

Bret mtg with Jason Vincent Tues., 4/29 am

From: M Bret Blackford (bret_blackford@yahoo.com)
To: swalker@mcknightcrossings.org; steve.awtrey@gmail.com
Cc: bret_blackford@yahoo.com
Date: Tuesday, April 29, 2025 at 02:20 PM CDT

Steve W. and Steve A.,
I met with Jason Vincent today and below are my rough notes. I'm sure I didn't capture everything accurately but hope to continue checking in with Jason.
Sending you my notes as you may also have an opportunity to meet with Jason. Also, some of the feedback is good for us to consider as Elders - like sermon topics and our ability to hear and respond to the congregation.
---- Bret

Meeting Summary: Conversation with Jason Vincent

Tuesday Morning, April 29 – Starbucks

I met with Jason Vincent for coffee to better understand his decision to step away from McKnight Crossings ("MX"). My primary goal was to hear his story firsthand—his vision for the future, his concerns with McKnight, and to encourage him to consider whether McKnight could still be a place for him to serve and grow.

Key Takeaways from Our Conversation:

- Sermon Clarity and Accessibility:**
Jason shared that he and Wilka, his wife, often found the sermons at McKnight to be overly complex or difficult to follow. While these are my words, I interpreted his concern as the messages sometimes being too heady or esoteric. This was especially challenging for Wilka, whose first language is not English. They both appreciated the clarity of preaching from candidate John Blackmore and expressed a preference for straightforward, “meat and potatoes” preaching—focused on foundational biblical truths. Jason noted that this sentiment is shared by several college students and young professionals he has spoken with.
- Concerns About Doctrinal Influence:**
Jason expressed unease about the influence of N.T. Wright’s theology in recent sermon series. As an Anglican, Wright holds views that differ from our Church of Christ tradition, and Jason found some of those sermons particularly deep and even unsettling.
- Feeling Unheard in Leadership Conversations:**
Jason felt that his voice had not been sufficiently acknowledged. He referenced an email he sent with three specific recommendations that he perceived were disregarded. He also expressed disappointment in being excluded from church leadership discussions, particularly due to his past divorce. He felt this limited his ability to contribute meaningfully to the direction of the church.
- Current Church Search:**
Jason and Wilka have not settled on another congregation but are taking the remainder of 2025 to carefully evaluate area churches. They are reviewing each church's statement of faith and recently visited Lafayette Church of Christ. Their focus is on finding a congregation where they—and their daughters—can feel spiritually fed and aligned.
- Ongoing Respect and Appreciation:**
Despite their concerns, Jason expressed love for McKnight and respect for its leadership, including Jeff Kryder. His decision is not rooted in bitterness, but in a desire to find a spiritual community that meets his family’s needs, particularly Wilka’s.

----- Forwarded Message -----

From: M Bret Blackford <bret_blackford@yahoo.com>
To: Steve Walker <swalker@mcknightcrossings.org>; Steve Awtrey <steve.awtrey@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, April 25, 2025 at 12:52:22 PM CDT
Subject: Bret mtg with Jason Tues., 4/27 am

Steve^2 (Awtrey/Walker),
Just FYI - I plan meet with Jason Vincent Tuesday morning (4/29). Below is some of what I hope to share with Jason.
Sharing as I hope the two of you will also try and reach out to Jason.
--- Bret

On Wed, Apr 23, 2025 at 4:10 PM M Bret Blackford <bret_blackford@yahoo.com> wrote:

Hi Jayson,

Let me know if you have time to meet sometime this week or next—I’m flexible on both the timing and the location, so whatever works best for you.

I’d really appreciate the chance to hear more about your vision and plans, and also any frustrations you may have with MX. Please feel free to be completely candid—your feedback can help us grow stronger moving forward.

Of course, I’ll also share some of my own thoughts and probably do a little persuading—I genuinely believe that what’s on your heart can (and should) be realized here at McKnight, and that you’d be a tremendous champion for that vision.

