

Thank you for the opportunity to partner with you and speak into the Lead Pastor search process at Christ Community Church (CCC). My time with you has been meaningful and inspiring—you have blessed me.

CCC's leadership community seems unified, determined, growing toward health, and prepared to engage the future. The Lord has also entrusted you with a great gift in the wise and effective leadership of Interim Pastor, Gregg Caruso over this season of transition. Clearly, God continues to be at work through the life and leadership of CCC in significant ways.

Over the past several weeks, I've sought to understand the uniqueness of CCC and the pivotal points in your story— Matt's too. I've invested time listening, reviewing, reflecting and praying with you in seeking to determine if Matt Thornton is a strong Lead Pastor candidate for CCC. Respectfully, I offer you my thoughts below.

### **I. Five Key Questions (Asked by CCC's Leadership Community)**

#### **1. Does Matt have enough experience to lead CCC into the future?**

The question of experience is one many churches ask when hiring a lead pastor. It's often assumed someone with previous experience will be less likely to make mistakes along the path of future leadership. Sometimes this is true, but not always. Previous experience doesn't always translate into future success. Every season is unique, every community, every congregation—and what works in one place might not work in another.

Perhaps a better way to gauge whether someone has the potential to be effective is to look at capacity and fit. In my experience, *a good fit is the #1 factor that leads to long-term effectiveness*. In Matt's case, experience will come with time, his gifts will grow, and his leadership capacity will increase. I believe the evidence of Matt's continuing growth at CCC points to the potential of durable leadership.

#### **2. Will the congregation assume that presenting Matt as a Lead Pastor candidate has simply been a foregone conclusion?**

No matter who leadership presents to the congregation, people will have strong opinions. It is clear to me that presenting Matt as a Lead Pastor candidate was not foregone conclusion. *CCC's leadership has labored under the weight of this decision and been deliberate in seeking outside counsel and perspective*. It is my opinion that you have been well-grounded, patient and comprehensive in seeking to assess Matt. *Should you decide to move forward in presenting Matt, I would encourage you to do so in confidence—he is a worthy candidate*.

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**3. Will presenting Matt as a candidate be perceived as the “easy” choice or has leadership done its due diligence?**

As mentioned above, a decision to move forward with Matt has not been an easy choice. *You have prayerfully and carefully considered options over an extended period of time.* Due diligence has been realized through prayer, your personal experience with Matt’s leadership, and clear observations of his stability through a major church transition. You have also had the objective affirmation of experienced, impartial leaders speak into your process.

**4. What candidate or candidates might CCC miss if Matt is presented to the congregation exclusively?**

To some degree, this question is irrelevant. If you sense the Lord leading you to present Matt to the congregation, you have not missed anything. In the event you do not move forward with Matt, regardless of who you decide to place before the congregation, you will miss someone.

Perhaps it is helpful to think about it like choosing a spouse. Could there have been someone else? Who knows—but if you were to search the world, my guess is that you would STILL choose the one you chose—that’s what makes your choice so profound. You might even say something like, *“God led me to this person.”* Right. When you come to understand someone, believe in who they are, and choose to move forward together powerful things come to life in both of you.

**5. Has Matt been properly vetted and assessed both internally and externally? If so, what has been the feedback?**

As to properly vetting and assessing Matt, a resounding YES. In my conversations and meetings with well-informed leaders, I have not heard one mention of a “red flag” issue concerning Matt. Are there reservations, sure—but the reservations are not rooted in Matt’s competence, character or chemistry. The reservations I am aware of are based on the premise that Matt may not be able to grow into the role. I believe this is a false assumption and that the evidence of Matt’s life and ministry indicate he will thrive. *The mantle of Godly leadership has a peculiar way of summoning deep things within us we have not known before—it is a gift of grace.* I see this potential in Matt and others have affirmed it as well.

## **II. Reasons to present Matt as the Lead Pastor candidate**

- Strong personal character
- Clearly called by God to serve as a pastor
- Demonstrated effective leadership and stability through an unstable season
- Has won the respect of staff and support team
- Currently leads through relational authority rather than positional authority
- Deep love for Christ Community Church and awareness of its culture
- Clear understanding of local culture and community
- Strong commitment to build a diverse, multi-generational, multi-ethnic church
- Passionate to engage the unchurched and unconvinced
- Enthusiastic commitment to pursue a Gospel centered ministry
- Strong family
- Wendy!
- Demonstrated capacity to grow and learn in spite of challenges
- Willing to engage conflict and seek resolution
- Young families are at the heart most flourishing churches. Matt's style will probably attract younger families.
- "Team" oriented leader. Builds and releases teams to lead
- Professional marketplace experience
- Has the emotional intelligence to unify people and foster trust
- Humble enough to listen, strong enough to contend for his convictions
- Courage to risk and change
- Strong personal testimony of God's faithfulness
- Pursued outside mentoring through his own initiative
- Noticeable growth in preaching ability
- Tenacity & Resilience
- Tender heart for marginalized people
- Energized by serving as a pastor
- Speaking as an outsider, it seems Matt is well-qualified and would be a marvelous fit as CCC's Lead Pastor.

