

January 30, 2022

Dear Conejo Family:

It has been five years since our congregation last went through a season of reflection and discernment concerning congregational leadership. The congregation added two new elders (Greg Brawner and Michael Ditmore) at that time, and three others (Rick Marrs, Mike Murrie, and Stu Warford) have since stepped away from the group. We have dealt with several important matters in those five years, including the launch of a fundraising campaign for an expansion of our current facilities, significant fires in the area, the Borderline shooting, and ongoing challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The constantly changing conditions produced by the pandemic prompted the elders to delay the selection process a full year, but they also provided us the opportunity to use the months of October and November to engage in focused conversations with as many Conejo families as we could, in anticipation of this selection process and to help prioritize congregational goals and efforts. We are extremely grateful to all who were able to participate in that exercise. The elders spoke directly with more than half the congregation over the course of those weeks, and we believe this has provided us with greater clarity regarding the thinking and spirit of the congregation as we move into 2022.

We announced at the end of worship on January 30 that we are opening a new elder selection process, and we hope to install/reaffirm a new slate of elders by early April. The proposed schedule and other details of the process are provided at the end of this letter. One significant modification is the elders have decided that the congregation should prayerfully consider and nominate whichever individuals – both men and women – from our church body they believe are equipped for this important task.

The possibility of including women for consideration in this role was raised in the selection process five years ago. Following two months of congregation-wide study and discussion in 2017, that group of elders reaffirmed its conviction that Scripture does not exclude women from serving as elders, but they also determined that to include women at that time would hamper rather than encourage congregational life. Therefore, that group of elders asked the congregation not to consider women for the role of elders at that time because, from a pastoral perspective, the flock was not prepared for such a change.

The current group of elders – as a group and individually – has continued to study and pray over this issue off and on over the intervening five years. As we prepared to introduce the present selection process, we recognized that significant differences regarding the issue remain in the church family, and there is every indication that this will persist into the foreseeable future. So, we made the issue the initial topic for consideration in our recent conversations with you. These conversations confirmed what we had suspected: We are not in agreement. Regarding women elders, the views of the current group of elders closely parallels the views of the whole congregation. We disagree over whether Scripture authorizes women to serve as elders, and we disagree over what our next step should be, from a pastoral perspective.

However, we are in full agreement – congregation and elders alike – in our desire to conform our beliefs and our lives to the teachings of God revealed in Scripture. Similarly, we are in full agreement in our desire to faithfully commend the gospel to those around us, in our words and in our actions. Attaining our common desires in the face of disagreement requires a healthy dose of humility. We must trust that brothers and sisters with whom we disagree share our goal of submitting to God’s will and furthering His kingdom. Otherwise, we will listen only to the voices with whom we agree and ignore those with whom we disagree.

Over the course of our conversations in the fall, several of you reiterated the belief that Scripture restricts the eldership to men, often with additional concerns about the potential for this issue to create divisiveness in the body and open the door to radical, culturally-popular beliefs and practices. All the elders take these comments very seriously. Nevertheless, a clear preponderance of you believe that Scripture allows for the inclusion of women among the elders. Among these latter voices we frequently heard the sentiment that to engage now in an elder selection process that excludes women from consideration would diminish rather than enhance this congregation’s efforts to “be the blessing” in our community and proclaim the distinctive message of the gospel to a world that seems less and less interested in hearing it.

Therefore, with one dissenting voice, the elders have determined that we will make this change to our traditional practice and include our sisters in Christ fully in the current elder nomination and affirmation process. We believe, as many of you shared in your conversations with us, that God has gifted both men and women among us with the personal character and experience necessary to take on the responsibilities of this role as laid out in Scripture. Not to make this change would signal, we believe, a lack of faith on our part in the Spirit’s guidance of the congregation and the sincerity of your shared commitment to respect God’s will.

As we take this step, we strongly urge every member to be ever mindful of the valid concerns that are being raised by those who would disagree with the decision. We must not – we cannot – ignore the voices of our brothers and sisters. We call on all to extend and expand your conversations with one another on this issue and the related concerns, always remembering to do so “with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15). We believe we can best address these matters by lovingly and humbly calling one another to reexamine Scripture and reexamine our hearts again and again. One thing we heard loud and clear in our conversations with you all is that we share a common love for God and a deep love for one another. Please, show the fulness of that love and listen to one another.

Several important opportunities and challenges lie ahead of us that will demand our concerted efforts, and good leadership will be vital to our success. We encourage you to review relevant Scriptures as you prayerfully consider which individuals you believe are best prepared to serve this congregation as elders. The primary passages regarding the character and responsibilities of elders to which we traditionally have turned are 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, along with 1 Peter 5:1-4 and Acts 20:17-35. We would also commend to you the teachings about Christian leadership and spiritual gifts in Mark 10:41-45, 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, and Ephesians 4:1-13.

We now urge you to participate in the elder selection process as you feel guided to do so by God and His Holy Spirit, nominating whichever individuals you believe are fit for the task. An “Elder Nominations” box will be set up at the entry to the building, and you can place the names of those you would like to have considered as elders in that box; or, you may send an e-mail to cvccnominations@gmail.com and submit your nominations in that way. After we identify the individuals who have the support of a sufficient portion of the congregation (at least 20% of those nominating), we will contact each nominee to determine their interest in and willingness to serve. We will announce those names to the congregation and allow time for members to talk with candidates and for the current leaders to deal with any concerns that might arise. The selection process will then conclude with a time of affirmation. As in past selections, each member will be provided with an affirmation ballot to indicate their willingness to affirm each candidate nominated, as well as their willingness to re-affirm each current elder who feels called to continue in this role. Nominees must receive affirmations from at least 70% of those affirming to serve as elders.

The following timetable reflects the proposed schedule for the selection and affirmation of new elders and the re-affirmation of current elders:

- January 30, February 6** – Announce to the congregation the elder selection process
- January 30-31** – Emails and letters go out to the congregation encouraging nominations
- February 1 – 19** – CVCC members submit nominations
- February 20 - 25** – Leaders contact nominees receiving sufficient congregational support (at least 20% of all nominations), determining their interest / willingness to serve
- February 27** – Presentation of nominees who are willing to go forward to the congregation
- February 28 – March 12** – Time to discuss and raise questions about nominees, resolving any potential Scriptural objections
- March 6** – Conduct congregational discussion with nominees in a town hall setting
- March 13** – Deadline for submitting Scriptural objections regarding any nominees
- March 14** – Mail out affirmation ballots to the congregation
- March 24** – Affirmation ballots due
- March 27** – Announcement of all affirmed elders to the congregation (those receiving affirmation from at least 70% of those submitting ballots)
- Earliest convenient Sunday in April** – Formal installation of new elders

We encourage you to contact us with any questions or concerns you might have. We are committed to spend time in discussion and prayer with you about your concerns. Of course, we ask for your prayers as we lead the congregation through this process. Finally, we pray that this process will enable and inspire us all to give ourselves more fully to the service of God and His kingdom in the months and years ahead.

In Christ,

The Elders