Please know that we’ve been praying for you for many months, and we’re planning to revisit the current prohibition on divorce for eldership at our meeting next month. My personal hope is that you’ll be sitting in on those elder meetings before long and helping us shape the road ahead.

There’s a lot here, and I think much of it would be best discussed face to face.

Hope to hear from you soon,
—Bret

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Previous email Discussion Included Below ...

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On Tuesday, April 22, 2025 at 12:21:01 PM CDT, Jayson Vincent <jayson.t.vincent@gmail.com> wrote:

Hi Bret!

Yes, you have my approval, but with an amendment, and that is that I want to be clearer about my comments about the 4 items I reached out about to the Elders via email earlier this year (Arstine, Panama churches, Access Point, Feed My Starving Children). It's not that I received no response at all, it's that I believe I can be much more effective in a situation where approvals (within any constraints from Elder's, yes/no's, requirements and schedule conflicts w/ other events) for someone with a shared history like I've had are pretty quick for these scenarios, and where the burden is on me to think it through, organize, serve, build teams, recruit, and carry it out, with minimal burden added to the Elders, and that's important to me in terms of being as helpful as I can within the time windows of opportunity to help people. I did receive feedback (Steve Walker was willing to take time and was interested in prioritizing them and fleshing them out further), but it was going to require more effort and burden to Steve (or any Elders) than intended, and the pace wasn't going to allow for me to coordinate w/ the other groups in a manner that I could feasibly achieve. I aimed to be trusted enough to run forward on opportunities like these. And I also have in mind this thought of "how hard would it be for me to help bring in brand new members with less than a year of experience at McKnight, and help them not only grow in discipleship of God's word but to help them

participate in ministry ideas that they bring to the table, as opposed to not only ideas already on the table," and I sense that it would be very difficult in current state.

But I just want to be very clear that the way I'm seeking to operate is not necessarily the best way, nor were any Elders required to move in a manner that I was seeking. I felt I had some precedent (for example, my family has been tremendously blessed by food trains and lots of love during times of illness, hospitalization, etc and so I was simply excited to help be a part of the same for additional members, and I'd received inputs from other MX family members who were interested in the same). But I respect that different times and needs require different ways of operating and different priorities.

I also want to be clear of our tremendous love for Steve Walker and for every one of our Elders. I'm worried about the negative impact on anyone. We treasure memories of Steve & Gwen having us over for memorial day barbecue with their family, surprising our daughters with dresses (which they wore on Easter), meeting for coffee w/ myself, Jeremiah, & Ross, making himself available as I considered a recent job change.

Our situation is not about Elders being better, even though we have stated our concerns and areas where we wanted to see different, Wilka & I are focused on changes to ourselves and next steps to serving in His Kingdom.

This is a big part of why we don't want our needs & interests to be a need for MX change, but we do need to change, and we have our daughters in mind in terms of the same behavior we would aspire for them in terms of what they orient their lives around, to the best of their ability.

I also want to be very clear that our family has great love and appreciation for Jeff & Becky Kryder, and for their tremendous efforts in ministry, mentoring, and teaching. We feel a safe enough ground to share our concern (and we truly do have concern around the NT Wright Series & NT's system of beliefs and approach to scripture, and not only that one, and the impact on whom we feel most called to focus on discipling at this time), but Wilka & I's hesitation in communication is the potential harm done to relationships. We have a specific target of discipleship that we hope to grow into, alongside the continued discipleship of the ages of our daughters, and we sensed a sincere stumbling block.

We, ourselves, could be very wrong and off, but we're convicted about sorting that out.

We also don't want our decision to become a force for change in order to keep us at MX, because we feel that's unfair to our Elders and to our MX family. We wouldn't want anyone demanding change or else leaving and we certainly don't want to do that. Instead we're trying to identify a next best opportunity to be as helpful as we possibly can in the building of God's Kingdom and in the roles we play, and in the example we set for our daughters, and for the accountability to ourselves.

