

**McKnight Crossings Church of Christ**  
**Interview Summary & Recommendations—For Elders**  
**April 3, 2022**

**Interviews Summary:**

1. How does the elders' common work support or hinder the church's mission? The MX elders' self-perception is described as increasingly attentive to the spiritual leadership needed within the congregation. Several factors (most recently, COVID and Jeff's sabbatical) have heightened the elders' focus on pastoral care, spiritual direction, and ministry oversight. Staff view is positive, appreciating the elders' encouragement and support in various ways.

The elders express a high degree of trust and appreciation for each other's giftedness and contribution toward the functioning of the group. Several individuals noted that the group exhibits a healthy ability to handle honest debate. Some concern was expressed, however, in decision making about the group's difficulty in reaching consensus and actively supporting its implementation.

2. How does the staff's work support or hinder the church's mission? The elders' response regarding staff was generally positive, although acknowledging some unintended consequences of organizational "drift"—namely siloing and decreased morale. Staff is seen as competent but sometimes distracted by the urgent or what is comfortable, rather than what's important. In some cases, overlapping staff responsibilities seems unnecessary and inefficient.

Most of the concerns expressed about staff are systems-oriented rather than personnel-related. If so, these could be mitigated through clearly defined job descriptions, consistent accountability and coaching. Collectively, the MX elders believe that oversight of the staff is best addressed by someone(s) other than Jeff.

3. What are the practices/activities currently in play that contribute the most to the mission? Multiple responses were given, with the majority clustered around Connect Groups (5) and the Food Pantry (3). Honorable mention was given to A.C.T.S., widows serving the church, Next Gen class, block parties, Family Retreat, worship, and teaching/preaching. Many of those identifying Connect Groups as a strength acknowledged that a majority of the congregation did not participate in them.

Strikingly, only a few named worship and teaching/preaching as having a significant impact on MX's ability to fulfill its mission. Worship and spiritual formation may have been taken for granted. The question also may have been construed in a way that suggested outreach or evangelism. However, if the mission is to be taken seriously, worship and adult formation should be central practices to be refined and sharpened.

A final observation is that, with the exception of the food pantry and A.C.T.S., the remaining outward-focused aspects of MX's work are intermittent or occasional and therefore unlikely to engage the community in any consistent, impactful way.

4. How do you know when the practices/activities are working? What do you measure? Unfortunately, this question was not asked consistently throughout all the interviews. Nevertheless, a few themes emerged. One identified measure involved numbers: *“Are an increasing number of people becoming engaged (or involved) in a small group? Increasingly, are people showing up?”* This is a useful frame for measuring discipleship, particularly when framed along a continuum or series of concentric circles—people moving from fringe, to congregation, to committed core. A second measure is just as important. Often, it's evaluated by questions like, *“Are people being formed? Do we see growth or movement in people's lives?”*
5. What might need to change in order to pursue the mission more effectively? Clearly the leading response centered around greater engagement of the community. This was expressed in a number of ways:
  - an emphasis and intentionality about sharing the gospel message (4)
  - educational initiatives or support groups addressing felt needs—i.e., support and recovery groups, community workshops (3)
  - programs targeting specific demographics—i.e., younger families, women, singles (2)
  - more community service (3)

A second response centered on organizational needs—clarification and realignment of staff functions; clarification of staff/elders working relationships; adjustments that would elicit greater coherence of and commitment to MX ministries; and the implementation of a thoughtful transition process for Jeff's retirement at some point in the future.

6. What sort of ministry staff will MX need for the next chapter of its mission? MX presently is engaged in a search for both a children's minister and a student minister. This question was asked within the context of other potential staffing changes with the following responses:
  - Energetic, people connecting
  - Driven by mission, focused on community service and outreach
  - Skilled at building a cohesive network of small groups
  - Person of color, reflecting MX's desire to better represent a diverse community

## Recommendations:

1. Attending to God's mission. The "welcoming others" aspect of MX's mission statement deserves sustained attention and investment. I recommend the following:
  - a. Identify a few ways in which the congregation as a whole can engage the community and its neighbors on a more consistent basis (not periodic or occasional).
  - b. In my opinion, an "organic" (versus "programmatic") approach is preferable because it is more consistent with the "as you are going" aspect of the Great Commission.
  - c. Be intentional about equipping members to live as missionaries where they are already doing life.
  - d. Champion a missional emphasis in the planning and implementation of all congregational activities and events, not a select few.
  - e. Discern whether this is an area that merits a staffing focus.
2. Gatherings of the MX community. God's people have observed the rhythm of gathering and scattering for millennium. While COVID has complicated matters in this generation, if the mission is central, worship and faith formation are central practices to hone. We gather for prayer, teaching, and worship, and we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to go into the world in love and service to others. Likewise, re-envisioning MX's smaller gatherings (i.e., the Connect Groups) as an essential part of MX's mission and strategy offers possibility, both in terms of spiritual formation and in reaching the community. <sup>1</sup>
3. Governance and roles. Leverage the advantages of working through elder "clusters." <sup>2</sup> Create a fourth cluster that provides staff oversight and functions as a liaison between the staff and elder group. Communication and coordination are crucial elements for effectively working toward shared goals. Staff oversight would focus on encouragement, accountability, and coaching. <sup>3</sup> Alternatively, schedule combined elder/staff meetings on a quarterly basis for the same purposes. Jeff provides leadership of weekly staff meetings and overall staff development. <sup>4</sup>
4. Congregational ministries. It's critical that church leadership maintain an alignment of mission, core values, and ministry practices. In an obsession with relevance, American churches are tempted to provide as wide an offering of ministries and programs as possible (consumerism). Busyness offers an appearance of life, but often fails to advance kingdom purposes. The MX church has a strong mission statement, *"Welcoming others into a growing relationship with Christ and His community through God's radical hospitality."* As you move forward, concentrate on what truly advances the mission. <sup>5</sup>
5. Administrative and ministerial staff. It might sound counterintuitive, but declining churches employ 56% more full-time equivalent employees than growing churches. <sup>6</sup> Growing churches typically "staff to strategy" and focus human resources where they're most needed. With that in mind, I recommend several staffing changes. However, these recommendations are systemic in nature in that a change in one area affects the whole.

