Friends of Central Bible Church,

Central Bible Church was founded in 1931 and has significantly contributed to the life and growth of the Church in Portland for almost 90 years. We are thankful for the many ways that God has used this church community to glorify God, leaving a legacy that has seen many respond to the Gospel of Jesus in genuine faith. Even as we celebrate these realities, we also acknowledge that for at least the last 20 years, our church has been in a steady state of decline.

For the reasons detailed below, **it is the unanimous conviction of the elders that the best way to honor our church’s legacy is to close Central Bible Church.** This was a difficult decision that has taken months of prayer, tears, seeking God’s will, and pursuing objective, outside counsel in making this decision. We plan to hold our last service, a time of celebration and remembrance, on Sunday, February 23rd at 10am.

We believe the Spirit of God is at work in bringing new life through this closure. Though this decision comes with great sadness we are also excited about what is ahead. The choice to close Central Bible Church at this time, is not forced on us, but is a strategic and proactive decision that we believe will bear the most fruit and have the greatest impact in this city. **We would like to see the assets and property of Central Bible Church reinvested into the body of Christ in Portland through the creation of a church planting fund that will support new gospel works among underserved and underrepresented communities.**

We also plan to commission a new church plant that we hope to see launched from among the members of our church in the coming year.

Please take time to read through the following letter that was shared with our church family to better understand the conviction that the elders have come to and the vision that we have moving forward. If you have questions or words of encouragement that you would like to share please reach out directly to the elders of Central Bible (elders@centralbible.church).

The news of this closure is difficult for all involved. We will be shepherding our people through this transition in the coming months by sharing meals, meeting in homes, and processing the future as members of our community consider finding a new church home. As you reflect on the season that our church is in, please take time to pray for us. Please reach out to those you know who are affected by news of this closure and look for ways to actively care for them in the months ahead. We dearly love the people that make up Jesus’ Church and it is our hope that God will be glorified through this time of transition for our local church family.

Sincerely,

The Elders of Central Bible Church
Dear CB family,

**Greeting/Announcement**
Thanks for being here this morning. The news we have to share with you, our church family, is difficult, but we believe it’s important to share it up front and then to unpack the context for how we came to this conclusion.

**What we’ll be sharing today has taken months of prayer, tears, seeking God’s will, and pursuing objective, outside counsel.**

**For the reasons you’re about to hear, it is the unanimous conviction of the Elders that the best way to honor our church’s legacy is to close Central Bible Church.**

We want to now give you the context for this decision and why we believe that though this closure would be painful, the impact and legacy of Central Bible Church will live on for generations to come.

**Context**
As we formed our current Elder team in January of 2019 much of the work that lay before us was complex, yet clear. Our vision was tied to the realities and needs we faced as a community. Our goals were to bring health and stability to a vulnerable church community. Solidifying our church, especially in the context of community was primary to us. Bringing a sense of peace, stability, togetherness, even some forward momentum was the goal and the vision.

We believe God has been at work in this community in many ways, and we have seen marked growth in how many in this church have embraced the need for change. Many of you have stepped courageously into spiritual and emotional health, and many have answered the scary but necessary call for meaningful Christian community. We have had a lot of wins over this last year!

Central Bible’s roots go all the way back to 1931 and throughout our history God has used this body and it’s many ministries to make a significant impact for the Kingdom of God. We are thinking of ministries like Trout Creek Bible Camp, Skatechurch, and Multnomah University among many others. We’ve also seen Christian leaders like John Mitchell, Tim Mackie and Gerald Griffin and many others raised up to serve Jesus in Portland and the Church abroad.

But for at least the last 20 years Central Bible has been in a state of decline. Dwindling membership and finances, and lessened kingdom impact have left our church as a small but courageous group of around 100 people.
Over this last year many positive things have come about. 60% of our church has joined a home community where we have seen meaningful relationships form that have extended beyond the Sunday service. Groups have come alongside those in need, walking with those dealing with medical issues, financial issues, marriage issues, and other challenges. Without those groups, people would have been facing these difficulties without the support of community.

