

Town Hall with Pastor Brian
06.03.26 Meeting Minutes

*Please note: these are transcribed meeting minutes. If you have any clarifying questions, Pastor Brian is available to answer. Thank you! Questions are marked in red, followed by Brian's responses.

Ken:

I want to welcome you to this evening for an opportunity for us to get together, both in the room and online, to thank you for joining us.

Kevin prays over the evening.

Ken:

So the purpose for tonight is to have some question and answer time with Brian. It's an opportunity for us to get to know him and you get to learn a little bit more about the process.

Ken explains how the question and answer process will work for the evening.

Ken:

I want you to notice that Clark is not in the room tonight, and he's not online either, but he is 100% in agreement with this decision to have Brian become the next Lead Pastor. He's been part of the entire process from the beginning, and he is 100% on board. He's choosing not to be part of these question and answer meetings because he doesn't want to be a distraction. Also, I want to mention that Jenna is in the room as well. She is also supporting at 100... probably 110%.

Elder Question & Answer:

And tonight, before we start, I want to address a question that I've heard that needs to be answered by elders. And that question is, why didn't we do an outside search?

**The audio cut out for this question, you will see Ken circled back to this question and answered again below.*

Question:

Can you share your faith story and share how God has called you to being a Pastor?

Brian's Response:

Yes, sir. So I grew up in Simsbury, so not too far from here. I grew up going to Valley Community Baptist Church, which planted Valley Brook 25 plus years ago at this point. I grew up in a Christian family, grew up learning scriptures, I grew up learning about what was in the Bible. I was very dedicated, and I professed my faith when I was in middle school. I attended many of the programs and the retreats. And after that, after I had grown up and grown older, I started to ask some very serious adult questions about faith. I started to ask the questions that you would hope that people would ask when they started to take their faith seriously. And I was met, not with answers. I was actually met with, a wall, and I was told that my questions were not helpful. If I asked those questions, I was told it was because I didn't have enough faith, or I didn't pray enough... read enough, and so... with those answers that actually led me out of the church and it led me away from faith as I decided to seek answers on my own terms. During that period of time, I walked away from my faith, during that time that I started to seek other truths in other ways. When I reached college, though, I ended up started asking these same

questions again and I started meeting other people who asked the same questions. I began to start to meet people who had asked these questions that had gone further beyond them.

They had been walking through with me and answering some questions, and I really ended up wrestling with the truth of the Bible. So I actually took some time, as I learned a little bit more about myself during the time, because I love research, I love, you know, reading, I love information. I just started diving deep into: "Is the Bible really what it claims to be, you know? Is Jesus really who He said that He was? Is this really something that had happened? Is this really something that transpired? Is God who God says that he is? And through my time of asking these questions, I came to a realization that God is exactly who He says that He is, and that Jesus is exactly who the Bible says that He is, and Jesus claims to be, that He is God. So I came to recognition one day when I realized that I kind of pulled all the pieces together, had my own doubting Thomas moment where I looked up to God and prayed and said, " My Lord and my God, you are exactly who you are." And I had committed to following Him for the rest of my life.

From that time, I began to return back into church and return back into ministry realms. I didn't really know what I wanted to do for school. A friend invited me to take a gen-ed course that happened to be a ministry course that just happened to fulfill a course that I needed to take. In the course, it was leadership theories and development, it was on budgeting, it was on hiring, you know, getting volunteers, and learning about church mission, and I realized that this is...

this is really interesting stuff. I said, there's something in this. And I started learning more, so I started taking more classes. And after that, I began to have some serious conversations with my pastors, and I started serving in Young Life and in different ministries, and I felt really called to this. I felt an internal call to serve within ministry for my full-time occupation. And after time of praying, many of these pastors and teachers believed that I had a call to go into ministry as well.

From there I continued, and I changed my degree to Christian ministries. I studied to be a youth pastor. I then got hired at my home church to work with students. From there, after a few years of working in that ministry with students, I began to get a call from the elders that they had desired for me to continue in my theological education, so they wanted me to go back to seminary to get a master's degree. And in that time, I also began to wrestle with the need for people within the church who knew more about pastoral care and counseling. That was just what led me to also study counseling as well at the same time.

