

## Belvedere Family Church: Letter from the Assistant Pastor Mika about the sudden ending the Church Council

Justin Okamoto  
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Dear,

I know many of you have been wondering about the certain line of events that happened surrounding the dissolving of the council. Pastor Justin and I felt everyone should be informed about it, and ultimately to find some understanding together, in order to move forward as a community.

The sudden change of ending the council came as a surprise to all of the council members including the pastoral team as well. We were in the midst of finalizing the Council Retreat when Pastor Justin announced on Wednesday 10/18 the dissolving of the council. This decision was not made lightly, and ultimately was not made only with the authority of Pastor Justin himself but it was a decision aligned to where President Dunkley is leading us currently as well as our Subregional Senior Pastor Naokimi. The council did serve a great purpose for our community but Pastor Justin felt it was time to create a new structure based on the lessons learned through the experiences of the pervious council as well as the creative minds of our young people, and by creating a new one can further support how we want to build as a community going forward. To be clear, this decision was not personal and was not targeted at the current council members, it was a revelation brewing underneath the surface for some time which was meant to come to the light. Therefore, during his sermon on Sunday 10/22 he announced the ending of the council which was difficult to digest for many, in order to encourage a new perspective, a new way and a new structure that can bridge us all together as one family under God and True Parents.

During our Council Appreciation dinner on Saturday 10/28, all the council members including the pastoral team and Pastor Justin had the opportunity to share our thoughts, hearts and feelings about the ending of the council. In the last meeting together, we heard what Pastor Justin had been going through and his main reason for ending the council. Mainly, to restore the relationship between children and parents. This is not meant to separate us further but to bring us even closer as 1st and 2nd generations and beyond. Pastor Justin said "I think this is the most important point to address, it's the understanding of the heart, everything else can come into alignment if there is an alignment of the heart." In order for the alignment to happen, sometimes we have to rip off the bandage, feel the hurt and express ourselves truthfully to uncover the true meaning of what kind of community and family we want to become. Based on that understanding, a new structure is able to be born. Therefore, we wanted to take the time to appreciate the incredible foundation the council and its governance has given us on Sunday 11/5 which has sustained our community for more than 20 years and served the members of our community to have a voice.

The creation of the new structure has begun and we had our first meeting with the new ad hoc committee on 11/13. Pastor Justin is carefully forming the best way forward for our community, involving Young Adults and 1st Gens to be a part of the conversation. The members on the ad hoc committee are Pastor Justin, Kimberly McCarty, Kester Wilkening, Grace Tanaka, Denthew and Iasmin Learey and myself. Pastor Daryl and Dr. Shimmyo will also provide support through advisory roles. It is a process but we are hopeful and looking forward to what's to come. We will share what the new structure will look like with all of you when it is complete.

Change is not easy for many of us, it has never been easy for me. The past few months I've learned to ride the waves of uncertainty and there were times I've questioned the leadership based on my own fears and concerns. Mostly, I was concerned about all of you. I took the time to process what was happening and what I was feeling while listening, observing and trusting that all my questions would be answered, and they were. Somehow God kept sending me signs and certain people to open my heart to see beyond my own perception, to not give up but to see through to what is really needed at this time. I trust through this change of structure and feeling our grief surrounding the ending of the council or the way it ended that there will be healing, clarity and so much love that will come at the end of the tunnel. For now, let's pray and trust all will be well.

I hope this letter gives you a sense of the conclusion of the council, and if it does not, that is okay too. I'm here for you and truly honor your process wherever you are. We wanted to share some questions a few of our members have asked Pastor Justin and his responses to those questions in order to clarify, amend and integrate during this transition. If you have any more questions or concerns, feel free to reach out to me or to one of the Pastoral Team.

Thank you for your consistent love and support!

Much love from your Assistant Pastor,

Mika

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For context if you have not already watched the last two sermons Pastor Justin gave about this, please watch them on our website, [belvederefamily.com/sermons/](http://belvederefamily.com/sermons/)

#### **FAQ:**

**What is the interim structure to handle anything that comes up between the old and new?** The core team will decide together if anything comes up. Core team is pastor Justin, Daryl, Mika, and Eritin. Our bookkeeper has always been very vigilant in protecting our finances and I trust she will continue to do that. We can also make sure to provide some kind of report so there is transparency in financial matters.

**How is the new structure going to be approved? By whom?** I have the intention to make this decision with our community, not solely by myself, because I know each community works differently based on the needs of our members. I'm open to ideas on how that might look but for now it will probably be approved through unanimous consent amongst the ad-hoc committee members.