As a church we also embraced our move downstairs as a way to live more within our means, to worship in a more intimate space, and to ready our hearts for more potential change if and when it came time to move. As a leadership team, we took note of how this effort galvanized our church, giving us a shared sense of ownership and camaraderie as we worked side by side.

In addition we celebrate some of the fruit that came from our community in the last year as we sought to be a welcoming presence in Montavilla. Events like Love Montavilla, Family Fun Night and our Harvest Party gave us opportunities where we were able to grow in relationship with our neighbors.

**Financial Difficulties**

Though we have had a number of victories, this last year has not been without its struggles. One of the realities that has kept us weighed down has been our financial situation. This is not necessarily because people in this community are poor at giving, it is as most people know, a multi-faceted reality that has developed throughout the history of this church.

We have a 60,000 square-foot facility with staggering expenses and deferred maintenance that approaches the one million dollar price tag, not to mention the complex seismic issues that other churches and organizations are currently dealing with in our city. We have also been over-staffed for our working budget and the size of our congregation for some time now. This is still true even with Andrew Pratt stepping off the staff team earlier this year. To clarify, though the building has been a strain on our budget, it is not the only reason we have been unable to overcome our financial deficit.

Here are a few of the financial challenges we've contended with as we've tried to steward the church's resources well:

- **Overstaffing** - It's typical for a church to be operating at around 50% of operating budget for staffing, but we've been operating at nearly 65% of operating budget.
○ Care/Needs of our aging facility - With the size of our building and lack of budget, it has lead our staff to become part time maintenance people which is something they are not trained to do, nor have the time to do.

○ Our building has sizeable deferred maintenance costs - Estimates put deferred maintenance somewhere between 1-2 million. Not to mention new seismic requirements of the city adding another 3-5 million.

○ Utility costs - The amount of utilities we consume to keep our building is disproportionate to the size of congregation we have. Have we saved money by moving downstairs? Yes. But bills such as our $25,000 a year water runoff, and our $10,000 a year insurance policy are directly proportionate to our building not our people.

At the start of 2019, we as Elders decided not to entertain listing our property, but instead would pursue leasing opportunities to help offset the deficit. In the Fall of 2018, we inherited a church that was already running at $150k deficit a year. At the beginning of 2019 we made the strategic decision to operate $80,000 in the negative with the hope of cutting that in half for 2020. What instead happened was our budget deficit for 2019 grew to $125,000.

During the 2019 calendar year we started making changes that we hoped would help come 2020 budget time. We made arrangements for the Romanian church (Word of Life) to take over the janitorial needs of our facility, and invited the AA group that meets in our building (Rule 62) to take over the landscaping needs for our property, all in an effort to offset operating costs. During that time Andrew Pratt transitioned from a paid staff role to a lay Elder role which brought cost savings as well. Many of our staff's hours (and many volunteer hours) have gone towards ongoing building issues to help save money.

Even after all of that, after succeeding at our goal of cutting our expenses by around $50,000, we are STILL operating at an $70k deficit as we move into 2020 because of congregational size and not being able to finalize significant lease agreements. This difficulty was due in part to the age and poor condition of our rentable spaces. Pursuing lease agreements to utilize unused space upstairs was a good idea, but as time went on, it became clear that it was not sustainable because we were becoming property-managing-pastors.

We want to pause and take a moment to thank this church. Many of you give generously and have stepped up in big ways during the last year to help with the financial burden and to contribute significantly to the life of this community.
Leadership Dynamics

We would like to share with you all a bit about how the Elder team has been functioning given our shared leadership dynamic over the last year. As we sought outside counsel in the Fall of 2018, we felt confident that entering the long candidating process for a new, full-time, outside senior pastor was unwise. In order to hire a senior pastor, we would have had to let go of Danny Kugelberg and Andrew Pratt to afford the hiring as we already had an $80k deficit without a senior pastor.

We want to acknowledge that on the one hand, a lead pastor arguably could have led more effectively with a more clear vision as our church needed to move forward into the future. However, on the other hand, we simply didn’t have the luxury of time or money to go through the process of hiring that lead pastor.