So, leaving that job and going into those studies, and serving in church ministry over time, I came back here to Connecticut after my studies and I started getting involved in ministry again. I began to get a calling not just working with students specifically, but working with adults and to working with ministry at a higher leadership level. And Pastor Clark, who was just my pastor at the time and now my boss at the time felt he had recognized that in me as well. And so in that, when the discipleship director position opened up, he felt that I would be a good fit for that. We took some time to pray for that position, and that is how I stepped into pastoral ministry, and that's how I got here.

Question:

What's your vision for a healthy, growing congregation? And what areas are you most passionate about?

Brian's Response:

So I think a vision for a healthy congregation is a church that is united around shared beliefs.

A church that's united around shared practice. So maybe practices of the faith and different activities that we do together, that we teach our kids, that we reveal to other people, that we share with them, practices that unite us and bond us and grow us over time. They need a shared vision of where they're going, a very clear vision of knowing, this is what we believe, this is what we do, and knowing where we are hoping to go with this. So a church that knows that very, very clearly.

And then lastly, I'd say a church that really shares ownership in getting to that mission and getting to that destination. A church that says that we are all together in this and for this. I'd say that is a good sign of a healthy, growing church.

Question:

What is your approach to discipleship?

Brian's Response:

My approach to discipleship spans across different ages and stages of life. So I am a big believer in the 'go and do likewise' model of discipleship, which is what Jesus taught his disciples, that he walked with them for years, taught them, helped them walk through difficulties of life. As he was teaching them, answering their questions, allowing them to practice at different times, calling them to come back after practicing, and talking about it, helped them to grow and then eventually led them to go and make more disciples of their own, the same way that He had taught them.

And so when he said, go and likewise- they're leaving and going and creating more disciples. And so that's the model that I believe is best for discipleship. While I believe information can be helpful, I don't believe that you can just learn information on your own and be discipled. I believe that being discipled is something we do together. This is why something we talk about frequently on the stage is that following Jesus connects us, there's no one single believer on earth.

Across the different ages and stages of life, I'd say I believe also in an intergenerational or multi-generational model of discipleship, meaning there are people of all ages to meet together. Leading each other, guiding each other, walking with each other, just in stages of life. You see this with Paul and Timothy. Timothy was leading other people as well. You see disciples across all different ages. Peter was at a different life stage than many of the other disciples that he was at and that he was with.

But you learn from people. So one of the examples that I'd like to do for this is when it comes to kids.

Because people want to know: how do I make sure my kids practice the same faith that I do? Show them.

Do your faith. Practice it openly for them to see. Not so they can get bored, but practice it so they see it. So that way, when they see God call you, and they see how you respond to that call, they will know what to do when God calls them.

You guys see this with your own kids. Your kids imitate you in more ways than just one. I've seen it. Your kids are very much like you.

And this is a beautiful way that I view discipleship sometimes. We are all imitating each other, as Paul was telling us, to imitate him as he imitates Christ.

So that's my understanding.

Okay.

Question:

What qualities do you have that will benefit leading an organization? And how are you committed to continuing to learn and to grow?

Brian's Response:

I'd say I have a wonderful mentor, Pastor Tim Ponzani, who was the Executive Pastor of VCBC. He used to be the Regional President of Converge, now is the COO of Converge National. And one of the things that I learned specifically through him, and is very helpful as a leader, is that you don't have all the answers. You're not the one that makes all the decisions, nor are you the smartest person in the room, nor should you want to be.

And so what does that say about what is a leader, what the leader's role is? Is that the leader's role is to surround themselves with very different people who are at different walks and stages of life. And do it as a community. Do it as a group and create a well-rounded team, not just a well-rounded leader.

So that's one of the things that I've been able to understand and recognize at this time. This is one of the things that Clark has taught me very well in his time and his leadership. And then he hired me onto the staff knowing my counseling background because he believed that was an area for our team to grow.

