

Dear Church Family,

The last year has been unpredictable, unfathomable, unprecedented and for some, it has felt *unending*. Since the “Ides of March” 2020, the world has been grappling with all kinds of challenges. Through these times, God has been very faithful to us, and all praise and glory goes to Him for helping keep LBC on track and focused on the Great Commission.

As the light appears at the end of the tunnel with vaccines and diminishing hospitalizations and cases, we are prayerful that some sense of normalcy is on the horizon. Guided by some lessons learned during the pandemic, some new realities that we’re experiencing, and a firm recommitment to God’s Word and God’s ways, I want to share with you what the elders and church council have been discussing as some next steps for our congregation as we emerge out of the pandemic.

Lessons Learned

One of the most important lessons that we’ve learned is that all of our plans are subject to God’s plans and His timing. We have felt our frailty and our humanity through these days. Another lesson we’ve learned is that we ***need each other***. Of course, we’ve known that biblical principle for a while, but all of our quarantining has made us all the more aware of the importance of presence and togetherness. One church member described Zoom to me with this analogy: “It’s like putting the yule log on your tv...it looks like the real thing but there’s no warmth there.” We need the warmth – we need the assembly of the saints! Finally, there’s the lesson of flexibility that we’ve learned. In spite of the challenges and uncharted waters, we’ve navigated them well by staying flexible.

New Realities

COVID-19 has taught us some valuable lessons, but it has also brought about some new realities. The first reality we’ve seen as church leaders is that although our church is doing better than most, the temptation to be away from in-person gatherings has taken its toll on overall “attendance.” Even if we include digital attendance through Zoom metrics, we are averaging about 60-70 less in attendance than pre-pandemic participation. A good portion of that relates to non-member traffic decreasing. With no nursery, limited programs, and the general sense of uneasiness about being at gatherings, “fringe” participation has dropped off severely. When it comes to our members, the elders (along with the deacons and church council) have been making every effort to stay in touch and keep a pulse on how folks are doing. It seems like LBC members are generally doing well, but the reality is that the *habit* of gathering together (as Scripture commands) has been broken for many of our church members. I am not speaking of those who very faithfully participate via zoom. I mean those who have stopped connecting completely. We need to pray for one another and encourage one another to get *back* in the habit of assembling together as soon as feasibly possible. This relates to another reality – pastoring (shepherding) people is all the more crucial – because people (especially senior adults) are lonely, and we’ve seen report after report of teens and children experiencing severe depression from lack of social interaction and too much screen

time. When you couple that with a sense of disconnectedness, we know Satan would love nothing more than to devour those who are straying from the pack and weak.

Our Anchor

So what are we to do when the tempests blow and the waves are rough? We put down the anchor and tether ourselves to the unchanging Word of God. We recommit ourselves to biblical principles and our core values/DNA as a church. Without sharing every detail with you in this letter, I want you to know that that is exactly what our elders have been doing and have recently shared with the church council. We are (re)committing ourselves to several key scriptural principles. And as a result of those commitments, *in light of lessons we've learned and new realities*, we prayerfully want to bring two key recommendations to our church family. We intend for this letter to be a starting point for the conversation around these concepts. We'll also be holding a Town Hall Discussion about them on Friday, March 12 at 6:30pm (in person and via Zoom) and then we'll bring them to the church for discussion and a vote at our Family Gathering on Friday, March 19.

Two Key Recommendations

- 1) We recommend that the church commit to staying in one worship service and expand our Sanctuary's seating capacity to allow us room to grow in the short-term and to serve as a launching pad for a return to church planting as our long-term growth strategy.

In light of the lessons we've learned about our need for each other, we feel like the church needs to be *the church* – in ONE ASSEMBLY. Even when we did two services, we did that because we had to – NOT because we wanted to. The reality is, many of you would say by way of experience that you didn't know people in the other service – we were basically two churches that met in the same building. Being in one service during the pandemic, and also the new reality of less people attending (when we first regather) means we *finally can*, and our elders would also argue, we *should* be one assembly. Initially, this will present no challenge for space in the sanctuary, but we do feel like we should expand the seating in the Sanctuary to allow us to *stay* in one service as we grow back to pre-pandemic levels and beyond.