**So much was put into the governance of the last Council and now with the new structure in the making, are you planning to start from scratch?**

This is not about throwing out something that was not good. I think it was good, it served its purpose, it laid the foundation for what could come next and what could come next could not come into being without the foundation that came before. But I see it like the printing press. It was a revolutionary piece of technology at the time and it was because of the printing press that we then had typewriters and eventually keyboards and printers. But we don't call typewriters printing press 2.0. Whatever we create will inevitably be created on the foundation of what was before, we could not learn the lessons we learned to inform our next creation without the experiences we and I had with the council. I'm grateful for those experiences, I truly am, they taught me and anyone that was involved in it so much and those lessons and the heart and the investment that made all that possible WILL live on in whatever we create, we don't even have to be intentional about it, it just inevitably will.

**It seems you made a huge statement that has pushed the 1st Gen away and has hurt them.** I don't agree that I pushed away the first gen. I get how it might look that way right now. For some, there is a sense of distance that maybe wasn't felt before, but on the other hand, I've had more intimate, deep and authentic conversations with my 1st gen aunts and uncles and brothers and sisters in the last month than I've had in the last 2 years. I've heard stories, and experiences that I had never heard before that surprised me, shocked me, and moved me deeply. In fact it's everything that I've always wanted to have from my elders, and of course personally with my parents. It feels like I'm finally getting to know who they really are and they are also seeing who I really am and what I'm experiencing is that when we really get to see and know each other we get to experience the incredible deep hearts of love that actually exists in every single person, regardless of any labels we put on them.

I understand that there are people that are experiencing hurt after hearing my words. I do feel sad about that. But I want you to understand where I'm coming from. I'm not saying where I'm coming from is right but I'm just saying it's the way I am processing and interpreting all of this. I want to emphasize that the lack of regrets is not because I am oblivious to the pain people are feeling, or that I don't empathize with that pain although I admit that I could empathize with it more, and I feel through hearing from you and others that may be feeling that hurt it is helping me to empathize more. It's not that the hurt that people feel doesn't matter to me. It matters and I TRULY TRULY believe the best way we can heal our hurt is through allowing it to come out and express it to a person who can accept it and acknowledge it and love them anyway. I welcome anyone who is feeling hurt or a distance to reach out to myself, pastor Mika or pastor Daryl.

**How do these changes affect you as a Pastor?** My mindset with how I want to lead as a pastor and more generally how I want to contribute to people's lives is to figure out what it looks like and feels like to be the person that God made me to be not the person that I've become due to the impacts of the fall, and

allow others to be a part of that process and my hope is that through being a part of the process others can be encouraged to go through their own journey. I'm not saying I've figured out how to do that perfectly, I know I'm stumbling and fumbling around and trying to learn how to walk, but it's something I feel we all need to go through.

**Is Dissolving the council being directed from HQ for this to be done?**

HQ dissolved all the councils in 2019. So dissolving the council already had backing from the decisions of HQ and of course I asked Naokimi about it too and he also dissolved the Clifton Council around the same time we did. The community will definitely have a voice though. I'm working on a new structure that to me will allow for not just a voice but engagement. Voices alone are in my opinion cheap. But voices plus committed action is what makes a difference. One of my gripes with the council is that the structure encouraged people to give their opinions but then expect the pastor and the paid staff to pretty much do everything which was totally unworkable and led to a lot of burnout for pastors and paid staff alike.

**Does HQ have the right to dictate and dissolve councils that have been established on the local community level, without their consent and due process? Did you check the by-laws and charter that was drafted in the beginning?**

Well, the Charter does say that the National President has higher authority and authority to amend any part of the charter, so in a sense the president can also completely dissolve the council and even the charter.

**Do you have a plan to increase our community engagement, volunteers... etc.?**

I do have ideas on how to increase engagement and it is very much in line with helping people discover their gifts and passions and then how to create projects that allow them to share those gifts and passions with others. Lots of ideas are brewing but I share more about the plan publicly once things have been fleshed out a bit more!

**Why not just change the council/charter instead of creating something new?**

I want to give our young people the opportunity to create something completely new just like our elders had when originally creating the charter. When people create something, the sense of ownership is huge. That sense of ownership would not be possible if they only were to change or adjust something. An analogy would be like the feeling towards children that a parent has vs. a tutor or teacher. The parents having been a part of the co-creation process have an eternal bond of love toward the child. The teacher, while responsible for molding the child's mind, will never feel the sense of ownership that the parents have. If you are struggling with this still it is understandable, but I suggest that you just ask yourself why do you have an attachment to some external document or structure? Where does that fear of letting go come from? When there is fear, that is a great time to go to God in prayer and meditation.