I feel that with my other ministry experience [at my previous churches], leading children and families, I believe it helps me be able to understand what it looks like in communication to families of different age groups. I've been able to work with the elders at that church and here as well, and stay able to hear and see what is important to the congregation.

Lastly, Clark has provided me the means of being able to learn and hone my skills as an effective communicator, which I think is a huge piece of what it means to be a leader of an organization, to be able to cast an effective vision, be able to communicate really well with my team, the church, and the congregation.

Question:

Hey Ken, real quick, so it did look like the audio cut out right at the point when you had asked why we didn't pursue an outside candidate. Could, do you mind reiterating that one more time?

Ken's Response:

As I mentioned at the annual meeting, we began praying for a succession plan. Once Clark first shared this retirement plan with us. When we began to consider a candidate. We looked internally first. We have been watching Brian grow over the last few years and observed his leadership. His preaching, and his level of caring that he shows everyone. Through the ordination process, a group of nine Converge pastors examined and approved his theology of the Word. Our prayers are continually guiding us and the independent study by NLMoore also confirmed that Brian is a good fit.

Early on in the process, we talked to a pastor that shared some information with us. So I wanted to share that. But one of the things that he said, as we were talking with him, he said, if you're not happy with what's going on inside the church, if there's things in the leadership, maybe the congregation is declining, some things are going on. If you need to make a change because things are not going well, then go and look outside and hire from outside.

Because what he said is that person, whoever that is, even though it's during the interviewing process, he says nothing is going to change, he's not going to bring in a lot of change.

A new person is going to change and it's going to affect things.

But then he also said, if you're happy with what's going on in the congregation that you're in now. If you like the position that the church is at, if the church is growing, if you're seeing new faces and you're giving us whatever it needs to be and you're, you know, all things are going well. And what he said is that the reason to hire from within is because the person knows the culture. The person is already part of the DNA.

A survey done by NL Moore showed that Valley Brook was in a position of growth, excitement, a lot of things are happening and you know, one of the people that was affecting all of that was Brian. You've helped bring along that growth. And we have felt that probably was the right choice from the beginning and we didn't need to look elsewhere. And I believe that God just orchestrated all of it.

Question:

I want to just say, at the end of our congregational meeting, I did speak to the elders, but I want this to end on the record. I was so happy that when you announced that Clark was retiring, that you had a plan. Because I think there would be nothing worse would have been to leave that meeting without knowing what was going on. The other thing, you pretty much answered this for me, but did you ever think you would be a pastor?

Brian's Response:

You know, when you serve in ministry people often times say, "hey - you should keep doing this." And so - It did cross my mind. Absolutely. Especially when I went back to seminary. When I went back to seminary, I knew I was eventually going to be a pastor at some point. Whether it was going to be a senior pastor for church, that was something I did not know.

All I knew at that time was I wanted to serve whatever way God desired for me to serve. This is His church. And wherever He felt would be best for me to serve, I would be honored to and ready to serve in that place. And so, the thought has definitely entered my mind at that time.

There are some prayers that say, God, if it's your will, Let it be done and give me the skills that I need to in order to get there. Teach me what I need to learn in order to be able to do that. If not, teach me what I need to do, what I'm doing right here, right now, as best as I can.

Question:

What are your spiritual gifts?

Brian's Response:

We have a spiritual gift inventory that we take here in the church, which is great, so I get to look at these very frequently as well. But number one, one of the gifts that I have is I have the gift of evangelism. Being that I am able to communicate the truth of the gospel very well to people who have never heard it before. And so that is something that I've always known that I have the ability to do. Being able to explain that with clarity to people who do not understand that. And so I think that's a very wonderful gift to be able to have. I do have the gift of leadership as well which I'm so honored to be able to have.

Also, another one, mercy [that comes from my time as a therapist], in my counseling them, I have the ability be able to understand where people are, to be able to sit with them, feel where they're feeling, and be able to see them and have compassion.

Question:

What would you say is an area that you want to continue to grow?

