

## **HOUSE Denver Thoughts & Concerns**

March 15, 2025

Dear HOUSE Denver Elders,

Our heart's intention for meeting with you all on January 26th was to seek clarity and share our concerns, while walking in the light with HOUSE Denver leaders as a church family. The four of us wanted to approach our conversation with you all with the utmost integrity, humility and gentleness. We understand and validate that the elder team is hurting and exhausted from church conflict. We empathize with you all in that this has been a burden in your lives and it has negatively affected our lives as well. We deeply care about our leaders and those in the church body.

We spent a lot of time asking the Lord for guidance and prayer to understand your hearts. We were hoping that the meeting would bring clarity about the reconciliation process, policies and procedures that are in place to navigate church conflict. Though we gained clarity on a few things, we are overall disappointed in how we were treated in the meeting. We expressed multiple times that we were not trying to sound accusatory or give punitive action- but to simply ask questions and gain understanding, something all the elders verbally encouraged us to do. We felt that some of your actions and responses were harmful. It has proved otherwise, that when sheep ask questions to seek clarity or bring their concerns to the table, they are seen as combative, emotional and accusatory.

Frankly, we were disappointed in how the meeting played out. We naively hoped the conversation would bring forth breakthrough and opportunity for healthy change, repentance and growth, but instead it brought more hurt and confusion.

From our understanding, the elders have full confidence in one another and believe that there is no moral failure or spiritual abuse happening from any individuals on the team. We want to challenge that conclusion and propose otherwise.

We are devastated to feel that our only option is to find a new church community, after our best efforts to discuss these issues with you all. The attached document goes into more depth and detail about our existing thoughts and concerns. We would greatly appreciate it if you read through it and pray about what we have written. We have exhausted our efforts to find understanding and clarity, but please know that this does not close any doors to additional conversations and we openly welcome it no matter how long time passes. We still deeply care for all of you and will continue to pray for the health and wellbeing of HOUSE Denver.

## HOUSE Denver Concerns & Areas of Growth

1. **Church Structure** - Biblical Accountability & Governance
2. **Church Environment** - Repentance, Wise Counsel, Training, Support & Inner Healing
3. **Church Finances** - Transparency, Proper Legal Structure of a Church & Healthy Financial Decisions

### Thoughts & Existing Concerns: Elder Meeting on January 26, 2025

We understand that “abuse” is a strong word and don’t want to use it lightly. We also understand people may have experienced abuse to different degrees in life and can agree that some abuse is more severe than others. Sexual or physical abuse is easier to define than emotional abuse, but that doesn’t negate the severity of emotional, psychological and spiritual abuse. With that being said, we want to give the definition we will be using for ‘spiritual abuse,’ since we know it can be ambiguous. Most of the tactics listed are from a book we encourage you all to read called, “Bully Pulpit” by Michael Kruger PHD, M. Div, MACC.

*Spiritual abuse is when a spiritual leader—such as a pastor, elder, or head of a Christian organization—wields his position of spiritual authority in such a way that he manipulates, domineers, bullies, and intimidates those under him as a means of maintaining his own power and control, even if he is convinced he is seeking biblical and kingdom-related goals. (Bully Pulpit, Dr. Michael Kruger PHD, M. Div, MACC)*

Please read these examples below and ask the Holy Spirit if any of these seem familiar within the leadership team of HOUSE Denver. **We are challenging you all to ask yourselves,** “Have I myself experienced this from other leaders? Have I myself used these tactics? Has information been withheld from me to make decisions that affect my role as an elder and overseer of the church? Have I neglected my role as an elder and blindly trusted and protected the leaders, instead of protecting, caring and nurturing the sheep?”

#### **Spiritual Abusers do the following:**

- DARVO—an acronym that stands for “Deny Attack, Reverse Victim & Offender”
- Build a coalition of defenders (and control the narrative)
- Insist that proper process wasn’t followed (change the focus to procedural rather than substantive issues)
- Claim to be the victim of gossip/slander
- Attack the character of the victims

- Tout their own character and accomplishments
- Play the sympathy card
- Masters at “flipping the script”
- Having an elder team made up of loyal friends and young people that have allegiance to the leader
- Have a unanimous agreement rule to create illusion of unity
- Flatter and love-bomb

### **Unhealthy & Harmful Tactics Observed During Elder Meeting:**

1. **DARVO (Deny Attack, Reverse Victim & Offender):** This is a technique a person uses to shift and avoid responsibility. In the beginning of our meeting, we asked the question, “Why do you feel there are multiple members bringing forth concerns? It appears that there could be a deeper issue that needs to be assessed and not merely a philosophical difference or difference in leadership style.”

**Responses:** We were disappointed that we did not get our question answered directly, but rather it seemed to be deflected to questioning individual cases and details when we had asked about a global pattern and response, and not seeking detailed specifics. This was the main point of our meeting. This singular question was the main reason we wanted to meet, as we noticed a general pattern of people leaving the church and wanted to understand what church leadership was seeing and the processes/policies in place for healthy change.