## **III. Reservations in presenting Matt as the Lead Pastor candidate**

- No previous experience in a Lead Pastor role
- Does CCC have the resources to provide an Executive or Associate Pastor to handle ongoing administrative/ministry development if Matt steps into lead role?
- Will Matt be able to generate "fresh energy" among the congregation as a home candidate?
- How will Matt do when he is the "lead-dog" without Gregg's presence to mentor him?
- Can Matt create sustainable momentum and lead toward a compelling vision for CCC's Future?
- Will "older saints" hang in there with Matt if changes are initiated?

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## **VI. Clarifying Questions for CCC's Leadership Discussion**

- Based on your understanding, is there solid evidence to indicate Matt has the potential to be a strong Lead Pastor at CCC?
- What are your fears in moving forward with Matt?
- Where are Matt's blind spots? Is he open to growth in these areas?
- What does "healthy success" look like for the Lead Pastor role at CCC?
- In what ways might Matt be provided with resources to help him lead well and thrive at CCC?
- What does a healthy church look like? Do you believe Matt has the capacity to lead the church toward health?
- What steps might CCC need to consider in moving toward a healthy future?
- What will be the impact on the CCC if Matt is not presented as a candidate and decides to pursue another opportunity?
- Are you willing to walk alongside of Matt and support him as the Lead Pastor of CCC?
- What do you like best about Matt?

## **V. Final Thoughts & Conclusion**

There are few decisions more daunting for a church board than calling a Lead Pastor. There are so many factors, challenges and differing expectations it can be paralyzing. The reason this decision process is so challenging is because church boards carry the weight of spiritual leadership for an entire congregation—and nobody wants to make a poor decision. So, how can a church board know they are making the right decision? Truth is, you can't. Only time will tell.

The goal should not be to make the right decision; it should be to make the best decision.

When it comes to hiring Lead Pastor candidates, it is unrealistic to expect you will have 100% agreement on the ideal candidate. Obviously, there is enormous complexity considering individual preferences related to teaching style, ministry gifting, vision, relational style, etc. Even within core essentials that have been agreed upon, there are endless variables. Assuming you are "prayed up", here is a good rule of thumb when seeking to make a complex group decision rooted in strength: If 80% of your team agree on 80% of what's positive, you're on solid ground—no one is right 100% of the time.

Finally, I encourage you to keep in mind that a decision to appoint a Lead Pastor is not simply professional (do they meet the criteria) or relational (do I like them)—it's intensely spiritual. You must ask: What is the Lord indicating to us? As you make a decision regarding Matt's candidacy, my prayer is that you would resonate with the words of Acts 15:28 "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us..."

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*Matt is a tremendous candidate and I would **strongly recommend** you present him to the congregation of Christ Community Church as the exclusive Lead Pastor candidate. Based on my assessment; I have every expectation he will be used greatly by God. He's a WINNER!*

**\*A Post Script Parable**

On September 23, 2001, with 5:30 remaining in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of the Jets vs. Patriots game, Jets linebacker Mo Lewis slammed into Patriots quarterback Drew Bledsoe along the right sideline at old Foxboro Stadium.

That moment changed the NFL forever.

Bledsoe was replaced by unknown backup, Tom Brady. A lightly regarded prospect coming out of college, Brady was selected by the New England Patriots with the 199<sup>th</sup> overall pick in the sixth round of the 2000 NFL Draft. (Arguably, the greatest deal in sports history.) Brady has since spent his entire 18-season career with the Patriots. His tenure with the Patriots, is an NFL record for the longest time playing quarterback for one franchise. Since Brady became the starting quarterback in 2001, the Patriots have never had a losing season and have won 14 Division Titles. The Patriots played in twelve AFC Championship Games from 2001 to 2017—including seven in a row from 2011 to 2017—and won eight of them. Brady has eight Super Bowl appearances, four Super Bowl MVP's, and five Super Bowl rings. All of these events are NFL records.

Perhaps Tom Brady is on your bench?