

## **Q&A about the transition to MC3**

### **General**

**Q. Explain the rationale to rename and re-envision Mount Carmel Christian Church, which has faithfully served the Lord for more than 113 years.**

A. Our decision to rename and re-envision is the end product of prayer and discussion that has been ongoing for several years and with different elder boards through the years. Simply put, the church has been in decline with regards to membership since moving to this location in 1989. The split in 1998—when the vast majority of young families left the church—exacerbated the problems and we have experienced a steady decline in membership, transfers, baptisms and offerings. Currently, we have between 200 and 250 members in our Sunday worship service. While our per-person giving is strong, the low number of members puts the church at serious financial risk. We cannot continue to absorb revenue losses each year and continue to operate as if nothing has changed. Plus, we spend the majority of our revenues on maintaining our building and property versus supporting ministry. Most troubling for our senior pastor and the elders is the fact that we are not winning new people to Christ. Baptisms are a rarity at Mount Carmel, which is a major indicator of an unhealthy church. Through the years, leadership has attempted different strategies to grow the church, but they have been for the most part Band-Aid approaches that have yielded few results. Art and the elder board strongly believe the time has come for a complete reset. We are making these changes with a goal to bring Mount Carmel into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and once again make us an effective ministry in the Lord's Kingdom.

**Q. Why make these changes now? Couldn't we have waited until the property sells and we move to a new location?**

A. We could have easily done that. Indeed, we considered it as one of our options and it would have been the easiest course to pursue. However, the Lord led us to move forward now, a decision we trust will allow this church to lead people to Christ and bring glory to God. Rather than wait until the property sells, we wanted to start now being the church we believe God wants us to be. We concluded there was no time to wait in pursuing this vision. In addition, restarting and rebranding now will give us an opportunity to practice being who we hope to be in a familiar setting prior to the sale of the property.

### **Q. Why did you choose the name MC3?**

A. We wanted a modern, contemporary name, and this proved easier than expected, primarily because of multiple sources that pointed to MC3. When we were searching for a new minister prior to hiring Art Stansberry, one of the candidates suggested MC3 would be a great name to bring Mount Carmel into the 21<sup>st</sup> century; he saw it as a play on the name Mount Carmel Christian Church—Mount and three Cs. His suggestion stuck with Art through the years. More recently, our new video ministry—of their own volition—co-opted the name MC3 Visual Studios for their work. For Art and the elders, however, the primary driving force was linkage to our mission of creating Fully Devoted followers of Christ, which we will strive to do through the three Cs:

**Celebrate**—Attend weekly worship.

**Connect**—Pray and read scripture daily; join a C-group (Connect Group, our version of life groups).

**Commit**—Give your money and serve each week.

Finally, we see a connection to the Holy Trinity—God, His Son and the Holy Spirit. In summary, we believe the name points to both our rich legacy and a promising future.

### **Why do we need a new name for the church?**

A. For too many years, we have clung to the past glories of Mount Carmel, to the point that we have made this church irrelevant in many ways to the Great Commission. Art and the Elders view these changes as a new beginning for Mount Carmel, a fresh start, and we felt it was imperative to separate our past from our future. While we understand and share the great attachment to Mount Carmel, we strongly feel the time has come to leave the past behind and make our church relevant in the world in which we live today.

### **Q. With all this focus on young people and those who don't know Christ, is there still a place for me— someone who is older and has been a faithful long-time member of Mount Carmel?**

A. Absolutely. Whether you're older, younger or somewhere in between, change is difficult for most people. We hope and pray every member of this body of believers will remain once we transition to MC3. You are loved and respected for what you contribute to the church—you are our backbone and we need your contributions more than ever as we attempt to make Christ and church relevant for new generations that are increasingly indifferent to religion in general and Christianity in particular. We need your continued

tithing to ensure the church maintains adequate resources to operate. We need your service to ensure there are loving people available to meet the demands of our congregation. We need your prayers to seek and follow the Lord's will. And we need your support and unity for a vision that is geared toward the One who needs Christ. Adhering to Luke 15—where Jesus talked about the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son—we want to be a church more focused on capturing the one who is lost than pleasing the 99 who are saved. Embracing this bold vision gives all of us as believers an opportunity to build God's Kingdom.

**Q. Why are you going to ask members—some of us who are lifetime or longtime members—to recommit to membership in the new church?**

A. Simply put, it boils down to starting over and embracing the future versus living in the past. Church membership per se is not defined in the Bible. It is a manmade way of coming together with mutual commitment as a body of believers. We view this as an opportunity to “clean up” our church records and prepare us to be the church we want to be in the future, including a vote on new bylaws that will be presented to the congregation in November. For most who choose to remain members of MC3, this will be as simple as filling out a recommitment card. We hope to celebrate Recommitment Sunday in May to give our existing members this opportunity.

**Q. Do I have to recommit – is that a requirement for membership in the new church?**

A. While you certainly do not have to recommit, it will be a requirement for membership in the new church. Again, this is part of our effort to clean up our membership rolls and move our church into the future.