- a. I recommend that Jeannie and Elizabeth’s responsibilities be consolidated, given the following adjustments:
    - Outsource payroll, which also offers risk management benefits
    - Utilize additional management features within Servant Keeper (MX’s database program) that allow for automation of contributions/payments into QuickBooks (through use of credit cards), scheduling, registration, and attendance/progress tracking
    - Address IT needs through church volunteer(s) or outsourcing
    - Tom assumes responsibility for managing his own work
    - The admin/finance elder cluster also would need to make adjustments
    - If these changes are adopted, who is best suited to manage the office?
  - b. Consolidating these positions, along with phasing out Dolores’ role, would allow for a part-time communications person to handle graphic design, copying editing, social media and/or the website.
  - c. In terms of ministry staff, changes in Jeff’s responsibilities are already underway. The intention is that these changes will lighten Jeff’s load, enabling him to concentrate on areas of strength. The MX elders acknowledge that Jeff is particularly gifted with the ministry of the Word, but they may need to clarify with Jeff how these shifts of responsibility will be handled.
  - d. As MX’s primary worship leader, Jeremy’s contribution to its mission is significant. Through the years, Jeremy also has served as a utility player, filling many roles. During COVID, he played a crucial role in helping to keep the congregation connected. However, this might be an inflection point for Jeremy’s ministry at MX. What are the factors that hinder Jeremy from being effective in his current role or previously in other roles? If nothing else, a clearly defined job description and greater accountability would be useful for Jeremy, Jeff, and the elders. Jeremy is about to be tasked as MX’s interim youth minister, but this is an opportune moment to “staff to strategy” and consider other roles that might better fit Jeremy’s strengths and church direction—perhaps as a connections minister (guest follow-up, new member integration, community outreach) or Connect Groups leader.
6. Final Thoughts. The MX church certainly has areas for improvement. However, reflecting on the Interview Exercise leaves me with the following convictions:
- a. The elders have immense good will, collegiality, and integrity. <sup>7</sup>
  - b. The staff are committed to their various ministries.
  - c. MX has a lot of resources—spiritual maturity, good-heartedness, and loyalty.
  - d. This is not a church bound by tradition; the chief need is to allow the mission to truly frame its work and life.
  - e. I am quite hopeful about what God can do in and through MX!

## Resources:

<sup>1</sup> The key to building a robust network of small groups is for someone(s) to focus on equipping and nurturing small group leaders. Growing churches develop functional structures and strategies to promote the ongoing development of their leadership core. Although it's a blast from the past, you can find helpful resources in my unpublished *Shepherding Notebook* [Mid-County Church, 1998].

<sup>2</sup> Grady King offers a helpful approach and rubric for reaching consensus within an elder group in the chapter entitled, "When Leaders Are Stuck: A Guide for Communal Discernment," (pp. 131-142) of his book, *Navigating the Storm* [Hope Network Ministries, 2017].

Michael Bungay Stanier's, *Do More Great Work*, provides a variety of exercises that I've found helpful for team collaboration and direction-setting [Workman Publishing, 2010, ISBN: 978-0-7611-5644-4].

<sup>3</sup> The Ministry Action Plan (MAP) is a useful tool for these purposes.

Michael Bungay Stanier's book, *The Coaching Habit*, is an easy read (difficult to master) that I've found quite useful in coaching staff members [*The Coaching Habit: Say Less, Ask More & Change the Way You Lead Forever*, Box of Crayons Press, 2016. ISBN: 978-0-9784407-4-9].

<sup>4</sup> Our staff benefited from reading Brené Brown's book *Dare to Lead*. Processing the book together enabled us work through some team dysfunction and better understand one another [Random House, 2018. ISBN: 978-0-3995-9252-2].

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Root blames consumeristic influences within secularism for the decline of the American church and argues for the need, in Jesus' words "to lose our life, in order that we might find it" [*Churches and the Crisis of Decline*. Baker Academic, 2022. ISBN: 978-1-5409-6533-2].

<sup>6</sup> According to the latest data published in "The Unstuck Church Report," Q1, 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Those who find themselves in the crucible of ministry (ministers and elders) would be greatly encouraged and empowered by Ruth Haley Barton's, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, InterVarsity Press, 2008 [ISBN: 978-0-8308-3513-3].

I also highly recommend her book, *Pursuing God's Will Together*, InterVarsity Press, 2012, [ISBN: 978-0-8308-3566-9]. Barton offers a practical approach to spiritual leadership (as opposed to secular models) that focuses on the responsibility of helping the community of faith be more attentive to God, to oneself, and each other.