

October 18,2023

## **To the Redemption Church Family,**

### **Subject: Alhambra's Decision to Transition from Redemption Church**

With deep love and a heavy heart, we, the leadership and congregation of Alhambra, wish to formally convey our decision to transition out of Redemption Church into a new structure that is being built as a Fellowship of Churches in partnership with Surge, South Phoenix Church plant, and R/Flagstaff. While our emotions are multifaceted, we are greatly encouraged and thankful to explore what God has in store for us within a new connected-church model with Flagstaff and South Phoenix and will continue to pursue collaboration with other emerging R/AZ independent and network churches.

We understand the significance of this decision and believe it's important to provide a clear account of our journey and the factors influencing our choice. Given the diverse nature and varying viewpoints within R/AZ, it's challenging to have a single unified narrative across all ten congregations. Our goal here is to offer our perspective on how we arrived at this decision.

While there have been challenges and complexities within the structure of R/AZ that have had a role to play in our decision, there has also been much grace and prayers extended to us by other leaders involved. As we seek to be honest with our perspective, we invite and trust our community to enter this transition season with us with the same posture of grace and prayer.

### **Our Story:**

We planted 21 years ago as Life Connection Church and 10 years ago, we were overjoyed to be adopted into the R/AZ family. It was with a deep appreciation for the vision and leadership of Tyler Johnson and the other leaders in which we were drawn to the vision of being a church oriented around the pursuit of being a faithful witness in a changing world. R/AZ has been a family of churches in covenant that has pursued investment in leadership health, prayerful dependence on the Spirit, and aspiration to be a multi-ethnic expression of churches committed to the ministry of reconciliation. Our decision to join Redemption was primarily driven by our alignment with these values and the vision for a collective city church embodied initially broadly in Surge and then through a tighter covenant in R/AZ.

### **Structural Challenges:**

Over the years, R/AZ has faced challenges in its leadership structure. We began to notice a gap between "aspirational" vision and values contrasted against what we believed were "actual." This contrast was visible in what we wanted to achieve and what was happening in our collective local churches.

R/AZ's leadership model pushed most decisions to local congregations, which sometimes made it hard for leaders with a vision for the whole of R/AZ to initiate collective movement without creating tension for various local churches' ability to actualize values. We did not have a structure that held accountability across the ten congregations to our shared goals, and the authority was placed primarily, often only, with local elders. Over the last ten years, it led to misunderstandings and what we

believe were unfulfilled promises, especially for churches financially dependent on the collective vision and structure.

### **Key Reasons for Our Departure:**

While our initial experience within R/AZ was marked by alignment and affirmation, we have been through a series of challenges along with multiple leadership transitions that have now reached a juncture where we believe transitioning is the best course of action. Several factors have contributed to our decision over the course of ten years:

### **Tyler Johnson's Leadership Transition & Counsel from Leaders:**

We were brought into R/AZ and deeply aligned with Tyler Johnson's leadership and multi-ethnic vision, including Surge's city church approach. However, we have observed a shift in the understanding and acceptance of this vision within R/AZ, culminating with Tyler's repositioning in R/AZ, which raised questions for us about our place in R/AZ.

We actively sought guidance from internal and external leaders to gather insights from diverse perspectives to assist us in making prayerful and wise decisions. In that process, it became evident to the Elders and church leaders in our community that God was using Tyler's change and trusted leaders to discern and clarify our path. It is important to note that no one dictated our course of action; instead, they prayerfully listened, walked alongside us, aided in our discernment process, and provided wise counsel.

This decision weighed heavily on us, but we are grateful for the clarity God provided through His word, our communal discernment, and the confirmation we received collectively through the peace of the Holy Spirit.

### **Multi-ethnic church and Commitment to Under-resourced Communities:**

R/Alhambra's commitment to our calling to participate in multi-ethnic movements played a significant role in our decision. We were initially brought into R/AZ because of our dedication to diverse and under-resourced communities. We have encountered challenges related to diversity, leadership representation, and cultural competency within the organization. While our unique calling and experiences were initially valued, when decisions were required that we collectively take one particular path over another, it became a source of tension where our leadership became stuck struggling to resolve the difference.

We want to continue pursuing our mission of reconciliation without causing tension within the broader R/AZ community. While we believe all ten congregations aspire to be multi-ethnic, our experience requires us to take a particular approach that we did not feel we could push for without creating division. It became clear that when it came to covenanting with other congregations at such a close level, we need to align with those who share our approach, passion, and see this as a primary factor for making decisions.

In this next season, we will still collaborate broadly with all congregations, including our sister churches who determine different methods are necessary. R/AZ initiated a partnership we called 3:1 Partnership (3 financially supporting congregations for every 1 financially supported congregation functioning in reciprocal gospel relationships.)

This vision is moving into the broader unity space, Surge, and will be a place to continue to press into reconciliation and relational depth. We believe this is an excellent way for all of us to sustain meaningful discussions, collaborate around a shared vision, and ensure we stay relationally proximate even as we move out of the R/AZ structure.

### **Ecclesiology and Collective Vision:**

Our view of the church as a local, city-wide, and global family required an ecclesial structure that faced challenges as Redemption's system grew and needed more structure. R/AZ has had a long history of churches functioning with an independent ecclesiology now trying to form as a collective leaning most of the weight to making structural decisions that maintained as much independence for local congregations as possible. Our instinct for actions that would lead to greater alignment made the different desires around independence versus collective and interdependent structures more visible. Without a leadership structure that could resolve these differences, trust and relationship became strained. Without deep trust and a shared vision as a foundation, a way forward without compromising our need for a structure that would realize a collective ecclesiology became evident.

