

Covenant Fellowship Church

Summary of Findings

October 2021

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INTRODUCTION

TO: Covenant Fellowship Church Oversight Board

October 20, 2021

FROM: The Center Consulting Group

It has been a privilege to work with the Oversight Board over the past ten months. We know that this has been a hard season for many at CFC. We hope that the summary below will give further clarity to the challenges you have faced and suggestions on steps to work toward greater healing and unity. Accordingly, below are The Center Consulting Group's "Summary of Findings" identifying several key findings from our assessment at CFC.

This report contains our best interpretation of our findings in our work with CFC. This summary of findings is an evaluation of the culture and health of the church, and it offers recommendations for next steps. The Center provides these candid observations to help you think wisely and creatively. However, you are the ones entrusted by God to make the decisions on the future of CFC. The Center will walk alongside you as you act upon your decisions.

BACKGROUND

Over 30 years ago, God planted Covenant Fellowship Church on the campus of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with the vision to produce kingdom workers.

Every church, should it live long enough, will experience some form of conflict and suffering. In light of the difficulties that came to a point in early 2019, The Center was asked to conduct an assessment of the situation to help CFC's leadership navigate this season. We began our work in November 2020 which focused primarily on the relationships and work of the SLT (Pastors Sean, KJ, and David).

The past CFC governing structure was senior-pastor-led with assistant/associate pastor involvement (when the assistant/associate pastors were younger). Over time, it was senior-pastor-led with fellow teaching elder involvement (as associate pastors became ordained as teaching elders).

In August 2019, by God's leading, CFC transitioned to a team leadership model to be led by a plurality of elders (by the Senior Leadership Team consisting of Rev. David Kang, Rev. KJ Kim, and Rev. Sean Lee) with membership involvement. Meaning, the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) would now set the direction of the church, equip the church, and lead the church into the future. The membership of the church was involved by participating in congregational meetings. A bridge to this leadership structure was created by starting an Oversight Board (OB).

The OB is not an elder board, although biblical principles are used in conducting the OB meetings to govern the church: "direct the affairs of the church" (1 Timothy 5:17-18, NIV) "so that you might put what remained into order" (Titus 1:5, NIV). Furthermore, the OB members are not elders, although biblical principles were used in selecting elders (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1, NIV).

CFC has experienced several challenges related to the leadership and governing of the church over the past two years, and the OB that was put in place 14 months ago has invested a great amount of time and energy to bring CFC to a place of health and stability. They recognize the challenges we identify in this summary of findings, and they have been an excellent group to work with in exposing the truth of CFC's past and a hope for its future.

Timeline/Process: The Center began working with CFC in November 2020. Over the past year, we have done extensive work to guide CFC through this difficult season. The summary of findings comes as a result of our work with CFC over the past year which included numerous one-on-one interviews, the results of the church health survey that included 143 completed surveys, anecdotal comments from the interviews and survey, church document review, and a number of meetings with the pastors and leaders of CFC.

In addition to this work, we have been to CFC on four separate occasions where we worked with the leadership; led a Q&A with the entire church on Sunday, July 11, 2021; and led a Q&A with the UG on Wednesday, September 22. Today, we are grateful to be with you and hope that our time will begin a season of healing and stability for CFC.

COMMENDATIONS

1. CFC has demonstrated, over many years, a commitment to mobilize kingdom workers for the harvest.

This is a character trait of the church that has moved many people to full-time service across the world, and the kingdom impact is significant. CFC has a heart for reaching the lost and seeing its role in global evangelism.

2. The Oversight Board of CFC was brought into a leadership role 14 months ago in the midst of a global pandemic, political turmoil, and racial unrest.

These men that represent the lay oversight board have labored for many hours on the healing, direction, and future of CFC. They have led with a spirit of humility and a deep love for Christ in all that they do, and we do not always see this level of care for their respective role. They have also made important decisions about the leadership of CFC and about separating from Pastor Min in addition to wanting to understand all the concerns related to the past issues.

3. God has brought to light critical issues that CFC needs to fully understand and address.

The leadership of CFC has allowed The Center to provide insights into the cultural challenges of the past, and the leadership has hired GRACE Ministries to do a full abuse assessment. While these are hard evaluations and conversations, it is also important to fully understand the hurt that people have experienced at CFC. The OB and Pastor KJ desire to understand the scope of ways they have hurt people in the past so that they can be a healthy church moving forward.

