

Recommendation

The MIPC Staffing Task Force (“STF”) unanimously recommended to Session that Mercer Island Presbyterian Church pastoral staffing go forward with two Co-Pastors and one Associate Pastor. The STF further recommended that Paul Barrett be called to fill the current open Co-Pastor position at MIPC, and that the church dissolve the Associate Pastor position now held by him.

Session accepted our recommendation at its March 16 meeting and has called a congregational meeting for Sunday, April 17 at 11:45am for the purpose of voting on the recommendation to call Paul as co-pastor and to then dissolve the associate pastor position he currently holds.

In making these recommendations, the STF wants to thank all those who provided input, asked questions, and prayed for and with us during this process. While there may be some who would reach different conclusions, or the same conclusions through different analysis, we want to reassure everyone that we have done our best to faithfully consider all points of view. The following Frequently Asked Questions are intended to address key questions raised by members of the congregation and staff.

FAQs about the pastor staffing options

General Questions

1. What is the process for making this decision?

The STF presented its pastoral staffing recommendation at the March 16 Session meeting. Session accepted the recommendation and has called a congregational meeting for Sunday, April 17 at 11:45am for the purpose of voting on the recommendation to call Paul as co-pastor and to then dissolve the associate pastor position he currently holds.

The congregation ultimately decides whether or not to accept the recommendation and call Paul to this role.

2. Are we keeping the same three pastors?

Yes. Our recommendation assumes that we will reduce our pastoral staff from four to three, with our three current pastors remaining. MIPC has called our three current pastors to their positions and we received strong affirmation for each of them and the gifts they bring to our church. They each continue to feel called to MIPC.

3. Have you consulted with the Presbytery Committee on Ministry and if so, what is their perspective and role in this?

Yes, after Dale announced his retirement, COM appointed two representatives who have worked closely with Session, our pastors and staff, the Strategic Planning Committee and the STF on many issues relating to this time of transition. One of the representatives, Rev. Will Mason, has attended several STF meetings, met with Paul and Sheri to assist in their discernment, and answered questions we have had about church polity. Rev. Mason has shared his view that Paul and Sheri are ready to work together as the Co-Pastors of MIPC. If the MIPC congregation adopts this recommendation, we expect it to receive the full support of COM.

4. What criteria do you believe are most important in coming to a staffing model recommendation?

The key criteria we have focused on in helping us sort through the potential staffing options are:

- Pastoral sense of call to MIPC and to any particular leadership model
- The degree of trust and respect between the pastors
- The degree of trust and respect the pastors enjoy from the church community – congregation and staff
- The gifts, skills and passions of the pastors and how they complement each other
- Fit with the goals and priorities of the Strategic Plan
- Which model best meets the needs of MIPC
- Paul's readiness to serve in a senior leadership position at MIPC

5. We understand that co-pastors are supposed to be "equal in all respects," but what does that mean?

First, we need to clarify some terminology. Although we have traditionally referred to our pastors as "senior pastors" or "co-senior pastors" and "associate pastors," under the Book of Order there are only "pastors," "co-pastors," and "associate pastors." If our recommendation is approved by the congregation, Paul will be called as a "co-pastor," but to avoid confusion in this document, we will use the term "senior pastor" and "pastor" interchangeably.

The notion that co-pastors are "equals" means that we have decided both of the pastors are at a level of experience and capability to serve as senior leaders of the church. Sheri served as the single pastor at Redmond for many years before she accepted the call to her current position as co-pastor at MIPC, so this is no change for her, but for Paul this means a change in his status from associate pastor. It is a recognition that Paul has already assumed many important responsibilities and is more than ready for the additional leadership and responsibility that the co-pastor role entails. While this doesn't require us to disregard Paul and Sheri's different gifts and experiences, co-pastors hold a similar leadership status in the church, and must be compensated similarly in recognition of their equal status.

6. If Paul and Sheri are co-pastors and one of them leaves, what happens then? How will the decision we make now impact MIPC in the future?

When a church has co-pastors and one leaves, the church has the option of filling the vacant co-pastor position or dissolving it. This means that if MIPC elects to continue the co-pastor model, when either Paul or Sheri leave MIPC, the remaining pastor would stay and the church would have the option of either conducting an open search for a new co-pastor or calling an existing associate to that role. At all times, whether times of obvious transition such as the present time, or other times, our pastors are guided by their sense of God's call, and we need to trust that God will care for them and for the church.

The situation where a co-pastor leaves is the only occasion under Presbyterian polity when it is possible for an associate pastor to become a senior pastor in the same church. If we were to dissolve the co-pastor model now in favor of a single senior pastor model, when the single senior pastor leaves in the future, we would have to conduct an open search, as our associate pastors would not be eligible to be considered for the open senior pastor role. In thinking about these "what ifs", some see the co-pastor

model as providing the greatest flexibility and stability for the future, but others express concern that it may prevent the fresh look and fresh start that can reenergize congregations.

Our recommendation is that retaining the co-pastor model is the best for MIPC at this time, but in doing so, we do not intend to in anyway commit MIPC or future leaders to continuing this or reaching the same conclusion when future vacancies arise.

Questions reflecting concerns about Co-Pastor model

7. I'm concerned that trying to share leadership may mean no one really leads. What makes us think that the co-pastor model of shared leadership can work?

We agree that shared leadership can be challenging, but we believe that Paul and Sheri will succeed as co-leaders with the ongoing support of the MIPC church community. The data we have reviewed, along with our own experience, confirms that shared leadership can be successful and, where successful, produces a partnership that is stronger than the sum of the parts and serves as a powerful testimony to how God calls us to work together and in community. Based upon our investigation, the key factors to having a successful co-pastorate are: having a relationship of mutual trust and respect, open and honest communication, and providing clarity about the roles each co-pastor will play. We believe that Paul and Sheri have a strong foundation for building a successful co-pastorate, but we also know that they will need to work hard, with our support, to develop and sustain it.