So, please help me minimize harm. That's our greatest concern.

There's too much that we're grateful for and appreciative of, and too much love we have for our MX family.

Thank you Bret, -jayson

On Tue, Apr 22, 2025 at 11:41 AM M Bret Blackford <bret_blackford@yahoo.com> wrote:

Hi Jayson,

Just checking again—would it be okay to share our email thread with the other elders?

Also, I’d really like to connect and hear more about what you and Wilka are considering. I’ve got some flexibility in my schedule and can meet you at your place, somewhere convenient for you, or even grab coffee over the weekend—whatever works best. I’ll do my best to accommodate.

—Bret

On Monday, April 21, 2025 at 08:13:31 PM CDT, M Bret Blackford <bret_blackford@yahoo.com> wrote:

Jason,
Is it OK if I share your email with the elders? Know that we talked about and prayed over you and your family tonight.
--- Bret

On Monday, April 21, 2025 at 04:47:21 PM CDT, Jayson Vincent <jayson.t.vincent@gmail.com> wrote:

Thank you Bret!
More than happy to sit down together.
I wanted to more clearly share that none of it is directed to any of our Elders specifically, but I do feel responsibility to explain where we are and what we were seeking, that's the reason for such a long note. We can also fully accept our interests and not good or not best for all church families.

I think I shared more detail with you than with anyone else, we didn't want you to be blindsided with our thoughts & decision.

You & Michelle specifically have given us great love and encouragement.

We're very grateful for you!!

On Mon, Apr 21, 2025 at 3:01 PM M Bret Blackford <bret_blackford@yahoo.com> wrote:

Dear Jayson,

Your letter hits me hard. You, Wilka, and your family mean so much to me and Michelle personally, and also to the McKnight family as a whole. Brother, I know this decision has come through prayer and reflection, and I trust your heart and intentions. That said, I want to be honest—it's hard to imagine our church community without your presence and leadership. I do hope you might reconsider, or perhaps allow us a little more time.

I completely understand and respect the convictions you've shared. Your desire to serve, lead, and disciple others is evident, and it's something I've admired in you since our days with AJ and ACTS. You've lived out your faith in powerful ways, and your example continues to inspire.

I also want to acknowledge that as elders, we may have become overly focused on the Lead Minister search and not been attentive enough to the voices and needs of the congregation. That's on us. Your ideas were brought up and discussed, and I'm truly sorry if you didn't feel that reflected back to you. That wasn't the intention, and I regret that communication faltered.

One of the key topics at our upcoming Elder Retreat is the current position on divorced men serving as elders. I can tell you sincerely that most of us no longer see this as a prohibition and want to open up the eldership to faithful men like yourself and Eric McPherson. I pray it's not too late to reengage that conversation with you.

You and Wilka have been—and are—critical parts of this body. Your heart for evangelism, discipleship, and service is exactly what we need more of. Please know that the elders have been praying specifically for you and a handful of younger men to rise in leadership. That continues.

Jayson, I'd be honored to talk more with you, whether it's to listen or to share more of what's on my heart. And while I pray for your continued involvement here, you absolutely have my blessing and support wherever God leads you. You've always followed Him with integrity, and I know He'll use you powerfully wherever you go.

With love and deep respect,
—Bret

On Monday, April 21, 2025 at 12:10:58 PM CDT, Jayson Vincent <jayson.t.vincent@gmail.com> wrote:

Hi Bret!

Wilka & I absolutely love, admire, respect, and appreciate you and your family and all of your Leadership, and you welcoming us into your family (our time w/ our girls for Cora's wedding is such a wonderful memory for us!).

After much discussion together and prayer, Wilka & I have decided to conclude our time at MX, for the near term. We remain open to God leading us in any direction He chooses ongoing.