**Q. Are we still a Christian church and part of the Restoration Movement?**

A. Yes, we will remain an independent Christian church and part of the unity movement to restore the New Testament Church. The “Restoration Movement” began when believers distressed with creeds, legalism, and denominations, called the Church back to the authority of the Bible. The Movement grew into what we call the Christian Churches. We do not call ourselves a denomination, because we believe that we are not “the only Christians,” but that we are “Christians only.” Mount Carmel is an evangelical church and we look solely to the scriptures as our true source of

authority. As an evangelical church, we can also be correctly termed as a “Bible-believing” Church.

**Q. Will church leadership stay the same once we transition to MC3?**

A. Yes. At this point, we anticipate no staff changes or other leadership changes during the transition period. Elders will continue to serve their previously elected terms. In November, the church will elect new leaders as warranted by the bylaws. We also will ask the congregation to approve new bylaws to govern MC3 that will be developed by a committee appointed by the elders.

**Morning Worship Service**

**Q. Why are we moving our morning worship service to the fellowship hall when we have a beautiful sanctuary that will be unused?**

A. The answer is really threefold. First, we believe the emptiness of our sanctuary on Sunday mornings sends a signal to visitors that we are a failing church. Imagine all that empty space through the eyes of a stranger. Second, we believe bringing our congregation closer together (physically) for worship will enhance worship for everyone, helping us to better connect as a church family devoted to Christ and serving His Kingdom. Finally, and practically speaking, it will help us reduce utility costs not having to heat and cool the large sanctuary.

**Q. Why are we moving to a modern or contemporary worship service?**

A. First and foremost, we must never forget that the object of our worship is God. And God alone. That must always be our number one priority. Beyond that, we want to create a worship service that transcends—beyond just songs and lights—and connects spiritually and emotionally with all who attend our services, whether they are believers or not. Furthermore, our worship service going forward will be geared to help us achieve our vision, which is to focus on the ONE who needs Christ in our community and world. Our worship service will be refined to promote unity in the body, Scripture, theology and participation from all churchgoers. It will never be undertaken to entertain anyone but to worship God.

**Q. Will there be a loud band or a different music format altogether?**

A. We have no intentions of staging rock concerts on Sunday morning. However, the music will change from its present format. You can expect less gospel influence and more contemporary songs. If a hymn is deemed appropriate for the worship we are seeking, we will sing a hymn. We also will emphasize songs and music that all attendees should find easy to sing.

**Q. Will we be allowed to worship in our way without being made to feel guilty for not standing or singing?**

A. Absolutely. We hope that is the case today, as many in our congregation opt to sit during both singing and prayer time. If you feel differently, please share your feelings with an elder so we can understand your concerns.

**Q. Will Leslie Riley continue as our worship leader?**

A. Yes.

**Bible School**

**Q. Why are you planning to eliminate Bible school once we move to a new location?**

A. Practically speaking, we anticipate a lack of space to accommodate multiple classes for adults when we move to a new location, especially a temporary location as the case may be once our existing property sells. However, the primary reason for this decision is our belief that life groups create a more dynamic environment for authentic community and spiritual growth. In addition, based on previous experience here and in other churches, it can be very difficult for both Bible school classes and life groups to thrive in tandem. Bible school creates competition for life groups and can make it more difficult for them to thrive. Finally, we want to make life groups a budget priority. For example, if we had adequate financial resources, we would move to reimburse families for childcare while they attend a life group.

**Q. Why do you believe life groups are better than Bible school?**

A. Certainly, this is debatable. However, we believe life groups connect more effectively with today's cultural needs. There are always exceptions, but in general Bible school classes have a teacher who teaches and students who listen. Life groups rely more on two-way communication, directly involving all participants. For the most part, Bible schools seem to be about information (classes learn about the Bible), whereas life groups tend to be about application and transformation (life groups discuss the Bible.) Focusing on conversation and dialog bolsters recreational connection (which keeps people coming back) and increases personal spiritual interaction. In addition, they allow us to take our learning opportunities into our communities rather than keeping it behind church doors.

**Q. Why are you discontinuing the longstanding practice by our Bible school classes to collect offerings and support missions near and dear to their hearts?**

A. This decision is based on the scriptural admonition to “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse ....” While this new policy represents a significant change in longtime practices at Mount Carmel, the elders believe it is crucial for two primary reasons:

1. To help the church better understand its financial resources, including tithes and offerings, and allocate them accordingly. For example, Mount Carmel – through Faith Promise, Bible school classes and the annual golf tournament – has contributed roughly 15 to 20 percent of its total annual revenue to missions over the past few years. When compared with just weekly offerings collected by the church and Bible school classes, missions giving consumes about 20 percent of the total. We must ensure the main body of our church is financially healthy, and unifying the entirety of our resources is the first step to ensuring we can do that.
2. To provide more effective oversight of financial resources. While there has been no inappropriate conduct or violations of church protocol, the fact remains that multiple bank accounts have been established over the years under the umbrella of the church's Articles of Incorporation. Each of these accounts have varying and distinct “authorized signatories” for them and function without general oversight and certainly without the level of confidentiality that we are proud of for the official church financials.