4. CFC has a shared passion for reaching students and young adults, and it has led to significant fruit.

One of the consistent themes we have heard about CFC, from those we interviewed to those who responded to the church survey, has been the commitment to discipleship. We believe that this should continue to be a strong commitment of CFC, but this focus needs to be carried out in a healthy manner.

ASSESSMENT

Pastor Min

Pastor Min served CFC as its founding pastor for 30 years, and early in his ministry career, an inappropriate moral failure occurred between Pastor Min and a woman in the church. This should have

been fully disclosed to his wife and to his spiritual accountability partners, but it was not. Pastor Min did not disclose this and made the decision to personally discipline himself by reading the Bible more, praying more, and increasing other spiritual disciplines. GRACE Ministries has been retained by CFC to further assess this situation and will provide specific recommendations about this situation and any abuse-related issues.

A church that starts as a first-generation immigrant church shares unique character traits that are common amongst many first-generation immigrant churches. This can include a lack of appropriate accountability for the senior pastor, a works-based culture, and an inward-focused ministry model. Pastor Min's lack of transparency set a course of action for some of the difficult challenges that CFC has faced over these past years. We received some difficult comments about the leadership of Pastor Min, and we believe that it was appropriate for CFC to separate from Pastor Min. These challenges for CFC came in several distinct areas:

1. First, there is a need to improve transparency and communication towards the church's role in leading God's people. A lack of transparency weakens trust and we are in a season that values transparency and the acknowledgment of failures. To be clear, we met with Pastor Min one time, and it is our intent to meet again in the future to share these concerns with him for the express purpose of accountability and healing. It is also impossible to ignore the people that have felt hurt under the leadership of Pastor Min, and yet we must acknowledge that people also spoke highly of Pastor Min and his ministry to them and CFC.
2. Secondly, the leadership of Pastor Min created an unhealthy culture at times, which was communicated in our one-on-one interviews and through the church survey. The church has focused on the theological equipping of kingdom workers, yet some indicated that grace was also needed as people grow in their faith. The culture was described, at times, as arrogant, works-focused, critical of those less "spiritual," and resembling selective cliques. Some respondents identified shame as one of the primary ways people have been disciplined and encouraged to change. It is important to note that some did not experience this type of unhealthy culture, but it was very difficult for others, and we address this in our recommendations.
3. Finally, we did receive comments related to the financial governance of CFC. We recommended a full audit of CFC be completed by an outside accounting firm that CFC has not used in the past, and the OB moved on this right away. This is in the process of being completed, and the church should accept and follow the suggestions of this third-party accounting firm. We have

no reason to suspect that any financial irregularities exist but we believe that this step to greater financial accountability is good for all churches.

We affirm the OB vote that unanimously agreed to separate from Pastor Min, and he will no longer practice ministry in any capacity in connection with CFC.

Senior Leadership Team (SLT)

One of the critical issues that CFC has faced over the past several years was the creation of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) by Pastor Min that included Sean Lee, David Kang, and KJ Kim. This team was instituted without a lot of training or consideration of the skills and leadership acumen that each pastor brings to CFC. This created significant tensions between the SLT. The SLT traveled to The Center in November 2020, and we found that the relationships and pastoral connections that existed between the three of these men was strained. We began to work with the SLT in December 2020 in a purposeful and regular rhythm of meeting. Within the next few months, two of the SLT members resigned from their pastoral positions at CFC. The resignation of two pastors has left a lot of kingdom work in the hands of one person, and, as we state later under next steps, this is a good time to evaluate a new staffing structure. The significant change in leadership structure and philosophy without clarity on roles and best practices for the creation of an SLT led to some of the leadership missteps in handling Pastor Min's situation.

Works-Based Culture

A number of those that were interviewed or responded to the church-wide survey described CFC as having a works-based view of faith. 62% of those who took the church survey believe that the culture of CFC has become more of a works-based culture. Additionally, 59% believe that CFC does not have a healthy view and balance of grace and truth within the church. This is a concern as it is not consistent with Scripture.