Brian's Response:

Okay, I'd say one of the skills that I hope to continue to grow in is executive leadership skills. I find that the executive side of pastoral leadership is something that's always interested me and is so vitally important to the growth of the church and the health of the church. It's something that I've always started to want to learn more about, and so I hope in that, actually working out with my mentorship process with Pastor Timothy, that is exactly what we are focusing on, is focusing and learning more about those executive skills within the church. Managing staff and questions about the budget, and budget meetings and elder meetings, things like that. I'm very interested in that. It's very helpful, and he has given me quite a few books to read.

Question:

What do you believe preaching should accomplish in the life of a church?

Brian's Response:

Preaching, I believe, first and foremost, is to remind the congregation and the staff of the vision and mission of the church. I believe that the primary means of preaching is reminding that it is the reminding the church and foundation of the mission of the kingdom to keep seeking the kingdom first above all things. And to be able to go through Jesus's word and teach about the Bible and help people see the truths of the Bible to be able to apply it.

Spiritual maturity is not equated with Bible knowledge necessarily, but it is equated with Bible application. So my hope is to be able to teach people to apply the wisdom and lessons that are in the scriptures. To know them, absolutely. But knowing without the doing, I feel like does not help serve me. And so I always am hoping that I can teach people to know these scriptures, to be able to understand them and be able to apply what they know. That's my goal.

Question:

Is Brian currently doing pastoral calls to people within our congregation, and or will he be taking on that responsibility if he is not currently doing it?

Brian's Response:

Yeah. So I do share in some of that responsibility with Pastor Clark. That is something that he has encouraged me to do with him. As our church is growing, the demand for more pastoral care has gone up, and so with that he has encouraged me to help with pastoral calls and visits. And then we're working through moving into funerals and weddings and other things like that.

Question:

And another question is, are there specific needs within the church or community that he feels particularly drawn to?

Brian's Response:

Um, one of the things that I love about our church is that our church offers an incredible church experience for families with young children. We are so mindful of kids coming in with their families and how to teach them to be able to then disciple their kids. We help the parents, not just to teach all on their own, that we do it together. And I find that that is an absolutely essential piece of the ministry. So I'm very passionate about being able to walk alongside families with children to be able to help them be on the side of their kids. And systems rather than applying lists and descriptions to their own life. So that is a huge piece.

Secondly, I'd say, you know, connecting with our community and being able to serve the needs of our community. One of the things that when I read Acts 2, and I read about the early church.

The early church knew how to care for people's needs better than anybody else did, and people from the community and people from their nation came to them because they were the ones that were able to do it most effectively. And doing that, people engaged with the heart of Christ because every single person in that church community cared and loved for people like the Good Samaritan. That was the ethic of their care. That was an amazing, amazing testament to the power of God. How much they can care for the community. So that is something I'm very passionate about doing, about seeing how we can continue with our effectiveness of being a church of Good Samaritans to the community. So that way they can then see that care. And do exactly what Jesus said would happen in the Sermon on the Mount. He said, they will see your good works and bring glory to the Father in heaven.

Question:

What does success in ministry look like to you?

Brian's Response:

Just a good question. It's a very good question. So that's a great question because I think success in the church is not just measured by just one metric. Just the amount of people in the church building is not the only area for success. I know of many pastors who have tons of people in their church, but they said that most are not actually Christians, and they would share this. And so, one of the things that I've learned through my partnership and learning with other pastors who do ministry in very many different realms is a successful church is a group of people that are living like Jesus, learning to be like Jesus, and then teaching others to do the same. And then if we have a church community of whatever size doing those things, God will bless that ministry. And I feel like that is successful.

So Jesus taught his 12 people how to do that, and see what the impact that those 12 people had on community, and how on their region. It's still impacting people, what those 12 people and beyond those disciples did. So my understanding of a healthy and flourishing church are people who are living practically the wisdom of the Scriptures, applying it to their life, and being able to know how to do that with other people.

Question:

How would you describe your leadership style? Especially in working with staff, elders, and volunteers.

