such severity..." future communications from the Moderator and Senior Minister assert much more broadly that the board found Michael's allegations to be "unsubstantiated."
8. **July/August:** The Board members inform Mark Booker of Michael Balboni's continued concerns, exposing Michael Balboni to unnecessary retaliation for whistleblowing.
  9. **August 1:** Jason Abraham and Geoff Raux tell Michael Balboni that the Board found Michael Balboni's allegations unsubstantiated. They state that they have not ruled "as a finding against you, nor have [we] found bad faith on your part." Michael Balboni then requests and is granted a voluntary leave of absence to pray on how to respond to the elders' determination.
  10. **August:** At some point, Mark Booker requests to terminate Michael Balboni and the personnel committee deliberates on Mark Booker's request. It is unclear what the committee's determinations ultimately were, what they were based upon, when they were made, and who (if anyone) recused themselves.
  11. **August 29:** Michael Balboni informs Jason Abraham that he will conclude his voluntary leave of absence and return on September 7, agreeing to submit to Mark Booker, giving him "another chance" with a "clean slate," and sincerely hoping for reconciliation.
  12. **September 3:** Mark Booker is severely injured in an incapacitating bicycle accident and admitted to the hospital.
  13. **September 5:** Mark Booker undergoes emergency surgery for a traumatic spine injury, requiring an extended recovery and time away from work.
  14. **September 6:** On the day before Michael Balboni's voluntary leave is to end, Jason Abraham places Michael Balboni on involuntary leave. According to the former church parliamentarian, Mark Booker made this decision.<sup>2</sup> It remains unknown whether the decision was made after Mark Booker's September 3 injury. It is also unclear whether Mark Booker had the capacity to make this decision given the severity of his injury, intervening major surgery, and almost certain requirement for strong pain medications.
  15. **September 24:** The Board approves Mark Booker's termination of Michael Balboni by majority vote.

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<sup>2</sup> Letter to Petitioners: <https://parkstreetpetition.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Ltr.Petitioners.9.27.2023.pdf>



## *Special Meeting Request #4 Background Materials*

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### ***Purpose 1(b) - PSC's Previous Handling of Allegations of Spiritual Abuse and Applicability to the Current Situation***

The Board of Elders did not conduct an appropriate investigation into Michael Balboni's allegations of spiritual abuse prior to deciding that "there is no evidence of disqualifying sins, as described in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, of such severity that they call for the Senior Minister to be disqualified from pastoral ministry." The Board subsequently approved Mark Booker's decision to fire Michael Balboni.

Less than one year prior, PSC hired a third party, the Telios law firm, to investigate allegations of spiritual abuse against a former minister. The congregation received an abbreviated report from Telios which outlined their findings and recommendations to the Board to improve PSC's handling of spiritual abuse accusations in the future.<sup>3</sup>

The Board's actions in response to spiritual abuse allegations against Senior Minister Mark Booker are inconsistent with the precedent set by this previous experience.

#### ***1. Michael's 17-page memo alleges spiritual abuse.***

- "Spiritual abuse occurs when someone uses 'what is sacred – including God's word – to control, misuse, deceive, or damage a person created in His image.' Common characteristics of spiritually abusive persons include a systematic failure to take accountability for their own actions, censorship of nonconforming ideas or voices, and a pattern of manipulation and exploitation." (Telios report, pg. 2)
- "For the purposes of this investigation, Telios Law used the following definition: 'Spiritual abuse is a form of emotional and psychological abuse... characterized by a systematic pattern of coercive and controlling behavior in a religious context.'" (Telios report, pg. 3)

#### ***2. Both Jason Abraham and Mark Booker have said that they will not tolerate spiritual abuse and that they would review PSC's servant leadership and oversight practices.<sup>4</sup>***

- "Given the findings of the report, we want to reiterate that as a community under Jesus, we will not tolerate abuse of any kind, and we will stand on the side of those whose vulnerability is exploited by others, whether by church leaders, ministers, spouses, parents, employers, or anyone else. Jesus used his power and authority to serve, to protect, and to heal. Any use of power or authority that exploits the vulnerabilities of fellow human beings, especially in the church, is a distortion of the purposes for which this power and authority were entrusted to us by Jesus. Insofar as we are able, we aim to prevent these abuses of power and authority in our midst, and to ensure that Park Street Church is a place where those who have been mistreated by others, whether through abuse or any kind of sin, are protected, defended, and healed."
- "The church is a place that, in Jesus's name, is to promote healing in the lives of God's people. When this center for healing becomes a place of harm, it is significant and

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<sup>3</sup> Telios Report: [https://mcusercontent.com/6d9a4602d911ac1f58c544dae/files/8e204122-ae5b-5c9a-287b-feb4f5137af5/2022\\_09\\_26\\_Report\\_to\\_Congregation.01.pdf](https://mcusercontent.com/6d9a4602d911ac1f58c544dae/files/8e204122-ae5b-5c9a-287b-feb4f5137af5/2022_09_26_Report_to_Congregation.01.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> September 26, 2022 email to the Congregation: <https://mailchi.mp/parkstreet.org/external-investigation-report>



## *Special Meeting Request #4 Background Materials*

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heartbreaking. We are sorry to you, the community, that this occurred, and we are reviewing our servant leadership and oversight practices."

### **3. *An independent investigation is the appropriate way to evaluate allegations of spiritual abuse.***

There is a power differential between Michael Balboni and Mark Booker, so Matthew 18 does not apply. Nor is a performance review or a general review of staff health sufficient.

- "The Minister [investigated by Telios] wanted a personal conflict-resolution process under Matthew 18. However, Rev. Mark Booker and the Personnel Subcommittee did not see that process as viable because: (1) it did not allow enough accountability to Church leadership, (2) there was a significant power differential with some of the complainants, and (3) there were concerns about patterns of behavior.

The decision was sound and justified under the circumstances. Matthew 18 is an ecclesiastical process for reconciliation and discipline of church members, not a process for fact-finding. It is not intended to compel individuals to directly confront their spiritual or organizational superiors, as it contemplates disputes 'between brothers.'

Yet a 360 review employment evaluation was also an inappropriate procedure for responding to these allegations. Allegations of abuse are more appropriately handled in an investigation." (Telios report, pg. 8)

### **4. *PSC is being inconsistent with its weights and measures (Prov 16:11).***

In an analogous situation of alleged spiritual abuse involving a minister at PSC, the Board and the Senior Minister continued to investigate even after her departure, and commissioned an independent investigation. Despite this precedent, and many calls for independent investigations from the congregation (including Petition 2 signed by 50 members), no independent investigation has been authorized in the present case. The Board of Elders and Mark Booker, in the previous case, applied a different standard that they refuse to apply to the Senior Minister. Instead, the Board allowed Mark Booker – the subject of the allegations – to fire the complainant, Michael Balboni.

- "After her resignation and additional complaints, the Board continued to investigate, consulting with outside experts on spiritual abuse, trauma, and misconduct investigation. When a request was made for a more thorough investigation into the allegations against the Minister [investigated by Telios], ultimately, the Board chose to move forward with an independent, third-party investigation. PSC retained Telios Law to investigate allegations of misconduct and possible abuse." (Telios report, pg. 2)
- "PSC was right to decline a Matthew 18 process for handling the allegations, but the allegations should have triggered a formal investigation into these matters rather than a 360 Review." (Telios report, pg. 4)
- "The Board of Elders voted to conduct an independent investigation by a 3<sup>rd</sup> party as the best option based on several considerations, including but not limited to the fact that one of the complainants had requested an independent investigation by an external firm." (Telios report, pg. 6)