**Q. What is the basis for these changes to our Bible school classes? Did you hear from God or are you just following what society is doing?**

A. First and foremost, we have tried very hard to listen and to follow where God is leading. We are praying earnestly and have not entered lightly into any decision about the future of this church. We have strong Bible school classes and members within them who know and love each other. That's why we felt it was important to retain them as long as we remain in our current location. We understand losing these classes will be a disappointment for many. That said, our Bible school enrollment—like our church attendance—has suffered a steady decline over the years. Every decision we have made has been predicated on making our church culturally relevant for the world we live in today—and not the past. Our inability to change with the times is one of the reasons Mount Carmel has struggled for so long. If MC3 becomes a truly healthy church, we have no doubt that one day in the future, life groups themselves will become obsolete and replaced by a new methods that can more effectively help build Fully Devoted followers of Christ.

## **Missions**

**Q. Why are we changing the way we fund missions?**

A. Mount Carmel has funded missions differently through the years. We have used our current method, Faith Promise, where the congregation is asked to pledge a certain amount specifically to missions each year—as well as designated a portion of our general offerings to missions. We have even had Homecoming offerings designated solely to missions. Today, the elders feel called once again to tie missions giving to our overall giving. On April 1, 2018, we will begin allocating a minimum of 10 percent of total offerings to support missions funding. As was the case with our decision to cease the practice of allowing Bible school classes to collect separate offerings and support missions, this decision regarding funding for missions is also based on the scriptural admonition to “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse ....”

**Q. Who will ensure that missions are being funded – what will be the new checks and balances?**

A. At this point, we plan to maintain a Missions Committee as one of the ministries of MC3. This committee has responsibility for reviewing and determining which missions the church will support as well as the percentage each supported mission will receive from our overall missions giving—subject to elder approval. The committee also has responsibility for communicating to the congregation about the church’s mission support. The elders recently directed the Missions Committee to develop a new philosophy that emphasizes Christ-centered and Great Commission efforts over general philanthropy and welfare, as well as community/state and international efforts. Obviously, this will affect some of the missions currently supported by Mount Carmel. With the funding method changing in 2019, we have asked the Missions Committee to take a “clean slate” approach when deciding which missions we support.

**Bylaws and Governance**

**Q. Why do you want to change the bylaws of the church?**

A. While we are retaining our Articles of Incorporation, we feel as if we are essentially starting a new church with MC3. As such, we need bylaws that will support the new structure and ensure proper checks and balances. As you know, we have amended the bylaws several times over the years. We would anticipate the new bylaws to be very similar to the current bylaws. To help with this process, we will appoint a committee from the elders, deacons and the congregation to review the current bylaws and draft new ones. Jon Peters, a lifetime member and current trustee of Mount Carmel, as well as a respected lawyer and judge, will lead this effort for the elders.

**Q. How will any changes to the bylaws be approved?**

A. Once the committee drafts the new bylaws, they will have to first be approved by the elders. We hope to have this completed by September. Current Mount Carmel members—who recommit to membership in MC3—will vote on the new bylaws during our November congregational meeting.



## **Post-sale of property**

### **Q. What is the status of our efforts to sell the property at 6015 Old Stone Mountain Road?**

A. Several prospective buyers have looked at the property and expressed interest, but presently, we have no offers. We did have a full-price offer at the end of last year, but the prospective buyer decided zoning laws would hamper their plans and ultimately let the offer lapse. We continue to pray that God will send the right tenant to occupy the property.

### **Q. Once the existing property sells, where do we plan to relocate?**

A. We plan to remain in this general area. We have instructed our realtor to focus in Gwinnett County on the corridor between U.S. 78 and U.S. 29, between Killian Hill to the north and the Gwinnett-DeKalb County border to the south.

### **Q. What will happen to the proceeds from the sale of the church whenever that occurs?**

A. The elders have had preliminary discussions regarding this and have approved a general framework. However, plans have not been finalized and likely will not be so until the building sells. Our first obligation will be to pay off the mortgage currently held on the building as well as fulfill any other financial obligations the church may have at the time. In addition, we have looked at funding missions and ensuring the new church has adequate resources to grow.

### **Q. Does anyone in leadership get a financial benefit from the sale?**

A. Absolutely not.

**Q. What if this new name and new vision for the church fail to produce the results we want?**

A. Art and the elders have been praying and seeking the Lord's will in this matter for years. This is probably the most difficult decision ever made by any elder board or pastor of Mount Carmel. We know it will cause concerns for many, given the long history of the church. Nevertheless, we are putting our faith in the Lord and have complete confidence that he will produce the results He wants for our efforts. Should those results fall short of our expectations, we would have to re-evaluate and determine what would be the appropriate course of action at that time. All that said, we're focused on putting forth and implementing the best way forward for the future, while letting the Lord take care of the results.

**Q. How long will you give this new effort a chance to work?**

A. Until the Lord shows us a different way.

**Q. Are you getting outside counsel for all of the above?**

A. We are relying closely on the advice and counsel of Jon Peters, a lifetime member of Mount Carmel and a respected lawyer and judge in DeKalb County.