Brian's Response:

My leadership style is more... I like to empower and raise up leaders to be able to enact their leadership the best that they can in the realms they are in. So I typically like to ask questions. I typically like to guide conversations and apply areas where people can utilize their leadership, test it, and try it, and then come back and say, okay, how can we grow from this? What went wrong? What went well? How can we learn from this to do that in the future? That way people are having hands on experience leading and teaching and doing what they need to do as disciples. So that way when they leave there, they can do it without me. And that's the hope, is that my leadership would then be able to help guide other people to fully be able to do it on their own.

There's a great saying, I love, I heard this, a bad leader, the team says they didn't help us at all. A good leader, they say, oh, he helped us a lot. A great leader, the team says, we did it ourselves. Because they learn how to do it, they can actually apply that. And that, I believe, is the leadership of Jesus. And I think in the Scriptures, He gave His disciples multiple different opportunities to go and lead and go and apply what He had taught them. He'd send them out two by two. When there were 5000 people, he said, you figured it out and let them figure that

out and test in that moment to be able to utilize what he's talking and really allow them to get through. So that's my understanding. I think this is where my encouragement side comes in as well. It's helping to encourage and grow those leaders. I'm a huge proponent of the constant learning and growing, so my hope is that we continue to be a group of learning leaders, as not people who think they have all the answers.

Question:

Having the gift of mercy, as a spiritual gift. How do you unburden yourselves from the struggles, the pain, the traumas that you will have on your shoulders, or see yourself having on your shoulders as a senior pastor? Talking with senior pastors I've known for years. I've asked that question many of them because I could not do it. So how do you deal with that?

Brian's Response:

So I want to answer that question in two ways. One, one of the things that I do that is the most effective for me, that has really helped me significantly is just marrying Jenna. Marrying Jenna helps me deal with a lot of stuff because she's just great. I could just, you know, come home and just, you know, smile on my face. She's a Disney princess, you know. It's just a wonderful environment to come home to. So that's just it's kind of hard to be stressed when you come home.

Secondly, I learned how to apply gratitude practice. And that is a daily practice that I do in the mornings, during my prayer time, when I get to just list off a whole bunch of different things that I'm just so grateful for. And I get to really just lean in onto that. That's deeply from the wisdom in Jesus' name. He said, why are you worrying about what's to come? Look at all the good stuff that has been given to you. And so interrupting that kind of rumination, the darkness that sometimes you can get from experiencing a lot of hurt and pain in people's life. I found that that has been exceptionally life giving to be able to help me build my back up every day.

But I think one other thing I'll try to keep this short because I'm a talker and I like to chat a lot. But there was a story when I was down in Charlotte. There was a client of mine who I wanted to meet, and they were in the hospital, and I couldn't meet them, because as a male clinician in a hospital on the trauma floor, it's very difficult to meet people, because you're a guy, and you could be the threat. Now, this person's story, I cannot share the details of the story, but the absolute worst human treatment I've ever, ever heard. Like, it just brings me to tears when I think about it. But one day they said that she could finally meet because she could finally speak, because she couldn't speak for weeks because of all the trauma that happened during the time.

When I walked into that room, the first thing she did when she could speak was she sang praises to God.

When I saw somebody at the absolute bottom, Praising God, saying, God has blessed me for so much I'm alive. I can sing, and I can worship Him. God has given me so much. I remember that when I struggled. Because when I start to get low, and I start to experience the darkness of life, I remember that there was so much beauty and so much to be grateful for in those moments. So that is a story that I remember very much when I get into those moments.

And so with that, my gratitude practice, my prayer time that I have, and with marrying the Disney princess. I think I'm pretty good.

Question:

I did want to ask Brian, can you give us a brief rundown of what your experience prior to that is with meeting staff and managing budgets?

