



July 22, 2024

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Thank you for your patience as we took time to pray and consider this most recent petition. We recognize that the members submitting this petition have strong convictions about these matters. We also know that the events that have transpired over the past several months, including the resignation of multiple ministers, have been difficult for many of us. We have tried to address the concerns and related hurt through holding nine processing sessions in June, requesting the Vicinage Council to reconvene, and by engaging in many small group and one-on-one conversations. We know that this is just a start, and that much work lies ahead as we seek to lead our body to a place of unity and health.

That work will be hard and will involve all of us. It is our prayer that all of the members of Park Street Church will display grace and understanding with one another and that, as we move forward together, we will not let our differences prevent us from living as examples of Christ's love and sacrifice.

One of our differences has concerned the work of the Vicinage Council in assessing the charges of Biblical disqualification that were made against our Senior Minister. Vicinage councils or "synods" are rooted in Scripture (*e.g.*, Acts 15) and play an important role in our congregational polity. The Cambridge Platform—a statement of congregational polity that Park Street Church affirmed at its founding—acknowledges that vicinage councils are an "ordinance of Christ," which may, at times, be "necessary to the well-being of churches, for the establishment of truth and peace therein." (Ch. XVI.1). It exhorts churches that are "rent with divisions among themselves" to "consult with other churches for healing or removing" of these divisions. (Ch. XV.2). Comprised of local church leaders "arguing, debating, and determining matters of religion according to the word," a vicinage council's "directions and determinations, so far as consonant to the word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission, not only for their agreement therewith...but also secondarily for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God appointed hereunto in his word." (Ch. XVI.2, XVI.5).

The Vicinage Council called for Park Street Church was comprised of seven senior leaders within the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference ("CCCC") and local congregational churches. They gave their time and their talents to serve Park Street Church in our moment of need, bringing an outside perspective and years of ministry experience and spiritual wisdom to investigate and assess the charges of Biblical disqualification that were made against our Senior Minister. It has been disheartening to see the personal attacks made against members of the Council, and to hear the unfounded claims that the Council was somehow biased and not independent. None of the Council members had any meaningful connection or relationship with Pastor Mark or the other Elders at Park Street Church that could be construed as creating a conflict. The notion that these men lacked the integrity to pursue their work honestly and objectively, or that they were more interested in helping a particular individual than the body of Christ is baseless and concerning. The members of the Council recently shared with us that they

received threats of legal action and repeated personal attacks from those in our community—some even having to block email addresses due to sustained harassment. While it is one thing to express a preference for a different investigative body or even to express disagreement with the Vicinage Council’s assessment, there is no place for this type of behavior.

The Vicinage Council completed its initial work in early May. The Council unanimously concluded that there was not evidence that disqualified Pastor Mark from continuing in the ministry. Following the June 2nd Special Meeting, the Elders decided to request that the Vicinage Council be reconvened to further assess the charges against Pastor Mark, including the testimony and information that was presented in the week leading up to the Special Meeting. The current petition seeks to challenge the Elders’ decision to request the Vicinage Council to reconvene. After prayerful consideration, the Board of Elders is not approving this petition for the following reasons:

1. The decision identified by the petition has already been fully effectuated, so is not subject to review. The petition was received on June 20, 2024. The Vicinage Council had already reconvened and begun its work by that time. At this point, moreover, the work of the Vicinage Council is complete and a Supplemental Report has been issued. Members do not have any right to review the Vicinage Council’s decision or to require the Board of Elders to undo the Vicinage Council’s work or expend funds on any additional investigation. There is, therefore, no practical purpose for the requested Special Meeting insofar as the decision to be reviewed is moot.
2. The petition seeks to go beyond review of the Board’s decision and to exercise authority that members do not have. Specifically, the petition states that the “[p]etitioners will seek other possible options from the congregation to ameliorate the current circumstances of our beloved church.” This indicates that the members submitting the petition, as in prior petitions, are seeking to take affirmative action on behalf of Park Street Church and/or to order the Board of Elders to take such action. As noted in responses to prior petitions, that is not permissible under our Charter and Bylaws. The model of church government adopted by Park Street Church places responsibility for management and oversight with the Board of Elders, who have spiritual and fiduciary duties that other members do not. The Bylaws, moreover, are deliberately and expressly not merely a legal document, but also a Biblical covenant entered into among the members of Park Street Church affirming that “the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God and the all-sufficient rule of faith and practice” (Art. II). Scripture speaks directly to the oversight responsibilities of elders and the corresponding role of the congregation (Acts 20:28; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; 1 Tim. 5:17-19; Titus 1:5-11; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:1-5). The Charter and Bylaws set forth an organizational and operational structure within the confines of Scripture, placing the responsibility to govern with the Elders in recognition that they must “give an account” to the Lord (Heb. 13:17).
3. The Board of Elders is convicted that the continued debate of the charges of Biblical disqualification that were brought against our Senior Minister, and the holding of another Special Meeting on the same matter previously discussed, is not merely inappropriate (as our Bylaws are not intended to give



a group who disagrees with a particular decision the right to repeatedly review that decision and prevent Park Street Church from moving forward) but also detrimental to the spiritual welfare of Park Street Church. The factionalism that has arisen in connection with this matter, and the gossip and slander associated with it, are harming our body. As the Vicinage Council previously concluded, the evil one has a foothold in Park Street Church and is using this controversy to divide us and to thwart the witness of the Gospel. The Board of Elders has a responsibility for the spiritual welfare of Park Street Church and each of its members, and, as an exercise of that responsibility, we cannot allow this matter to continue.

4. The petition reflects an improper posture of resistance to the spiritual leadership of Park Street Church. The Board of Elders does not claim to be infallible. We have attempted to be attentive to the voice of the congregation and lead in a manner that is faithful to the Lord. Our initial decision on this matter was reviewed at the recent Special Meeting. We accepted the vote not to affirm. We took up the matter again, requesting the Vicinage Council to reconvene. We wrote to the congregation to explain our thinking and ask for your prayers. We acknowledged that not everyone would approve of the course we were taking. We recognize and affirm that congregants are not required to agree with the Board of Elders in all respects or to heartily approve all of our decisions. However, challenging us at every turn is inconsistent with the Bible's call to appropriate submission to leadership, and is contrary to the pledge set forth in our Bylaws that we each take as members to "cheerfully submit myself to the instruction and government of this church," and "to promote its purity, peace, and welfare by all means within my power, so long as I shall continue to be a member."

We know that many of you will be disappointed that another Special Meeting will not be held. We pray, however, that you will accept this in the Lord. These are difficult times for us to navigate. The burden that we feel as your Elders has been incredibly heavy in this season. We are earnestly and fervently seeking the Lord's will for these matters and to promote the best interests of Park Street Church as a whole. We know that we are broken as a body and in need of healing and renewal. We must come together as one under Christ, and direct our energies to the common mission we all affirm. Let us now take back up our resolve to individually and collectively "be imitators of God, as beloved children; and [to] walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma" (Eph. 5:1-2).

In His Service,

The Board of Elders