

A LETTER OF APOLOGY & LAMENT

October 10, 2021

Dear Church Family,

The Antioch elders, with the blessing and affirmation of the congregation at large, recently changed our position and policy with regard to women in church leadership. Specifically, while we previously understood the role of elder to be reserved for men only (based primarily on our interpretation of 1 Timothy 3.1-7 and Titus 1.5-9), we now understand these passages (and the rest of the New Testament witness) to encourage the inclusion of women in this role. For those in our congregation who may still have questions about this change of position, we would enjoy the chance to sit down over a cup of coffee or share resources to help you better understand our process. While we are firmly convicted regarding our new position, we acknowledge that this is a doctrinal issue in which faithful Christians throughout history, around the world, and within our own congregation have arrived at differing conclusions.

In addition to changing our position and policy on women in church leadership, there is another step we are convicted to take. This is not only a biblical issue, it's also a justice issue. And for our sisters in Christ, it's an issue that impacts their sense of identity, calling, and belonging in the church. If our previous position involved a misunderstanding of Christ's will for His church, then that position represents an injustice in which we have been complicit.

So, how are we to respond when convicted of our complicity in an unjust system? Where there has been injustice, we must address it with consideration of both the past and the future.

As we look to the future, we acknowledge that change is necessary to ensure that justice is done going forward. In this case, we look forward to implementing our new position and policy in hope of creating a more just leadership model and bringing an end to the unjust conditions under which we previously operated. Starting today we will be accepting nominations for new elders with the expectation that some of the many faithful sisters in Christ who have already been such an important part of Antioch will now be empowered to use their gifts even more fully, in service as elders. We are excited about the future as we seek to follow the Lord together, and we are eager to see how the long overdue inclusion of women into the role of eldership will enrich and enhance our mission as a church.

In addition to looking forward, we must also look back, to lament and repent that we misunderstood and misrepresented Christ's heart on this matter. We, the current male elders, now recognize that we are responsible for the injustices inflicted upon our sisters in Christ by our previous position.

We know that if our former position was at odds with Christ's will for His church, then our entire congregation has been negatively impacted in one way or another. But those most directly due an apology are the women and girls in our congregation who have been misled by church leaders, held back by patriarchal policies, denied opportunities to use their God-given talents and personalities, and made at times to feel as though they were second-class citizens in Christ's church.

We don't pretend to understand all the ways in which our past policy has hurt our sisters, and we look forward to growing in our understanding alongside the female elders with whom we will soon be serving. As for now, we are publicly confessing our wrong-doing in this matter, apologizing and repenting to all those who have been hurt by what we now take to be an unbiblical stance. We are asking for forgiveness, from Christ and from all who have been hurt by the position we previously held. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.

At Antioch, we understand and teach "the reconciliation of all things" as a summation of the gospel of Jesus. We have committed ourselves to pursuing racial reconciliation, reconciliation with creation, and reconciliation in other relationships, but for far too long we have neglected the need to pursue reconciliation between men and women in the family of God, which we now see is a central theme of Jesus' ministry and Paul's writings. We trust that adopting this new position is a huge step toward the needed reconciliation in this relationship. We offer this public lament and apology with the hope that it, too, will lead to the reconciliation the Lord desires, for unity of His church, and the glory of His name.

On behalf of the current Antioch elders,



Pete Kelley, Lead Pastor



Rick Gerhardt, Elder Chair