We've been at MX for a long duration (22 years for me, 15 years for Wilka), and are so appreciative of our time, and we love so many people there, and we're so grateful for the love we've been shown.

It's really difficult to describe our reasoning, because we by no means want to imply that our experience has been negative at MX, nor that our priorities at this time represent priorities of the majority of our MX family. We love and appreciate our Elders, we love and appreciate Jeff & Becky, Nathan, Elizabeth, Kaylynn, and so many more. We're not mad at anyone, we don't feel wronged, but we do have convictions around some of the next steps we see God leading for us.

For this next phase of our journey, there are a few things that have been key for us.

* We want to continue inviting prospective believers, and very young believers, to join us, and we want them to follow God's points and teachings through His Word. The NT Wright series was one that we both feel would cause more harm than good for the categories of believers that we hope to focus on the most in this next phase. We respect and appreciate that the same isn't true for all maturity levels and backgrounds.

* We'd like to still be considered as an elder family. We haven't studied anything in scripture that we conclude prevents such, given the specifics of our story (mine, with divorce, in particular), and given the words of Jesus first, and the various words of the Spirit through Paul afterwards. We also don't want MX to change this just for us, but if this does change, we are excited about the positive opportunities for families like Eric M and Chris F, and others with similar stories to ours that come in the future.

* We'd like to have as great of an impact on new discipleship opportunities as we can, with more trust and approval than we currently sense. Earlier this year I shared a handful of ideas I'd love to move on, seeking feedback, and hoping for pretty quick approval to move on a couple. The topics were support for Arstine, joining hands for Feeding My Starving Children, supporting Panama churches at a small level (on the order of \$1k from MX, while I'd give the same myself, and increasing relationship there), and leveraging our facility (after coordinating date/time/approval from Elders and Staff) to invite Access Point students (high school seniors and high school grads within the last 4-6 years, from st. louis city and st. louis county) to leverage MX for one of its alumni gathering meetings, and to have MX family join in to show love to those students and to inject relationship in that way. As someone who's been at MX for over 20 years, and with relationships with our Elders and so much of our MX family, I was looking for a lot quicker and more enthusiastic trust and approval to get moving. As I think about what I've learned about the generation of age-group 18-30 (a demographic that we've struggled to build at MX), a big part of what they seek and need is the chance to serve and impact our society and community in creative ways, sometimes with risk, sometimes with more to plan and think through and flesh out, but an opportunity provided for them to lead and learn and make a difference in. If it's the type of experience I had after being here 20 years, it's hard for me to have confidence in opportunities that can be provided for those with our church family less. And I'm ok w/ perhaps my interest and pace not being a great fit for MX, it's just something Wilka & I need to seek out elsewhere. Even in the business world, which I believe should be less strong in this way than Christ's church, I've been afforded much more opportunity to lead and seek positive difference, for many years. So part of my conclusion is that perhaps Wilka & I need to seek a congregation that needs more help, or where our ways of helping are aligned with what the leadership would like to see. That's not to bring down MX. That's us looking to be as effective as we can with the gifts God has provided us. We fully respect and appreciate the HUGE load our MX leadership has been carrying as we conduct two searches, and lead through a variety of other transitions.

I'll stop there.

Wilka & I felt that it was important to share more with you and Michelle, as we so greatly appreciate your love and leadership shown to us, and yesterday wasn't the best time to share more.

We continue to be so grateful for and proud of MX, and the family it has become, and all that God will do through it. And we also are excited to pursue our next steps, with God's use for us and also His plans for our girls top of mind. We have felt that Jeff M has done an AMAZING job by the way, and we're really happy with how our girls have grown. It pains us to imagine them not growing under Nathan's service and leadership. We also feel responsible for pursuing ourselves what we expect them to pursue when they grow into young adults. We're navigating one step at a time.

We Love and Appreciate you and your family!!!

Thank you! -jayson