We really believe in the model of shared leadership and believe that a shared leadership team has the potential to lead as effectively and with as much clarity/vision as a single lead pastor could. However, it has become clear that one critical characteristic of an effective shared leadership team is philosophical alignment. Due to the circumstances under which the team was formed, we didn’t have the time needed to process what our particular philosophical convictions were and how that would affect our ability to lead the church forward. Hindsight is always 20–20, and as we look back now, we recognize that we underestimated the need to more carefully work through the long-term viability of this highly diverse, 7-man team on a philosophical level (i.e. how we do church). Despite its difficulties, this team has remained committed to working together through challenges to bring stability and leadership to CB.

How Our Decision Developed

With that in mind, we want to walk you through the elder team’s thought process as we approached 2020.

Coming into last November, we knew we had to discuss our budget, staffing, and property. We needed to right the size of our staff while also addressing the cost of staying in our building. What was needed to right the size of our staff was to cut the equivalent of one full-time position. As we discussed this in an Elder meeting in November, Danny Kugelberg graciously stepped forward to suggest his position be cut in the interest of righting our budget. As painful as this was, our team agreed this was the choice to make for the church. It was truly an exemplary moment of leadership, deference, and love from Danny both to the church and to the needs of the staff and Elder team.
This was a very difficult decision and the Elders affirm Danny as a full-time vocational pastor, which means, as he steps down, he will be looking elsewhere for a new pastorate in order to provide for Sarah and the kids. Danny has served at CB for nearly 5 years and it is painful to lose his gifts, personality, and family. He will continue to pastor through the end of February, at which point his severance will kick in to care for he and his family as he rests, recharges, and looks for new opportunities. You will get a chance to hear from Danny in the coming weeks as this transition takes place.

Again, as Andrew Pratt mentioned earlier, this time last year in a family meeting, we walked you through all of the issues with the financial woes in this building. The boiler, roof, carpet, seismic retrofitting, utilities, etc. Even if we were able to right our budget, it doesn't begin to address the capital necessary to deal with the deferred maintenance.

At our Elder meeting in November, we then moved to address the strain and struggle of keeping our building paid for and standing, at which point we decided in complete unity we needed to list the building and property of Central Bible Church for sale.

In the weeks following the decisions about Danny stepping off staff and listing our property for sale, our thoughts and feelings as a leadership team started to become clear in discerning what God was inviting us to do moving forward.

As we faced the future without a full time pastor on staff, as our budget continued to shrink, and as we faced the reality of relocating and selling our building, we as elders decided this was too much to bear. The church has been through so much loss and change over the last couple of decades. Change fatigue is real, and difficult for all of us, no matter our age, experience, and background.

It's no secret we have a wide diversity of age and generations in our body. This is something that we all love about our church. And yet, on a leadership level, we have found it difficult to lead our diverse congregation in a way that everyone can fully buy into. For example, CB has lost older members who don't like the changes being made to meet the preferences of the younger generation, and younger folks have left the church because they don't like the traditions that have been in place for decades that meet the preferences of the older generation. To be clear, this is something that CAN be done and done well, but it has proved to be tremendously difficult throughout the history of CB in particular.

Change is difficult for any church, CB is not unique in that way. But embracing consensus for how these changes ought to be made has been a longstanding issue, going back to at least the early 90's. You might recall a family meeting last year where I read the results of a study done by a professional church consultation firm from 1990. Some of the recommended changes and areas of needed growth from that study could have been given to CB last year because they are still areas that need to be addressed.
As we look around this room, we recognize how difficult and wearying the last few years have been for all of us. Frankly, we don't think we can accurately assess the level of fatigue we've endured because we're all still in it. This, among many other things, is part of what has led our Elders to seriously pray over the last year about the long-term trajectory of this ministry.