Brian's Response:

Absolutely. So I've managed my own budget for my time when I was at VCBC. I helped work with my direct supervisor on the larger budget within student ministry. I also had my own student ministry budget. I worked with him on learning about the much larger budget that he used. He was a very helpful mentor to me during my time there, so I'm familiar with. Secondly, I manage our own budgets here. Today, we have for the last 3 years, I've been kind of managing that as well for the ministry. My mentor, as well, is an extremely gifted executive leader, and he's taught me quite a bit about how to be able to look at them, read them and see things. And so I've learned in that area as well. In managing staff being here now, Clark has allowed me to be able to start supervising members of staff. This was essential during his sabbatical leave, serving as a supervisor and check in with staff members for the summer. And so while that is a newer skill that I'm learning, it's one that I find that I absolutely love being able to do.

I love being able to raise up leaders and being able to ask how they're leading their teams, how I can best serve them and being able to be. So that they can be effective in what they can do. Things like that. I absolutely love that. So those are my experiences with those two areas. And so again, that's areas that I'm so interested in learning more about.

Question:

Next up, my question is, what excites you about this opportunity?

Brian's Response:

I'd say so much. I'd say, first and foremost, that I get to be a part of the church's lives in a great way that I've never been able to see. This is a beautiful church, and the people in it. God has blessed us with so many people. I love this church so, so much. I feel like at this position, as this position is the position of further service, you get to serve that many more people. And being able to serve people in all of the experience that I've had up until this point has been nothing but a blessing. It's been difficult, but it's been absolutely a blessing. And so to be able to continue in that, to be able to lead and serve like Jesus did, and hope to continue to serve in larger and greater ways. It is so exciting to me to be able to do that, to be able to meet people, hear their stories, and listen to what God is doing in their life. It's so exciting. That God has given so many people His Holy Spirit, and I get to engage with God in His Holy Spirit through other people, and see the ways that He's uniquely gifted each and every single one of them, in a way that every single person I meet in this church, I'm learning something new about the Creator. And I'm never going to stop working without this. So I'm so excited to be able to continue. Also, the playground's pretty nice too. I want to be able to hang out there a couple times.

Question:

How do you approach conflict and disagreement within the church?
Those among the members or volunteers.

Brian's Response:

So I am a big proponent of going to the individual first, being honest about the grievance you believe or sin that you believe that has taken place. Then if it doesn't go well, moving up the chain of multiple people and bringing it to the elders and to the church itself.

Another thing, you know, is that one of the habits that we have here with our leaders and volunteers is to "support publicly and discuss privately", which is very much based off the wisdom of Matthew 18 and a few other scriptures as well. And so that's already something we've established as a staff is how we handle conflict. But also in that, another one of our habits is to "Assume positive intent and to give grace", which is, again, very much steeped in

the wisdom of the scripture of treating people the way that you want to be treated and also acknowledging that this is the image bearer of the king. And that God is doing something good for them as well. The same multiple habits that we have already established here as a church. We have a framework of how to approach conflict, and my hope is to continue in that, because I have seen and have been led by those in my own life, and have allowed those scriptures to be able to really take. And so I really just appreciate our team for putting those together, because I have been led so much by those, and so I hope to continue to be in that lane.

Question:

If we were sitting here together five years from now looking back. What would make you smile most about what we, as a congregation, have accomplished together?

Brian's Response:

So one of the... I'd say the first and foremost thing that comes to mind, I know that there's a hope to develop a strategic planning process for a couple of years down the road and say, first and foremost, I would hope that the strategic planning process that we work together on initiative and creating, I hope to be able to reach all the goals that we have in our setting and say, that's the first and foremost. You know, hope that I have is that the goals and missions that we set out to do that we accomplish, that we increase our effectiveness as a church in whatever areas those are. Very excited for that.

Number two, this is something really awesome I've been learning about and talking with staff about. Within church, there's an understanding of who we are, and then outside the organizational church, there's an understanding of what they think we are.

My hope is that these ideas of the two are the same.

My hope is that the community understands exactly who we are and is exactly who we believe we are. So I hope that in the next five years that the community will completely understand exactly who we are just as well as we do.

Question:

How do you anticipate balancing your time demands as a senior pastor 24/7 in your your home life, your family life?

