

News From Our Church Elders
June 12, 2022

Dear Saddleback Family,

We are writing with some news that we feel you need to be informed of as members of the Saddleback family, and something to be praying for.

The search for our next senior pastor involved a one-year long, four-phase process. Once the final candidate was identified, hundreds of hours of extensive interviews were conducted by our elders, our members, out-of-state researchers, and a third-party independent agency doing background checks. As an important part of due diligence, a third-party executive search agency was employed to do an extensive background check to uncover and investigate possible moral compromises, conflicts of interests, financial problems, lifestyle issues, or accusations of the candidate by existing or former staff of the candidate.

The Vanderbloemen Search Group, one of America's best known and highly respected Christian executive search firms, was hired to conduct the rigorous background check. At the conclusion of their investigation, which included wide-ranging interviews with Echo Church staff, board members and outside leaders, Vanderbloemen reported a clean slate and gave an enthusiastic green light for hiring the candidate. After elder approval, a public announcement was made to move forward with the calling of Andy Wood as pastor of our church.

However, once announced, a former Echo Church employee alluded to accusations against Pastor Wood's leadership using social media. During the interview process, Pastor Wood had taken the initiative to tell our elders about the accusations made by a former staff member against the manner in which he and others were leading the Echo Church staff. Pastor Wood offered videotapes of his meetings with the former staff member, including his attempt at seeking peace in the relationship. The Echo Church board, which included respected Christian leaders from out of state, also contested the validity of the accusations.

With a desire to bring the greatest light to any accusations as we look to a new season at Saddleback, this past week Saddleback elders immediately decided to take an even fuller look at this accusation. First, Saddleback re-engaged Vanderbloemen and asked them to do new interviews with all involved parties to see if there was any evidence or third-party corroboration by others of the accusation. At the same time, our elders launched a second series of interviews of our own.

Our elders have now received a preliminary second report from The Vanderbloemen Search Group, clearing Pastor Wood from all allegations. Vanderbloemen was provided an exhaustive report that was conducted by the board at Echo Church, which included video footage, email and text records, and interviews. They also interviewed more staff and board members of Echo. Finally, they tried to reach out to the former staff member and have yet to receive communication back. In this preliminary secondary report from Vanderbloemen, they stand behind their original assessment of Pastor Wood and believe he is clear of all allegations.

The report is not yet completed. As you can imagine, a process this thorough requires numbers of conversations. So instead of waiting until the end of the process to report to you, we felt it was important that you hear the facts on this from us now, rather than in the news or on social media. We'll let you know as soon as we hear on the final report.

In conclusion, we are asking for your prayers. Please stop a moment and pray right now. Pray for clarity of the truth and for wisdom. "Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ" (Ephesians 4:15, NIV). We encourage you to take to heart and to put into practice this truth from Proverbs 3, "Trust GOD from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for GOD's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track" (Proverbs 3:5-6, MSG).

Your Saddleback Elders