Church Health/Culture

The health of a church culture is often reflected by those who lead. For the past 30 years, CFC was led primarily by Pastor Min and his vision for the church. It is important to remember that several people had positive experiences at CFC and did not summarize the health and culture of the church in negative ways. They described their experiences as positive, impactful, and connecting to a community of committed believers. Many others described the culture and health of CFC in difficult terms which can be summarized in the following ways:

- **Legalistic:** People felt judged and ostracized by how much they were involved or not involved in the church. Some indicated that your place in the church seemed to be determined by your family, your salary, or what you could offer to the church.
- **Accountability of Leadership:** People did not feel safe to meet with some of the key leaders. Several people felt that Pastor Min and Miss Kim had too much power without the appropriate accountability.
- **Lack of Transparency:** This was mentioned by respondents with positive and negative experiences. People are looking for the appropriate amount of transparency and want to move to a place of trust with leadership. However, they need to know that their concerns are not only being heard but also that efforts are being made to bring about change that will help CFC experience greater health. In the church survey, 50% indicated that they believe communication is weak.
- **Perfectionism:** Several people indicated feeling like CFC leadership promoted a checklist of “dos” and “don’ts” that forced them to be perfect, even if they were struggling with areas of their faith.

Spiritual Vitality

In both the interviews and the church survey, it was clear that spiritual vitality is an issue for the church. 61% of survey respondents and over half of those interviewed believe that CFC is either stagnant or plateauing when it comes to spiritual growth and vitality. This is not uncommon in terms of where most churches are due to COVID-19, the political unrest of the past year, and the racial issues that continue to grip our country. Add to that the polarization of masks and vaccines and this is one of the most challenging times in the history of the church in the US. CFC has experienced all of this along with a major leadership crisis, and this next season needs to be focused on moving the church back to a place of health and spiritual renewal.

Location/Church Time

The time and location of CFC’s services were mentioned in the survey and the interviews. The challenges of renting buildings and the timing of services around the rental times have been difficult for some.

NEXT STEPS

1. Create a communication system for those who have been hurt to experience reconciliation.

Create a communication system where previous congregants who have experienced hurt and/or trauma as a result of the culture of CFC can communicate their experiences with CFC leadership for learning and reconciliation. The leadership of CFC should desire for listening and reconciliation as God moves in the hearts of those hurting.

2. Assemble a plurality of elders to serve as the spiritual shepherds.

Complete the work that is in progress to assemble a plurality of elders who will serve as spiritual shepherds of the church. These elders should fulfill the qualifications of elders in the New Testament and be voted on by the congregation. This is currently in process.

3. Determine the future leadership structure.

An important decision of the current OB group (Elders) should be to determine the future leadership structure of the pastors of CFC. Several pastoral structures exist in churches today, and this is a critical decision for the future health of CFC. Question #19 on the church survey asked about the future leadership structure of the church:

As CFC considers future pastoral leadership models, which one would you be most in favor of:

- 58% desire a senior pastor with assistant pastors
- 42% desire a shared leadership model with three equal pastors that all report to the elders.

4. Consider a new pastoral staffing structure.

CFC has lost three pastors over the past nine months, and we believe that this is the time to consider a new pastoral staffing structure, which we addressed above. We also believe that CFC should consider the addition of a second pastor to help carry the pastoral load.

5. Promote a healthy church culture.

To address some of the specific issues of church health, we suggest that CFC create a team to meet for the next year to discover where the health and culture have been compromised, and then make decisions that will allow for a healthier culture. This group should include a cross-section of CFC including men, women, and a diversity in age and time at CFC.

6. Commit to reaching the local community.

There is a growing desire for CFC to be more committed to the local community. We believe that CFC has a bright future, and we look forward to watching God work in this season of change and transition to reach more people for the kingdom.

CONCLUSION

The one question from the survey that gives us great encouragement for CFC and its future is: “How much are you willing to sacrifice your preferences in order to effectively reach our local community for Jesus?” 26% of respondents answered, “I am willing to make great sacrifices,” and 59% replied, “I am willing to make moderate sacrifices.” While this has been a hard and difficult season for CFC, it should be celebrated that 85% of the survey respondents are willing to make sacrifices to see CFC become all it can be. This is a strong response, and with the right changes and leadership calibration, CFC will continue to see great fruit in the future.

The Center Consulting Group

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