Brian's Response:

So I'm a big proponent of, I know there's work-life balance that people talk about. I'm a big proponent and believer in work-life integration. I don't believe that work and life should be seen as two opposing opposites that are at odds, where one wins and one doesn't. Both are a part of life. But there's so many other different areas of your life that are as well just as important to be able to integrate into that. Family, rest, learning.

You know, it's just so many different other kind of aspects within that, prayer time, Sabbath. And so my hope was to be able to grow in my ability to be able to work out a schedule and plan ahead to be able to make sure that. And so in those times when I'm working, that is exactly what I need to be doing. And when I'm not working, it's not just that I'm not working, but it's that I'm integrating another value and important aspect of life, and that's what I'm doing. So I'm not wasting any time in that. Instead, I know exactly what I'm doing if I'm working with families, with children, if I'm running, if I'm learning, if I'm resting, if, you know... And so that's my hope is to learn better how to integrate all those different areas together, so that way I can be more effective in my work. The hope is that those times of being able to fully be able to focus on all those different areas enriches each and every other single one of them.

I believe that's a healthy part of leadership is being able to do those things. And so because if I rest well, you'll know when I'm working. If I'm having a good healthy focus on my family, that should be able to inform many other different areas.

So I believe, first and foremost, your relationship with God is the first thing that needs to be focused on, and that is what everything comes out of. Right after that is your relationship status, whether you're single or you're married, and that is something... it's the next one that flows out of that. And so, from those two areas, everything else comes in. I hope those to be my foundation and then be able to take what I've grown and learned and rested from those into my work, into my parenting, into my friendships.

Question:

How do you see the church engaging in local community?

Brian's Response:

I'd say first and foremost it's important for us to ask good questions of the community to ask what needs they have. We have to be engaged with people to see where the needs really are. I think that is a huge thing that needs to happen. I think proximity is also required, being able to reach people. Jesus was very close to people who needed him, and he's out and about. He was in their homes. And so that's something that needs to happen. So we need to be able to feel comfortable and get close to the community to be able to be able to show up in Jesus Christ into their midst. So I'd say learning, being open to seeing how best we can serve the needs of the community, whether that be certain populations in the community or the needs of those who are struggling or supporting certain things that we believe would help the benefit of growing the community here. Each piece of that expansion.

Question:

Clark founded Valley Brook, or started at Valley Brook, and has been in the past for 25 years. So this transition is a pretty significant emotional event. How do you see this transition going from your perspective? If you were to be voted in, how do you see him transition into the pastoral role?

Brian's Response:

So Clark had informed me that if I am to get voted in as a new pastor, that there would be a slow transition of some of the responsibilities within the ministry, and he would slowly begin to move things off. I would take on more responsibility during that time. So he has a plan and a desire for that time.

So going forward from that, you know, I hope to be able to ensure a smooth transition for the congregation. And for the staff, as well, as my leadership is different than Clark's, it's going to take some time to be able to find new rhythms in all those different areas.

As well as on Sunday mornings, you know, preaching and communicating while he's already graciously offering me the ability to be able to communicate as much as I have been. I feel like that's one of the great areas of his leadership, because he's been able to already establish a team of people to communicate. I think that we need to walk at a very human pace to be able to move forward. Because there's gonna be people that are used to the way he does things, and his pastoral care, you know, how to communicate, and some of the style when he goes for things. And so, I think walking together in that, and learning together, would be the best way to ensure translation into the next season.

Question:

Valley Brook seems to be attracting so many families with young children. What do you think is driving them to Valley Brook specifically? And what excites you the most about that growth?

Brian's Response:

Specifically, there's a couple of different things that I believe is attracting young people. Number one, I've noticed the change in the demographic of the area. There is some turnaround in the area to families with younger children that are coming in and building more apartments nearby, and so younger families are coming to the area looking for housing. School systems are doing a really good job of bolstering their work, and so people are coming for the school system, and so I've seen the trend there as well.

Secondly, Clark and the elders have done a great job of creating a multi-generational team, and when you have a multi-generational team, you attract a multi-generational church. And so that's something that we've also been seeing slowly unfold over the last few years, is people starting to meet similar generations, like the staff members and leadership within the church are.