As we processed these realities and dialogued as a team, we decided as the Elder board that it would be best to close Central Bible Church by the end of February. This is brutal for all of us. We have prayed and contended in tears over this decision for months. We would be lying if we said it didn't feel at times like we were “giving up.” But as we've prayed and had robust conversation and sought outside counsel, it has become clear to us that this decision, difficult and painful as it is, is far from “giving up.” We believe that trying to keep the doors open, under all the circumstances you've just heard, would lead to an inevitable, reactive closure, as the funds slowly dwindle away. Instead, our desire is to make a proactive decision to close Central Bible Church in a way that sees its legacy live on for generations to come through wise stewardship of our resources.

The Month of February
What about the next few weeks? Here is our proposal for the month of February:

- Elders, pastors, deacons, and our spouses will be available to meet and process with you in the coming weeks.

- We will have a catered meal after each Sunday service through the rest of February so that we have time to process and discuss more of these things as a community. A time to listen to each other, to share memories, to reflect on the goodness of God in the history of CB. We’ll continue to meet on Sunday morning throughout February, with the plan being to have our final service of celebration on Feb. 23rd.

  Each of our services over the coming weeks will have outside leaders who have a history with CB coming in to bring a word of encouragement and blessing as we make this transition. Those leaders we have sought counsel from have affirmed and supported this direction (John & Carly Wecks, Gerald Griffin, Kevin Palau, among others). Several of these leaders will walk with us as we grieve and remember what we love about CB.

- Home communities and bible studies will continue to meet together over the coming weeks. Now more than ever, we want to encourage you to press into the relationships you have at CB.

- Finally, there will be a Q & A today and next Sunday for public dialogue.
Endowment

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” -John 12:24-25

As we have thought and prayed about our church, this is the verse that has spoken most clearly to our elder team and exemplifies what we desire for our own lives and for the legacy of Central Bible Church.

We believe that God is calling Central Bible to be a seed that is planted into the soil of this city so that through our sacrifice there can be the release and multiplication of strategic kingdom resources for the greater good of Gospel work in Portland. Though we must die to our personal hopes and ambitions for this church, the Gospel reminds us that “it is more blessed to give than to receive” and that it is in dying that we will find our lives.

In our city there is a growing tide of kingdom partnerships where churches, ministries, and leaders are putting aside their individual differences as well as the legacies of their own ministries for the sake of wider kingdom impact. Additionally there are many older churches who bore great fruit in generations past who are now gladly passing on the baton of their buildings and their legacies to a new generation of leaders whom God is raising up. We celebrate the humility and kingdom-mindedness of those who have gone before us and we desire to follow their example in being open-handed and generous with the resources that God has entrusted to Central Bible Church.

There are several thousand former CB members scattered throughout the city of Portland. Among them are many who have given and served sacrificially to build this church and to see the gospel of Christ advanced. We believe that the best way to honor those who have given to Central Bible Church for the 88 years of its existence is to invest those resources in a way that will have the most significant impact on our city and among the nations, for the glory of God.

When we look at the history of CB, there is much to celebrate and to be thankful for, but at the same time there has been a pattern of division and self-seeking that has led to multiple church splits over the life of this church. A part of being honest about our history is to recognize how the desire to protect and hold onto our existing people and resources has led to the loss of nearly all the influence that CB once had in this city. We refuse to pass this generational sin on to those who will come after us.

As we look ahead at the options that we have as a church, there is nothing that is ultimately forcing our hand or making us close the doors of our church. We could continue on, slowly using up our resources, living in the shadow of what came before. We could continue
existing like this for years to come. We could even sell the building and downsize our space and keep a large nest egg in the bank that would allow us to be comfortable and secure for decades to come. But in doing so, we would remain alone. And in remaining alone we would slowly die from the inside out.

But God has not called us to comfort. And we are not content just existing or remaining alone. Jesus says to us, “Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” A decision to close Central Bible Church is not the inevitable sign of defeat that critics of this church have been waiting for years to see. It is not an act of surrender to the changing tides of culture. And it is not an attack on the legacy of John Mitchell by those with no respect for what has gone before.

No. A decision to close CB is a calculated, strategic, and proactive decision that we believe will bear much fruit and have the greatest and longest lasting impact in this city and among the nations.