8. If we move ahead with Paul and Sheri as co-pastors, how do they plan to divide responsibilities?

We have asked Paul and Sheri to begin thinking about how they would divide responsibilities as co-pastors, and they have had several meetings themselves, with COM representatives, and with the STF to begin discussing specific ideas about this. Although we have encouraged them to begin this process, we think it is important to use this time to take a fresh look at the way we have been doing things in light of all the changes that have occurred and the priorities established by our strategic plan. We haven't wanted to rush that important process, nor have we felt comfortable asking Paul and Sheri to finalize their thoughts until we knew whether the congregation supported the recommendation for this co-pastorship. We appreciate the importance of clarifying the specific roles and responsibilities of our co-pastors and are committed to working with them to ensure that we end up with a clear and workable plan, not only for them but for the rest of the MIPC staff as well.

9. How does the co-pastor model meet the needs of the congregation?

The original 2001-2002 Staffing Task Force that recommended MIPC adopt a co-pastor model did so in part because it believed that MIPC would benefit from having two pastors who could share the significant leadership responsibilities and offer different but complementary gifts and skills. That reasoning is especially compelling now, as there is significant and important work to be done over the next few years in order to meet the goals established in the Strategic Plan. The co-pastor model gives the congregation the benefit of two known and respected senior leaders who understand our congregation well, have worked successfully together during a time of significant transition, and who will offer different, but complementary, gifts of ministry and perspectives. It provides stability at a time

when we believe that is needed, and it also gives the co-pastors the ability to share responsibilities in a way that should free each to devote more time and energy to those areas such as preaching, worship, and lay leadership that the Strategic Plan identifies as priorities.

10. We love Paul and Sheri, but think it's important that we choose a model based on what will serve the church in the long-term, and not just based on the people we have currently serving. Ignoring the current personalities, is the co-pastor model better?

We have thought long and hard on this, and believe that the co-pastor model does best serve MIPC for the reasons discussed above. That said, in the end, we don't believe that it is either possible or wise to make a decision about what is best for MIPC without also taking into account the talents, passions, and skills of our current pastors, and the current opportunities, challenges, and needs of the church. We need to remember the importance of God's call in this process, and trust God as we do our part trying to ask the right questions. We have tried to honor and balance all of these considerations as we have come to this recommendation.

11. How will this affect Lindsay's role?

At this point, we don't envision a change in Lindsay's role as associate pastor, although we anticipate that she will take on additional responsibilities as she continues to grow in her ministry and when we return to our work on the long-term plan for other staff. Lindsay strongly supports the STF Co-Pastor recommendation.

12. Is the strategic plan complete? If not, how can the STF make a recommendation in line with the strategy until it is complete?

The strategic plan is complete and has been made public. Our recommendation takes into account the recommendations and priorities established by the plan.

13. What is the financial impact of having co-pastors and can we afford it?

If we call Paul as co-pastor, we will need to increase his compensation so that it matches Sheri's. On an annualized basis, Paul's overall compensation is currently \$13,000 less than Sheri's. That is the additional annualized cost of having co-pastors versus a single senior pastor and associate pastor. This year, because Paul would only serve as co-pastor for half the year, the impact to the budget would be half that or \$6500, which we believe MIPC can afford.

The question of whether we can afford co-pastors in the long run is more difficult, but we believe this added expense must be the first and top priority. By recommending that we continue with three pastors rather than four, the church has already achieved significant savings over our personnel costs of the last several years. While we appreciate the concerns of those who noted that MIPC struggled this year to get to a balanced budget, we believe that with this co-pastor decision behind us, the church should be able to support the relatively minor additional cost of having a second co-pastor. It is true that in the short term this will prevent hiring of additional administrative or other staff to support our

co-pastors unless additional funds are raised, and while we see the need for additional staff as important, we think the benefits of the co-pastor model justify making that a priority at this time.

Questions reflecting potential concerns specific to Paul/Sheri

14. Are Paul and Sheri both feeling called to serve as co-pastors?

Yes. They both feel a strong call to MIPC as well as a strong desire to work together in a shared leadership capacity, based on their working experiences over the last eight plus years, and more specifically during the past year.

15. Shouldn't we do this so we can keep Paul? I'm concerned that he will leave if we don't make him co-pastor.

It is indeed possible, if not likely, that if Paul remains an Associate Pastor at MIPC, he would be called as a Senior Pastor in another church in the relatively near term. However, we do not believe our decision should be driven by that or any other fear, as we trust that God will be faithful to MIPC regardless of what decision we make.

16. Regardless of the model we choose, how can three pastors do all that we are asking of them?

This is a very good question, though not directly related to what staffing model we might decide upon. We have placed an extraordinary burden not only on our pastors but on all of our staff, and the past year has been exhausting for many. After the staffing model question is determined, we need to take a hard look at pastoral responsibilities overall to reduce the workload including, as our strategic plan suggests, equipping and engaging lay leaders to take a more active role in ministry.

17. Paul is about to go on sabbatical. Sometimes these open new doors or ways of looking at things. Should we delay this decision until Paul comes back? He might change his mind about wanting to stay.

We have had many conversations with Paul over the past several months regarding his sense of call to MIPC, and we are very confident about Paul's desire to serve this congregation in the role of Co-Pastor.

18. Is there a date by which this decision must be made?

No, it is up to us, but we want the decision to be made as soon as possible to support moving MIPC through this time of transition into our future.