By moving the sound booth upstairs into the attic and by shrinking the stage back, we are confident we can get 75 more seats in the Sanctuary. Moving the sound booth would also provide an opportunity for us to upgrade that system – which was on our future project list anyway. Additionally, after discussing options with the council, it seems prudent to go ahead and re-carpet the sanctuary since moving the sound board and adapting the stage would leave gaps. They also recommended that we ask the church their thoughts about some possible aesthetic updates. The front wall could perhaps have a more modern-looking stacked stone appearance, and I know there are some folks who would like to see an aesthetic upgrade to the main bathrooms. While the aesthetic items are not essential to being in one service, we want to leave the decision whether or not to do them up to the larger church family. Regardless, **the main theme** is that we want to be

together as **one service** – for unity, strength and truly for a display of the gospel: what it means to be the body of Christ.

Recommendation for March 19: For the church to authorize the AMT to work with church staff to develop a prioritized list of projects, with cost estimates supported by solicited quotes, and a plan for paying for the projects. These plans will then be presented to the church for a decision at the June Family Gathering. In addition, the AMT would be authorized to create a designated fund to allow those able and interested to begin making contributions which will then be used toward the final project list in the order of priority the church approves in June.

2) We recommend that the church commit to moving towards a third full-time staff elder.

As far back as 2018 the church had developed a task force to look into the possibility of hiring a third staff pastor. Part of my interview process included conversations with the search committee about the potential need for another staff pastor. Coming to LBC and observing firsthand, I now see where the church would benefit greatly from going in that direction. By hiring a full-time staff elder to focus primarily on **students** (children and youth aged), we would not only be serving our future well (by giving students specialized and undivided attention), it would free up Pastor Allen and me to serve the church body in our shepherding roles even more effectively. We are on the outer edge of what is feasible for two staff elders to do, but we also recognize that based on our budget and size, we may not be quite ready for a full-time hire.

In all likelihood, we may need to go with a part time person who can serve as a director of Student Ministry (just youth) for 2022. But we also don't want to count out the possibility that the church may show its ability to increase the budget even more than we anticipate. Last year's budget giving was over \$820,000. If we meet our 2021 budget of \$765,000 this year, **and** simultaneously are able to raise somewhere *around* \$100,000 (more or less... depending on aesthetic concepts) to expand our seating, upgrade our sound system, recarpet the sanctuary, etc... it seems like it may not be unreasonable for us to increase the budget in such a way during 2022 that we *could* actually bring on a third full-time staff pastor in 2022. Once again, we don't have all the details ironed out – but the conversation has begun with the Elders, the AMT, and the Council, and now we want to seek your wisdom and input as we carefully consider what the future may hold for us as we come out of this pandemic.

Recommendation for March 19: For the church to authorize the AMT to investigate the feasibility of a third staff elder and bring us back a report by June's Family Gathering.

[Let's Think About it and Pray About it](#)

As I write this letter, I recognize there's a lot of details for us to think through and pray through. Let's commit to doing that together. The Church Council and Elders are all more than willing to share greater details with you individually of some of the discussions we've been having. But more than that, we want to carry this conversation into a town hall type setting on Friday, March 12 at 6:30pm (in person and via Zoom). Then, by March 19, we'll all have a better picture of what

we're looking at and be able to make some decisions *together*. We are excited that the Lord has seen fit to give us these opportunities to recommit and refocus and *regather*. I pray you'll commit these things to prayer and bring your thoughtful input to the table as we discuss them moving forward.

In Christ,
Jason L. Pamblanco
Senior Pastor, Leonardtown Baptist Church

ZOOM INFO for Town Hall – Friday, March 12 @ 6:30pm

<https://zoom.us/j/94531691840>

password: next

Phone: 301 715 8592

Meeting ID: 945 3169 1840