Link to Cal's in service announcement from February 16.

There’s nothing quite like waking up to discover that your church is being featured on an episode of Dateline. While not the exact same thing, something very similar is now happening to Central in the Christian world. There are different individuals and organizations who report on scandals within the church world and the situation regarding Caleb Baker has now made national headlines.

I strongly feel the need to respond to this, to keep you informed, and to remain transparent in all things. Because of the immediacy of my need to communicate with you and the potential of harm this can do to our church family, I have decided this cannot wait until this weekend to be addressed. So, I decided to communicate with you in this manner now. I will keep this as brief as possible. (By necessity, it’s really not brief).

As you know, I recently made a very painful announcement regarding Caleb Baker, who was our Lead Student Pastor and Associate Preaching Pastor. On Feb. 12th, we discovered Caleb was involved in an extramarital relationship with another person on staff, and we found out this had been going on for the prior six months. As soon as I could, I gathered our Board together and made them aware of all we knew (Feb. 13th). The decision was made to release both from our staff, which we did the very next day (Feb. 14th). Two days later, at our Thursday night service (Feb. 16th, just four days after the discovery was made) I informed our church of this, and I did so at all our services the following Sunday (Feb. 19th). As the leader of Central, my commitment to you has always been to be transparent, open, and honest. This is exactly what I felt I was doing as I made the announcement regarding Caleb.

A lot has come to light since then. A few days after this announcement, (less than a week ago now) Central's Executive Leadership Team was contacted by the first of two different women who were associated with the church in which Caleb served before he came to Central back in 2016 (both women were former staff members who served under Caleb's leadership at his prior church). This church was Eastview Christian Church in Bloomington, IL, where Caleb's dad, Mike Baker, served as the Senior Pastor. The question raised to me, and to our leadership team was, and I'm paraphrasing here, "Why did you only tell the part of what happened at Central and not tell your church the 'whole truth' regarding Caleb's history of abusing women at Eastview?"

I immediately contacted both these women personally and asked them simply, again paraphrasing, "What history of Caleb abusing women at Eastview are you talking about?" The assumption both women had made was that we were fully aware of this history and chose not to disclose it to our church (Central). Let me repeat, their belief was that we fully knew Caleb's history before we hired him and chose to hire him anyway, which would put our people at risk, and now we were covering up what we had done.

Central, let me be crystal clear here... We were NOT informed of "charges" made against Caleb at Eastview when we hired him. In 2016, Caleb's dad, who is a peer and longtime friend, did inform me that there was an accusation made against his son by a woman who felt Caleb acted inappropriately toward her. He assured me his leadership team had investigated this charge and it was proven to be an unfounded and unsubstantiated claim by someone who had it out for his son. He felt his son's future in that small town was forever going to be defined by this accusation. A conversation then ensued about the possibility of Central hiring him so he could have a fresh start in a church where his dad wasn't the Senior Pastor, didn't have

any privilege of being “the Pastor’s son,” and didn’t have this accusation hanging over his head. I asked all the questions I felt I needed to ask, and I made a decision to hire Caleb.

Because I was not personally aware of any character issues regarding Caleb, in recent years I began to allow him to use his gift of communication on the biggest platform we have: our weekend pulpit. Nothing, until the revelation of the past two weeks, caused me to doubt the integrity of Caleb. I believed what I saw was the real Caleb. It wasn’t.

What has now become blatantly obvious is that I didn’t dig deep enough into the allegation made against him back then. All that was going on behind the scenes at Eastview was not revealed to me and since I wasn’t aware of it, I didn’t know, or think, to probe deeper. I put too much trust in my friendship with Mike and didn’t put Caleb through the normal interview process. In hindsight, I made a wrong call on this. And yes, I take full responsibility for it.

So now, literally in this past week, much has surfaced about prior allegations of abuse against Caleb, made by multiple women at Eastview Christian Church during his years while on staff there. A number of women have challenged Eastview’s Board to reveal what actually went on there while Caleb was on staff. Eastview’s Board has since made a decision to hire an independent investigator to determine what actually did happen. As a result, this past weekend, Caleb’s father, Mike, resigned from being Eastview’s Sr. Pastor. Mike stated that he believes all that has come out in the past two weeks (excluding what happened here) amounts to false allegations made against him and his family, and that there is no truth to them and thus no need for an investigation. I love Mike deeply, and he is still a very good friend, but I do not agree with how he has handled this situation and am saddened he has chosen to resign instead of

submitting to an investigation and trusting Eastview's Board in their process to discover the truth.

So Central, here's the bottom line. **I don't know** for certain what did or did not happen concerning Caleb's history at Eastview. This past week I have clearly been informed of things I did not know. Again, yes, I did know there was an allegation against Caleb when I hired him, and yes, to my regret, I discounted it. At a minimum, what **I do know** for certain is what happened with Caleb and one particular woman while serving on staff at Central. This is what we are acting upon. I am not the Pastor of Eastview and have no control over how another church functions. I am, however, the Pastor of Central and am called to shepherd this church. Here's what I want you to understand: Not I, not Central's Board, and not Central's Executive Leadership Team have any intention of covering up or whitewashing anything inappropriate Caleb did as a leader at Central. It has become apparent he was guilty of abusing his position and power as a leader here, and we released him for doing so. We have sought to act with integrity in all things; we will continue to do so.

Now… since so much has come to light in the few days since I made the initial announcement regarding Caleb, we as a church leadership feel compelled to ask you, our congregation, "Has anything else happened in **our** church regarding Caleb of which we are unaware? Is there anything inappropriate that has happened to **anyone else** that we don't know about?" If more needs to come out about any abuse of power and position regarding Caleb, PLEASE BRING THIS TO LIGHT! Our desire is to create a safe place for you to tell your story and to come along side you if you've been harmed by this church in this manner. We are going to work immediately to find a third party to come alongside anyone hurt by this and will post contact information as soon as it becomes available. In the meantime, if you desire, you can contact the Chairman of Central's

Board at boardchair@centralaz.com. We have both men and women on our Board; if you prefer to speak to a woman about this, please just indicate your desire.

Please know that as a church we are continuing to provide counseling and care for Caleb, his wife Jess, and his little girls, and we are also providing counseling and care for the woman Caleb was involved with here. We are consulting with experts in the field of church leadership abuse to learn how to best handle this and to prevent this from happening again. We are doing the best we know how, to handle this entire tragedy in the most God-honoring way possible. Please pray for the people and any victims directly impacted and involved – God's heart is near to them. Pray also for Eastview and Central for this is still the Bride of Christ even in her brokenness.

Striving to learn to lead better,

Cal

Psalm 34:18, "The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." Praying this is true for all involved.