Dealing with differences in how we see church leadership and autonomy became more complicated. The differences around the ten congregations shared beliefs about this became more clear over the last year, and we think it's better for us to work together in a different way instead of trying to make everyone agree on how to move forward within one church structure.

Despite these differences, we're encouraged by efforts to change our relationships so that each congregation can follow its convictions about local and larger church connections. We're thankful that existing R/AZ churches want to maintain a relationship while releasing us to find a community that matches our beliefs and works toward a shared vision for local churches.

### **Inclusion & Celebration of Women in Ministry:**

Our theological journey has firmly led us to embrace the active leadership and ministry of godly, gifted women. While we were initially aligned with R/AZ's stated theological vision, we encountered resistance and limitations when attempting to expand the scope of local Complementarian boundaries beyond the existing scale. We aimed for a unified understanding of how to practically live out our commitment together. This endeavor led to confusion at best and, at worst, inflicted deep wounds upon the women in our communities due to the lack of consistent and principled guidance on this matter.

Our elders have been, and continue to be, in a season of grieving the impact on many women within our congregation and, by extension, on our entire body. We regret the confusion, the constraining of gifts that don't align with our context, and the failure to address the stories of pain that we have been privileged to hear. It became evident to us this summer that we cannot proceed slowly when it comes to the inclusion and celebration of women in our congregation.

Our shared aspiration is to embody our understanding of the family covenant with both mothers and fathers within our local context. However, as we respond to the Spirit's call to fulfill this vision wholeheartedly, we also recognize the importance of

not becoming an obstacle or causing offense to other R/AZ congregations with differing convictions. Our intention is to prevent further confusion regarding these boundaries, ensuring clarity for all.

### **The Transition Ahead:**

While multiple factors influenced our decision, none was the sole reason for our departure. We transition with a deep sense of responsibility to our congregation and the broader city church, aiming to maintain positive relationships with R/AZ and continue our Gospel partnership. We appreciate the friendships we've built and look forward to collaborating within the 3:1 partnership. Even if we had known ten years ago that this would be our eventual path, we would still have wholeheartedly embraced this community, as we firmly believe that God providentially guided us here. We have cherished the journey together, with all its ups and downs.

### **To our Alhambra Church family,**

We understand that this news may bring about a range of emotions and questions. You might experience feelings of hurt, excitement, rejection, or freedom, among many others. You may have questions about why this is happening, what we're not saying, what will happen to our pastors, or what changes will occur regarding women in ministry, the building, and more. We want you to know that we are here to sit with you in these emotions and endeavor to answer your questions, guiding you toward the One who ultimately can heal and provide answers.

We firmly believe that God is in control of this situation, and we offer the following pastoral encouragement:

1. Trust God and Pray.
2. Spend time together in fellowship and prayer, as we need each other more than ever. Reach out to Pastors, leaders, and your church family.
3. Embrace grace and forgiveness. Just as God forgives us, let's show the same kindness to others in and around our area.
4. Treat each other with respect and dignity. Disagreements shouldn't lead to disrespect or disqualifying others. We respect other churches and wish them well.
5. Pray for and work towards unity in our city church. We have plans for cooperation and healing through prayer, time, and relationships.
6. Avoid talking negatively or participating in gossip about others in our church community or in the wider city church.
7. Remember our church's mission. Focus on promoting fellowship and unity, sharing the gospel through our word and action, serving our community, and reaching out to those in need. Don't let restructuring divide us.

Please join us in committing to walk alongside us during this season. We will greatly rely on the support, prayers, and contributions of the body of Christ as we embark on this path of new beginnings, change, and reorganization. After sharing a decade together, it would be challenging to navigate this journey in isolation. We deeply appreciate the diverse gifts present in the body of Christ, and we hope that each one of you will make a commitment to give, serve, and share the load together with us.

## **What Lies Ahead?**

Please join us in prayer as we step out on a journey to build a church family in partnership with South Phoenix and Flagstaff. We're currently working on figuring out how to make this happen in the best way, prayerfully discerning the most suitable structure to foster our connections as we progress toward our shared mission and future.

Our aim is for this journey to be guided by prayer and wisdom. We all share a vision of a united church family, where people from diverse walks of life come together. Our goal is to be a multi-ethnic community that prioritizes the vulnerable and shares gifts and resources.

We're collaborating with Surge Network and other leaders to figure out how to structure our church to match this vision. We're excited about being part of building a fellowship of churches but ask for your prayers as we navigate this path and discover together what God has for us.

## **Our commitment to you:**

We hold a deep love for you and are unwavering in our commitment to lead and serve our church family, regardless of the challenges. Every decision we make is driven by our consideration for you, and we firmly believe it aligns with the Lord's plan for our community.

In these trying times, we stand ready to offer our best guidance and leadership, relying on God's help and grace. We strongly encourage you to trust in God's sovereignty as we navigate these circumstances together. Our pledge is to support you on this journey with openness, love, and humility. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out.

**We love you all,**

**Alhambra Elders, pastors, and church mothers,**

Aaron & Dana Dailey // Wayne & Rasheeda Wynter // Kyle & Melissa Campos //  
John & Tiffany DelHousaye // Joshua & Christy Dailey // Miguel & Gladys Perez //  
Juan & Tina Chavez