As we've also been seeing more people on our worship team who are at a younger demographic. And so people are connecting more with people at similar age groups. That's there as well. And also, I have to say, it's just and this is something we all know very much. I'd say through the success and the just wonderful leadership of our students and children's ministries that we've seen an explosion of growth in both of those areas due to the leadership that we have in those positions. And so because of that, I hope that we are going to continue to grow in.

So I think all of those together are definitely adding to that shift that we're seeing.

Question:

How do you discern when change is needed in a church?

What opportunities do you see for churches over the next decade?

And on the flip side, what challenges do you think congregations will face in the coming years?

So I'll repeat just the first part, which is, how do you discern when change is needed in a church?

Brian's Response:

Typically, what I've learned about when change needed, tension arises. It's not a problem. The tensions are typically when multiple people start just bringing to light, God is bringing up something to them in their time of prayer, or if you're seeing the effectiveness of some of the things that we're doing is plateauing or started to go down. And so in those times when we notice them.

Typically, how we would handle those change moments is through prayer, through asking questions, through trusting in God and not making any hasty decisions. But kind of going back and asking the question before anything needs to change, why are we doing this in the first place? What's the purpose of this? Has that purpose been met? And if not, then how can we increase our effectiveness to be able to do that going forward?

So I'd say that that needs to happen in any and all areas, that way you can evaluate and innovate these things. It takes time and prayer with the leadership of whatever team that change is happening within.

Question:

But what opportunities do you see with churches over the next decade? And on the flip side of that, what challenges do you think congregations will face in the coming years?

Brian's Response:

So culture is ever changing, and with cultures ever changing the needs of the community changes with that. How it affects the community is very different. We're seeing different trends right now. Number one, we're seeing double income houses. Those parents have to work together in order to supply the needs for their families. We're seeing a difficulty with housing and difficulty with caring for children, but yet we still see kids, and we also, as a church, believe that having children is so vastly important to the health and wellness of the community. So being able to ask questions around that, I don't know the answer to how we'll be able to address that, but that is a need that we are seeing going forward. How do we support parents where both are having to work with their same family, and how do you help a person when they are the only person providing? And so, looking at that dynamic and saying, how can we as a church support the needs of our community and the demographic of our area? I'd say in the future, I hope that we come to an answer of that, and I hope that we as other situations arise, we again, ask those same questions. What are the things that we're seeing? Where are we seeing the trend move? And how can we as a church be best servants of people in those areas?

Question:

As you prepare to step into this role, maybe it's a year out now, but have you reflected on the weight and privilege of being a pastor?

Brian's Response:

One of the things that I've learned about this in my time talking with mentors, talking to Pastor Clark, my friends and family, my wife as well. Typically when people are in an organization and they get a promotion, you're moving up the ladder. But this position you're taking an incredible drop down because you're taking position of the servant. You are taking the position of a humble servant. And so, in a position of this, it is not looking at this as, hey, I'm just getting promoted, I'm moving up the ladder. Instead, I am taking a very humble position of a servant as an example of what it means to lead like Christ does.

And so the weight of responsibility and as that image of being able to shepherd the community. Absolutely, this is an incredible weight, but it is an absolutely incredible honor. That I have the opportunity and the possibility of being able to step into such a role. It excites me because I get to learn what it means to be more like Christ. I'm really excited for the challenge. To say, okay, let's learn a little bit more about what it means to live like Christ does here, to serve as he did.

Ken:

I just want to see if you have any other closing thoughts before we end.

Brian's Response:

Yeah, well, I just want to thank you guys so very much for your for your time, for your questions. I know that they probably have some more questions later on, and you might think of them and say, Oh, I should have asked that. You know we're here, you know, if you want to chat with me, I'm very happy to answer.

I'm in a position where I'm at right now, where I'm being considered for such a position. That in itself is the great honor. To be able to be to have been considered as someone who could do this. And so I just want to thank everybody that's here in the room and online, Pastor Clark and the elders for considering for this position that is itself. It's such a blessing to me. So thank you.

Ken closes the evening with prayer.