We have met with nearly a dozen Christian leaders in this city who love CB and who have a passion for Kingdom impact that goes beyond the vision of any one church. Leaders like Kevin Palau, Gerry Breshears, and John & Carly Wecks, and many others have responded with an outpouring of support and even tears of joy for the vision that we will be sharing with you this morning. Just this week Kevin Palau said to our Elders that in all his years of working with churches he has never seen a church close its doors with such a generous and kingdom-minded vision for their assets.

The first component of this vision is the launch of a collaborative church planting fund that will provide resources to support church planting in Portland, especially among underrepresented communities of our city. This would include new churches being planted among the urban poor, minority, immigrant, and other underserved communities.

We are in the process of gathering together leaders who are known and respected in the body of Christ to form an advisory board that will help to shape and establish this fund. A board of trustees will be established from among these city leaders and they will be entrusted with the strategic sale of Central Bible’s assets and this fund will, by God’s grace, support dozens of new churches in the years to come. “It is more blessed to give than to receive” and in investing these resources into the Body of Christ we believe that our return will be 100-fold, in Kingdom fruit and in the joy of city-wide church collaboration.

In keeping with this spirit of generosity, it is our plan to give a lump some gift equal to two years of support to all of our missionaries. Additionally, we have offered to sell Skate Church the property that their warehouse sits on for a price that is well below market value.
Though it is painful to give up our dreams for what this church could be, we invite you to join us in praying for God's will to be done and for his Kingdom to come through our grain of wheat that we desire to see planted into the soil of our city.

**Church Planting**

The vision of a fund is not the only word of hope and even excitement that we get to share with you this morning. God is not done working in and through the people who have called this church their home. Though we mourn over the need to lay to rest the organization that is known as Central Bible, this next year we hope to celebrate the birth of a new church plant that will be launched out from this community.

Our vision for the future has not died and our passion to see the gospel proclaimed in this city is as strong as it has ever been. Many of us are deeply invested in each other's lives and the thought of having to say goodbye is hard to bear. It is our hope that many in our existing community would find a home in this new church plant. We would invite you to prayerfully consider this opportunity. For others, God may be calling you elsewhere and we want to help you find the right church where you can grow in your faith and serve in your gifts.

Andrew Zellers and Russell Woods are the pastors who we would like to see leading the church planting team along with other current leaders in our community. In this next season they will be entering into a time to pray, connect with people relationally, and to begin dreaming with others and with the Holy Spirit about what planting a church could look like this next year.

The community that will form the foundation for this new church will meet in home communities in the coming months. This next season will be a time of slowing down to rest and to hear from the Holy Spirit. It will be a time to focus on growing in emotional and spiritual health, and to build a vision together for ministry in the city.

Our Elder team is fully behind Russell and Andrew and we are excited to see who God calls to join them in this work. As a former church planter myself, it was originally my (Ahshuwah Hawthorne's) idea to encourage Andrew and Russell to lead a church plant and it has been my recommendation that it be the first of many churches that are supported by the fund we hope to establish.

Central Bible Church has had a lasting impact and we hope that continues in this city and among the nations. In faith we believe that the seed of this church that is being planted into the ground will not remain alone but will grow into a mighty forest of fruit bearing churches that will nourish our city for years to come.
Conclusion
You have heard a lot this morning. I am sure there are many different emotions in this room right now. We are going to move into a time of Q and A so that you can ask questions or share some of the thoughts or feelings that you might have. We believe that this vision we have shared with you is how God is leading this church but we also believe that if this is so, he will be confirming it in many of your hearts as well. We really want to hear from you. As we share, please remember the following:

We on the leadership team want to say a genuine thank you to everyone in this church. It has been an honor to serve with you. Your commitment and love for both God and this community is inspiring to us. Whether you’ve been here for 6 months or 60 years, you may be tempted to feel that, because of this closure, your time and resources have been wasted. But we are not building an earthly kingdom... “For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.” – 1 Timothy 4:10

We love you,

The Elders of CB