- a. **Deny-Flip The Script:** One of the tactics we noticed was flipping the script. The elders initially answered our question with a question and ultimately did not give us an answer as to the pattern of people leaving the church, only that it is something that leadership has noticed. There was a question asked in regards to the twenty people we mentioned and if they all had the same reasons for leaving. We reiterated that everyone who left, experienced various forms of abuse. Instead of listening to us and giving us insight into our church conflict, we felt that you all flipped the script and made us the offenders and yourselves as the victims. Like we stated in our email, we recognize this has negatively consumed your lives. We hope you all can also recognize that every feeling that the elders have felt, such as loss of friendships, grief and pain, has also been felt by those that have left, including us.
- b. We did not ask for or need details of each person’s circumstance necessarily, we understand the importance of confidentiality in order not to disparage, but it seemed to us that this was leveraged as a means to avoid the question.

**c. Deny-Insist that proper process wasn't followed (change the focus to procedural rather than substantive issues)**

- i.** Multiple elders shared their frustration that those who have left, have not followed the proper biblical process or they did not come with a spirit of true forgiveness for one another behind it. This tactic changes the focus from the issue to the procedure.
- ii.** Although we don't want to believe that this was intentional, a response like this is typically made to make the other person feel bad or cause guilt, which we all felt after the meeting. Elders stated they had never denied a meeting with anyone who wanted to meet and to this day will meet with anyone. This seems odd because the Wield's stated they were denied a meeting in August 2023 and were essentially told to just "move on." Kathy recommended by email to not meet with the Kim's due to mixed priorities. However, we have all read that email and the answers the Wield's provided to Kathy's questions were all valid and did not have mixed priorities in our opinion. Additionally, we know that the Randall's have surprisingly still not received a response to their letter (which we had brought to the meeting for all elders).
- iii. Follow Up Question:** Is there a different reason than the one that was given for the Wield's being denied a meeting with the Kim's?

**d. Attack-Accusations of Gossip**

- i.** Don also asked if the twenty people came to Brian or the elders with their hurts. We stated most had confronted Brian and leadership. The elders seemed quite displeased to hear we spoke to twenty people and accused us of spreading gossip. We did not gossip about nor slander others. We saw a pattern of many people leaving the church and reached out to them to hear their stories. After hearing numerous stories, which were not shared with us in any slanderous way, we came to understand these people of different ages, life stages, friend groups and backgrounds all had similar experiences.
- ii.** Brian also told us we didn't give him a clean slate by seeking out and hearing the stories of other people, although the Soult's intentionally met with him prior to any of these conversations and we did not allow these conversations to unjustly alter our personal view or impression of him or any House leaders; however, the elder meeting on January 26th did alter our views. He also labeled us as being "colorblind." The Soult's reached out to multiple leaders immediately after former elders stepped down and many others left. All four of us have spent time talking with

leaders at length over this last year. Calling us colorblind and accusing us of gossip is hurtful and not true of our character or this process.

- e. **Reverse Victim & Offender-Playing the Sympathy Card:** We experienced the damaging effects of DARVO and left the meeting feeling that we were suddenly the offenders and that we had poured salt on wounds, ultimately offending and hurting the elders. Several statements were made to evoke our sympathy.
  - i. We feel grieved recognizing that leadership continued to think with this mindset throughout our meeting. It seems that elders want the questions to stop, and that opposing conflict on this topic to cease because the blood of Jesus covers it, but it will likely lead to more questioning and further division - because there is no reconciliation between two parties happening when shepherds are not active in unifying the flock themselves.

**2. Flattery:** This is a tactic that the Bible is very clear on. Flattery and encouragement are both positive content, but the difference is the motive behind the words. (Romans 16:8, Proverbs 29:5, Proverbs 26:28, Psalm 12:2)

- a. Brian stated, “I actually tried to resign three times because I care about the unity of the church more than my job. If you think being the pastor of this church was rewarding in the natural sense, it wasn’t. These past four years in my ministry life have been the worst four years.” Brian then stated, “You four among some others were the faces that kept me going.”
- b. For the Meyer’s, this statement seemed oddly disproportionate to the level of relationship we have with Brian, as we didn’t seem to have a deep friendship outside of Sunday services or our few (3-4) meetings.
- c. We (the Soult’s) have an established and genuine friendship with the Kims and have truly enjoyed and valued their presence in our lives. Their support, love and wisdom has been a gift to us these past three years. We are confused because in the past, they have made statements like, “you are the face of the church” and “main leaders” and “future elders,” so it hurts when we try to bring concerns to the table and are seen as opposition. We truly thought they had a level of respect and admiration for us, as we do for them. We value our church and have faithfully served these last three years. We desired to continue to grow in leadership and maturity at HOUSE Denver and even considered asking to be on the elder team one day. But because we started asking questions and leaning in with curiosity as to why so many people were leaving, we have felt this friendship/pastoral relationship dissolve from the Kim’s side, instead of growing together through a challenging time.

### 3. Build a Coalition of Defenders

- a. **Unanimous Agreement Rule:** Something that spiritual abusers often have in place is a unanimous agreement rule in order to minimize opposing viewpoints. All elders defended Brian because the team in place has fostered an environment where different opinions are not celebrated, and is quite the opposite, where opposing viewpoints are discouraged. Challenge and confrontation isn't safe to do so with a rule like this.

