

parish ministry

DR. TODD SMEDLEY, Senior Pastor

After much prayer and planning your elders and I are eager to launch a transformative shepherding initiative that will impact almost every aspect of our Gospel-Shaped Community. This fall we will begin implementing a new Parish Ministry in our effort to ensure that “everyone is known, and everyone is cared for.”

Fourth’s elders have pondered the Apostle Peter’s exhortation in 1 Peter 5:2-3. Peter urges elders to “shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly, not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.” We are excited about this new structure which will help the elders shepherd and know you, and also, prayerfully, will allow you to know them.

The congregation here at Fourth is being grouped into five geographical regions called “Parishes.” Every member is automatically part of a parish based on where they live. There is no need to join or register for a parish. This model allocates the congregation into smaller local regions so care can be more easily offered and community more broadly experienced by everyone.

The spiritual care for each parish will be provided by the elders who live within that parish. All the elders of Fourth are included in this parish model, both those currently on Session and those “non-sitting” elders who have served previously. There are approximately 80 elders who will serve among the five parishes. We are not assigning each member one elder, but providing a team of elders to care for you and your families. Ultimately, the deacons will also provide diaconal support within the parish model.

Each of the five parishes will be administered by a “Parish Council” made up of elders and lay leaders. The Parish Councils will seek to build community within each parish by planning occasional parish events and providing opportunities to serve your local communities in the name of Christ. The Parish Council will also help assimilate members, whether new or old, into the heart of our fellowship. Finally, the Councils will provide another means for communication within the church.

EVERYONE
KNOWN.
EVERYONE
CARED FOR.

Parishes are in no way intended to replace our existing Community Group Ministry. In fact, we believe the parish system will enhance and expand our Community Groups by getting more people plugged into one. Because the Parish Ministry and the Community Group Ministry will have a good deal of intersection, I have asked Tommy Myrick to take the pastoral lead of this Parish Ministry.

This Parish Ministry is not designed to replace the pastoral care your pastors love to provide, but to supplement spiritual care to the extent to which you and your family are comfortable. It is designed to give the elders and the members a way to know and care for one another better. The primary focus for the first years of this initiative is “knowing”—you knowing the

elders and them knowing you, whether through parish lunches, the church picnic, or a parish activity.

On each Sunday in October, we will host a lunch in the Upper Room, with a different parish meeting each week. Be on the lookout for the weekend assigned to your parish and please make it a priority to come that week. At these lunches you will learn more about this new initiative, meet the elders, deacons, and Community Group leaders within your parish and also meet people who live near you. Early this fall, members will receive letters letting you know what parish you are in, who are your elders, and the date of the parish lunch.

Some of you may be asking, “What if I am not a member?” If you consider Fourth Church to be your church home, let me strongly encourage you to become a member of Fourth. And of course all who consider Fourth home are welcome to participate in the October parish lunches and in parish events throughout the year. In the early stages of developing this ministry the care by the elders will be focused on knowing and caring for members until we feel we can open it up to regular attenders. And again, all who live in a given parish are welcome to the events and service days hosted by that parish.

While I am enthusiastic about a lot of the things the Lord is doing in our midst, I am overflowing with excitement about this new effort. I truly believe it will transform our fellowship, enhance our care for each family, and broaden our reach into our local communities for the sake of the gospel. Again, please make the October lunch a priority for your family and pray for this effort as it gets off the ground. I am praying and expecting that it will soar!