

Greetings church family! As the holidays approach, the Elder Board continues to seek God's wisdom and direction on the needs of our church, including hiring a Senior Pastor and planning for the next year. The Association of Hill Country Churches has offered their assistance where needed, and have already helped us with resources for our Senior Pastor search. We're considering other ways they can help us out as we continue to refine the interview and selection process.

In support of that effort, the Board is also working to identify ways for us to get our church ready for the one God leads to us. The changes we've gone through over the past year have had different impacts on our staff and church members, and our focus is and has been to identify where and how we can help. We are putting in place new processes to support our staff in their ministries as well as to help us know their needs. We're also meeting with those who reach out to us to understand any needs they have. There's a lot of work for us to do in this effort but your Elder Board is driven to do what we can to meet the needs of our church family.

Two very important items we'll be addressing over the next 2 weeks are presenting an elder candidate and an updated "Principles and Practices" document for congregational vote. As we mentioned in our last update, the Principles and Practices document includes the primary duties of the Senior Pastor as well as the duties and tenure of elders. The changes we will be presenting are intended to make the document more in line with the church's current and future needs.

Along with the Principles and Practices document, Chris Putney will be presented as our next elder candidate. Chris has been a member for 28 years and has previously served as an elder. He has a deep love for the church and serves or has served in multiple ministries including Worship and Youth.

We also have great things happening in the church as our ministries grow and find new ways to meet the needs of the congregation. Our Youth Ministry has been able to add a new meeting time for high school students to give them and our junior high students more focused and age-appropriate discipleship opportunities. And don't forget to join us in the upcoming events we have scheduled over the next months including Men's Serve Day, The Great Tamale Project and Christmas Eve service. Check the calendar (<https://hillcountry.life/calendar>) for these events and more.

### **State of the Church**

#### **Attendance**

Attendance levels have come back nicely since summer, but we're down about 7% compared to the same time last year. We aren't surprised by the drop considering the changes we've been navigating. We actually heard from some who speculated that it would drop much more significantly, but that doesn't minimize the 7%. If you have any needs or concerns that you need us to help with, please contact a pastor or elder and give us an opportunity to do that for you. We love our church family and want to hear from you.

#### **Finances**

We continue to be blessed with good financial health, no debt, and stable reserve funds. Since our last update, we've made some progress in closing the gap between projected and

actual offerings, and we're very grateful for your help in that! Our Treasurer, Diane Gulling, has also started working to establish roles and procedures to support the good stewardship of those funds. We appreciate your prayerful and cheerful generosity, and God is faithful to honor it! (Psa 112:5).

## A Final Note

Each of us on the Elder Board has a deep love for this church and everyone in it. We take the Biblical mandates for elders very seriously and very carefully. Our mandate is to "shepherd" the church (1 Pet 5:1-3). Shepherds are to lead by example and ensure the needs of the flock are met, but they also protect. We protect the church in an earthly sense through our Emergency Response Team (ERT) who are trained to be watchful and keep us all safe. We're very grateful for the way they carry out their ministry so well.

Most importantly, though, elders are called to be watchmen on the alert for anything that might cause division among us. God is making wonderful things happen through our various ministries, and the enemy hates it. He'll do anything to stop us. As the Apostle Peter stated,

"Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour." 1 Peter 5:8 NLT

Each of us has a role to play in standing against the enemy's attacks and protecting our brothers and sisters in Christ. One of the enemy's main tactics is to cause division, but the Bible gives us this mandate:

"I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose." 1 Corinthians 1:10 NLT

One of the most common causes of division the enemy uses in churches is gossip. The Oxford dictionary defines gossip as "casual or unconstrained conversation or reports about other people, typically involving details that are not confirmed as being true." The Bible is much clearer: Gossip is sin (Romans 1:29-32). It sows discord, which God also has a clear position on:

"[16] There are six things the Lord hates— no, seven things he detests: [17] haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that kill the innocent, [18] a heart that plots evil, feet that race to do wrong, [19] a false witness who pours out lies, *a person who sows discord in a family.*" Proverbs 6:16-19 NLT

We have a strong church family bound together in God's love and grace, and we know how valuable that is for us to be an effective church. Let's all be on the alert and ready to stand against the enemy's tactics. The elders and pastors stand ready to address any concerns and answer any questions we can, and we ask you to stand with us to continue to strengthen and support our church family.