**Questions we ask you to consider:** If a unanimous agreement cannot be reached, what are the next steps? We are concerned that this type of setup would cause more conflict, division and hurt. How does this foster courage to speak up in disagreement? Why was it the three elders that confronted and challenged Brian were ones that felt resigning was their best option? How is this a healthy family dynamic? Can people agree to disagree with certain philosophies without being pushed away from the family? Does this foster a safe environment for elders to voice disagreements without fear of being excluded? Does the culture of honor for leaders blind the team to see abuse being committed by the elders? Is the team of elders also a team of defenders of one another?

### 4. Lack of Empathy/Pastoral Care

- a. We are hurt that no one from leadership has followed up with us besides Savannah, who sent both couples a scripture and expressed that she's praying for us to have clear hearts and minds moving forward. It has now been over a month and others have not checked in, asked how we are doing or taken any initiative to answer our remaining questions from the document we presented. As long term members, leaders and friends at HOUSE Denver, this has been surprising to each of us.
- b. We brought up the Randall's letter to get clarity on why they did not receive a response. This is another example of serious lack of empathy/pastoral care which leaves the sheep feeling hurt. Their experience is not an isolated instance and is one of many. It makes us sad that all members of leadership gave the impression of not having received their letter via email or were under the impression they were not expected to respond. From what the Randall's have communicated, they never agreed to communicate through the LCT team.
- c. There have been many times elders have said statements like, "You can ask us anything." However, 80% of the questions we handed out in our meeting were

unanswered. The elder's willful ignorance and lack of curiosity is not exemplary of leading and living above reproach.

## 5. Manipulation & Control from the Pulpit

- a. We are concerned that from what we observed, leaders potentially use their personal experiences, emotions, thoughts and conflicts with the sheep to manipulate and drive a narrative in their sermons. There seems to be subliminal messages behind the words preached from the pulpit. We have listed one example below, but are aware of other sermons like this.
  - i. "OH PRECIOUS IS THE FLOW" -On February 2nd, Brian preached on reconciliation, just one week after our meeting with you all. The heart of the message was that Jesus' blood covers conflict, and does the work of reconciliation for us, therefore we are already free from guilt, shame, condemnation in these areas. Brian stated, *"It doesn't matter what you've done. So many of us want to hold even other people hostage to what they might have done to...you know whatever...didn't even do it to you, but you want to hold them hostage, but the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin."* He goes on to say, *"If He's made you righteous, who gets a vote to say otherwise in your life? Not even your sin today gets to say otherwise in your life and it's by the word of their testimony that they've overcome."* and then *"Have you applied his blood? If you are reconciled to the Father already, not by anything you've done, but through the shed blood of Jesus, what are we still arguing about? What are we still arguing about?!"* While we understand that of course it is true that the blood of Jesus' covers all sin and that we are justified by grace through faith and therefore redeemed and made righteous in Him, that does not excuse any of us of the necessary responsibility to love one another as God has loved us, and to carry out reconciliation among the body of Christ for the peace of the brethren. It felt that there were some subliminal & hidden messages throughout the sermon that would suggest that reconciliation of ongoing conflict between brothers and sisters in Christ is not something we need to worry about, nor take responsibility for -as if to say Jesus' blood and work on the cross does it for me, accusers who oppose my viewpoint have no voice, because I'm righteous. It is also concerning that Brian used the exact same scriptures that Mike Bickle used during his last sermon in October 2023 right before the accusations against him went public.

## Closing Thoughts

We understand that this church has had a lot of transition and unhealthy aspects from its beginning. That is a challenging start to Brian's pastoring career and we acknowledge that. We also want to remind you that the people who have experienced similar abusive behavior, are not exclusive to UPPERROOM Denver or HOUSE Denver members. This includes those who were in ACTS and IHOPKC under Brian's leadership. Most of the individuals we have talked to have attempted personal conversations and confrontations and followed the biblical process. Similar to us, they were not met with a receptive, loving or caring response.

The negative "fruit" of these behaviors and patterns are leaving sheep hopeless, fearful and traumatized. Some have expressed having to process years of trauma with professional counselors who have affirmed that what they experienced was spiritual abuse. It would be unwise and wrong to ask a victim of abuse to talk with an abuser, especially when they have seen others be slandered and rejected. There have been a handful of people who have asked us not to mention their names and we could sense fear in their voices. Many are afraid of Brian getting word that they "tattled" on him and would rather stay quiet than speak up. Again, this isn't an isolated incident or a mistake. Spiritual abuse and bullying that has been experienced for over a decade from many people is *sin, not merely human weakness*.

Would you please consider an unbiased third party investigation? We are asking you all to acknowledge that there are significant issues and to do this for the sake of our church body.

In his book, Kruger concludes with these sobering words: (which he backs up by listing the considerable research on the subject) "Anyone who thinks spiritual abuse is a minor problem has not reckoned with the documented devastation." We ask you again, please reconsider your conclusion. We care for each of you and the church and are praying for healing and clarity over everyone in this process.

-The Sault & Meyer Family